

Kevin Owen

Aubade

Sleepy poem.

Unknot those morning morphemes.

Yawn and stretch those syllables like sinews,
popping some joints, rattling the spine.

Poems should make sense:

smell the pasty breath,

see the window glare through the eye's first-film,

feel the sandbag muscles and the sliding separation from the sheets,
like some sweating mummy,

a weird new gift to life from the dead.

The shower stutters, then hisses and sprays —

breath-catch at cold drops,

then pausing and filling regularly.

The musty smell of old tiles first, but then

you fill

the morning forest air

with your damp skin and new-shampoo hair.

All poems should be alarm clocks.

Sweeping

I think of mother and bump the ceiling with the broom—
(she wasn't neat) stucco clouds the room
and chalks the air you yell through.

I will not sweep with these straws as you brew
the linguini in the saucepan. The pasta's yours
to boil; I'll keep to myself with granola bars.

My father's job made him paternally unhappy,
a rancher at a computer. We bought a Husky puppy
who crawled with worms when we didn't scoop her shit.
It was cheaper to sleep her the second time, and thrift
was always first. "Keep to yourself! Don't talk,
but work. A divorce in this house stays in this house."

Our sink reeks: dishes grow fungus
and worms from old cheese. Silent, I balk
at your transaction of cleaning for the new meal.
My talk and hygiene are weak, but I'll irritate you well.
Now my powers are fully inherited
from a family of lifetime suicides. I've merited
with shut mouth the skill to wreck
this roof with this cleaning tool behind your back.

Manuel as Symbol

This weird Guatemalan,
I think he's Guatemalan,
named Mizael or Miguel,
is always getting drunk
with us, on Miller or Lucky Lager,
(we student artists have no
money, and have to sacrifice
the quality of beer, proudly
wearing our thrift store paisley),
and has this quaint Spanish way
of saying "my friend"
all the time or when he drinks.

So one time, he fumbles a ten-spot out
and burns it with his Bic.
A pretentious, but amusing, performance art bit,
and Glen wryly notes disjunction of expectations —
he's into theories and modernism.
Miguel is only an illustrator,
symbolic Orozco suffering stuff,
but his real art is his life:
that little smoke is a needed vertical
in his hunched composition.
The ink-stink's acidic
and we giggle and cheer, thrilling at the federal felony:
the black spot spreads
but disappears behind its border,
a red empty eye eating as it opens.
The last of the green winks behind his thumb

and the black curls like a tongue.
He mutters in this sloshy Spanish slur
“fucking American money, fucking American guns n’ shit,”
like a pure proletarian mural, way down
in LA by the freeway. Mizael’s a refugee
of some war or another.
Nicaragua, Peru, El Salvador, some Mexican name,
I don’t know. Here in Santa Barbara
we have higher surf, mundane Republicans, and dickhead cops,
and an old-guard formalist art department.
I elect Miguel as comrade-leader
of TARP—The Artistically Revolting Peons.
But he’s so smashed
he doesn’t even laugh,
and his wide-cheeked face and buttoned white shirt
make him into a somber art history professor
lecturing on representation and perspective.
So I tell him he looks like a history professor
and he flicks a bottle cap at us and laughs
too hard, like some drunk in a Dutch painting,
except for his brown skin and scars.