

The Squirrel that Ate Cincinnati

by John Olson

If tuna is immediate and scratched, is salt rational? Honesty heaves itself at my energy and makes me feel bald and useful. But why tuna? Why salt?

Tuna is specific and salt is stunning. Each time I construct a moment of sand all the words in the sentence bristle in agreement with art and produce a sensation not unlike initiation. Words, pushed out of the mouth and into somebody's ears, will reassemble themselves in a stain of thought, straining to become more meaningful, more like butter, or semen.

Mosquitos, meanwhile, give their blood to a napkin. I collapse from too many scruples and crawl into a convulsion somewhere near the Rio Tinto Zinc Mine to get rid of them. If that seems subversive, so be it. The drug that brought me here is orange and opposable as a thumb. Therefore, send me a dollar and I will swim in your beautiful gaze like a new experience. We can be caviar together and create metaphors for the stars. God knows they need them.

Yeah, like a hole in the head.

Please forgive me. My tongue is an animal.

This afternoon I saw a woman pass the library with the skinniest two legs I've ever seen. I don't know why I mention this, it has no importance outside of writing, where language occurs, trembling with truths so intractable they have to be tilted.

This proves my theory about ecstasy. That it goes through a series of complex maneuvers to attain enlightenment, and shrubbery. Sometimes the table squirts itself against a bowl, and sometimes it is the bowl that vomits a table and impersonates Chicago.

A face is more like a moon. It is a noun with nowhere to go except the fact of its own existence.

A cloud flaps out of a cocoon of words and fills the air with thought. In fact, it is a thought. Soft and misty and tingly on the skin. You know? Just like an airport that follows you home and you have to take care of it and feed it airplanes every day.

Metamorphosis concludes the day by dancing on the valve of a trumpet. Which changes into a crease. Which changes into a golf club. Which changes into an abalone. Which changes into a mustache. Which changes into a squirrel. And eats Cincinnati. All of it, including the Harriet Beecher Stowe House, and most of William Howard Taft Road.

I'm sorry this happened. Sometimes these poems get out of control. Nothing remains the same. They have to rub themselves up against everything, bridges, hotels, cafeterias, distilleries. It all occurs with or without our complete attention and we are free to shovel coal or saw the sky in half and watch as heaven and all its angels come tumbling out. Some of us inhabit bodies for the sole purpose of reproduction and good jobs and cable TV, and others surrender themselves to the glimmer of alternate realities and translate the hollowness of existence into an interesting alternative to moss.

As for me, I rely on tactility. It is tactility that pilots my fingers. Solitude does the rest.

