

Night Sweeper

Everywhere I think of young women with unwashed
faces, men
asleep against their stomachs. I miss morning's semen
smell.
And time before first light when you emerged tucked
into mufflers
and shirts like cages to sweep the driveway for exercise,
the clock
of your ticking broom timing sleeplessness shared
in twos. Now
for hours I toss awake massaging the muscles
of my eyes
with a finger. Beside me lies an unshuffled Lucky pack
and poker chips.
There are cards I draw which tell the future.

Last summer I wanted to lay down: another body. Become
the skunk's broom
tail, up, huffing it out past the driveway. Each night
you were clean
without purpose or timeliness. You did not make love
like the angry
couple next door nor forage like the skunk for food scraps
to be excavated
under the moon. The car park's photo eye bled you into dark.
An early
wind conspired to consume the soft furnace of the yard's fire
even as you stood
at the driveway's lip counting and counting rows of leaves.
Twelve piles now:
one for each couplet of my life. Still you appeared torn
between them,

as if every decision carried equal weight, every problem its own
terrific sorrow.
Assuming this as well I'd like to analyze
my hair
for a moment. Shanks of it unpinned, lifted at random, display
streaks of white
like Christmas lights threading a black barroom. I think it has something
to do with lack
of sleep. I think it has something to do with your broom.
Its metronomic
sweep timing dawn, hiss hiss hissing every night away according
to your schedule.
I should tell you how every year I plan to step down
and be reborn,
sloe-eyed Aphrodite, in the gin-baths and blackjack of the damned.
I'm moving
to the desert to become as greedy as the sun; I will fasten until
by time
alone I am endemic: manure to earth, plague
to Europe.
I don't need good examples or clean driveways. I need sleep.
Hours to whittle
into nothing more than plastic cups of beer or dust balls, movies
too awful to pay for.
I want to waste a life away being homesick. I thought this having smelled
the unwashed
crease of your neck, your wretched shoulder elongated
as an ox's haunch.
People are tender with me because they think I can't bear the weight
of insomnia, and thus
mistake my blank expressions for anger. That was my blank face
at the window

watching you, sir, watching you sweep what looked to be
enormous
white cups from the walk. I was disappointed with the repetition
of sleeplessness,
for though my hair is turning white I've had nothing to worry over,
not a child or lover,
not one word so beautiful as to make sleep
an impossibility.

Somewhere there is a store filled with bone artifacts
which I will enter
late at night to parcel out each rib among the shelves, lock my thighs
behind the counter.
And I will dream there in my separate houses of skunks chased
by errant brooms,
grass tips dark as a girl's boots. Even the girl, my metaphor,
will rise naked
from her bath of cards brushing stones from her chest. This
is how I learned
you died today: at noon, having found the new postwoman
asking for you.
At your door was a sign I'd ignored since Monday,
underneath
the penciled scrawls of several residents. He's dead,
I exclaimed,
and she covered her little wax mouth with a hand, comical,
ashamed.
But it means nothing to us. I knew your smell, the sound
of your broom.
I began to write about them months ago simply as an exercise
to help me sleep.
Now I'm simply getting the chance to finish up; now, sometimes,
I sleep.
Tonight I might dye my hair in anticipation of events which decades
won't provide,
note the papers taking over the drive, the stones and late autumn
cherry pits,
unswept, bunched in fists. I'm waiting to be a wife. I have my
cards, my lights,

my thousand useless bottles. Insomnia was only a tiny space
between us.

This was your life to me; it was nothing at the time.

And this
is my acknowledgment. This is just an exercise.