

lyrics

1. UNION SQUARE STATION

After all the fervor—all the search
for words, the reach for flesh,
the warmth of both, or just
a way to cope with what they do—
and after all the space that's left
when sought, whether found
or not, I think, standing in the empty
subway stop, while a lone cellist bows
his low harmonics into the cave,
that this, too, must be desire:
reaching out not to the player,
nor with any fire, but to the train: Be slow
and far away. Let me stay
with this raw sound humming
in my lungs. Make me wait.
Never come.

—Robin Myers

2. THE GLEAM

We dig deep into the earth, Nina.
We cut it up.
We do not try to fix it.
We lurch in circles underneath,
we string lights where there is no light,
we will do anything to go faster
than we can go alone.
We point our guns at people we do not intend to kill.
Sometimes we kill them.
We shove our men into a ring
and they shove each other until they bleed and swell.
We boil lobsters alive.
We whip adulterers.
We adulter.
We skin deer.
We rape our altar boys.
We strike pedestrians, who die instantly.
We die instantly.
We shear our corneas with lasers.
We burn our neighbors' orchards,
we slice our thighs with razors,
we turn our backs to sobbing daughters
every day of the whole first month of first grade
so they will learn to leave us.
We give birth, Nina,
we give birth incessantly.
We ravage our cuticles,
we explode entire mountains,
we forget nearly everything,
proportionally speaking,
and decide who does and does not have the right to live
in the new luxury apartment building,
and prop up museums over the ruins
of massacred villages, and stride with purpose
past the glue-sniffer convulsing across the street.
We sniff glue,
and drink until we say things we don't mean,
and introduce feeding tubes into our grandmothers' tracheas,

(THE GLEAM, continued)

and lock adolescent girls into the backs of trucks
with a mattress underneath them,
and ink our skin, and perforate our faces,
blend ice to foam, break horses,
disappear, disappear others, maim verbs,
and put away childish things,
and ignore the men we loved,
and speak of love in tenses that are not the present tense,
and fling ourselves from airplanes,
and flay our children until they can't speak our native tongues,
and throw our sewage to the sea,
and lie, Nina,
and lock our hands around the throat of what we desire
until both throat and hands go white.

We do.

Yet it's also true

that we pull softened butter across a slice of bread
with a softened knife.

We entrust our bones to bus drivers,
the napes of our necks to hair-cutters,
the lobes of our ears to the cloudy mouths
of lovers who may love us or not love us
but touch us as if they could.

We brush the birch bark with our fingers
as we pass by.

We share our blood,
distribute lollipops to grown men
to prevent them from fainting when they're done.
We nurse the shoots that burgeon from potatoes.

We wait.

We burn the rice, we eat the rice,
we dog-ear books,
we seek a single face in every passing face
and find it, or don't find it,
and trudge up the hill, and sled down the hill,
and sing with our eyes squinched shut,
and shut our windows against the parade
so we can lie down together and hear everything we say,

(THE GLEAM, continued)

and let the house fire have its way
with what we own.

That we have no choice
is not the point.

We yearn.

We confess to deeds we haven't done.

We wash our feet.

We laugh until we're sick.

We let the turtle go.

We're certain that we're right.

We come, which is a curious way of saying
that we go away,

with a joy that would be desolation
if it weren't so joyful.

We are told that we must first learn joy,
so we can later bear the desolation.

No.

We are told that we must first learn desolation,
so we can later bear the joy.

No.

We bear what we can bear.

No.

We do not know what we can bear.

Don't we?

I don't know, Nina,

I don't know.

I've seen a schoolboy drop to his knees

in a posture of prayer,

or betrayal,

or cartilage injured during a soccer game,

so what do I know?

I've seen an aging woman wrench her limbs
from an embrace

in a gesture of rancor,

or sorrow,

or desire passed over,

or rheumatoid arthritis,

or missing her mother,

(THE GLEAM, continued)

or old terrors made new,
and what, Nina, can we do?
We do what we can do.
No—
I know
a man who,
years ago,
would hover at the highway's edge
to feel the eighteen-wheelers pass and feather
his body backwards, to feel the minefield
between the yellow line and his own two feet.
The mine. The field.
How does the body get to where the world
has told it not to travel?
I'm asking you.
Our choices, in the end, are few.
I love this man whose body said
it did not want
to go.
And I loved you,
who went.
Love, not loved, my friend;
forgive me.
We know not what
we do,
as awed before
the green corn gleaming in the field
as with a foot into the mine.
We go, we go, we go,
Nina.
We gleam.

—Robin Myers

3. I woke so early (*from A HUSH YOU COULD SEE*)

I woke so early
that the blue light
hadn't yet become a substance,
was still more
of a hush
you could see,

and I heard the cat
communicating with
the curtains, saw
the shadows of my objects
all around, things
gifted or acquired,
softened by years of seeing them,

felt again
the shock of joy in my chest
as a challenge
to be honored,
without ever having truly
learned how—

In the way of the sweet blues
that goes

*I'm so glad,
I'm so glad,
I'm glad,
I'm glad,
I'm glad.*

*I don't know what to do,
I don't know what to do,
I don't
know what
to do.*

—Robin Myers

4. For awhile I tried writing it all down (*from A HUSH YOU COULD SEE*)

For awhile I tried writing it all down:

birds glimpsed on walks,
meals shared or not,
novels dog-eared,
animal organs skidded
into pavement,
names,
things that shifted across
my father's face in the months
of his illness,
neighbors and what I heard them shout
to their children,
meteorological surprises,
what day it was,
what time.

It was infuriating.
It never stopped.

Everything's just a fucking catalogue, I snapped
to my friend the biologist,
as if insulting his mother.
He looked up at me from the garden,
smiling, full of dirt.

Everything,
he said.

—Robin Myers

5. When I sleep in the language I forgot (*from A HUSH YOU COULD SEE*)

When I sleep in the language I forgot
and wake, it's like kicking to the surface with the sun
slanting in through the water,
it's like the memory of being under it,
it's like the weight,
it's like finding the air again,
breathing, the body
already forgetting again
what it was like, being there.

—Robin Myers

6. A REMINDER

Suddenly, a world of rain,
the city warm and dark with it.
A sky that splits and heals without
a wound. Water blooming from the trees,

your dress a skin on you. Mouth
and hands that are enough, that give
no more or less than their own warmth
cooled by rain, which is enough.

Streetlamps calm as planets
that have left their orbits to join,
briefly, ours. The wet earth learning
to take on their light.

If, in the years to come, you are ever asked
if you knew a moment of tenderness
without pain, no umbrella held against
the fall of loss, no loss, not yet, all raining,

all enough, then the answer is
you did. There was. Say yes.

—Robin Myers