

HOLLER

'round here
roads is hollers
and neighbors know
other folks is home
by the smoke
what's rising from chimneys

roads is rugged
hereabouts,
like the people,
and just as well traveled

cricks run alongside
most these roads,
the houses facing them
tucked up aways,
up along the hillsides
and hidden by the trees

we got ways about us
is hidden, too,
and y'all can settle 'long side us
if you're a mind to,
but you ain't never
gonna settle in

BURIED BUCKLES

My boys make mountains and roads in soil once soaked in blood,
clueless as the Matchbox cars between their fingers
about the price of the land they play on
until one day the youngest unearths a piece of lead shot
and an old buckle with the letters CSA worn near flat as the nation's memory.

He wants to know why—
why things besides beetles and roots hide in the dirt he plays in,
so bedtime talks turn to tales darker than the Brothers Grimm ever imagined.

He takes up a drum, learns to play, and in a few short years marches into battle,
a living historian of no more tender years than those he portrays,
those who died with drum sticks in their fists and the smoke of a thousand guns
drifting above their wide, unblinking eyes.

To this day my son still plays on land soaked in the blood of his ancestors,
and as I watch, I see their ghosts rise to the beat of his drum,
their dried bones still wondering when in god's name will reveille ever end.

GHOSTS OF THE POTOMAC

I sat in the stones by the river at Harper's Ferry
and dipped my toes in holy water while ghosts streamed past,
some having floated all the way from Antietam.

They floated face down, their spirits never having escaped
even though their bloated, bloodied corpses
had long since broken down into molecule and memory.

Ghostly smells filled the pristine air around me:
the stench of industrialism and disease and the aftermath of battle.

I imagine the dead lifting their drenched faces
and watching slack-jawed as I put on my shoes
and stroll into shops selling ice cream, into pubs pouring beer,
through tidy museums depicting their lives—as if
it somehow made up for never having plucked them from the current.

Water flows from their mouths as they call out to me:
“I died a gruesome death for tourists?”
“I slaved in an armory for this?”

EMPTY VESSEL

life is beauty
and brutality,
a butterfly alit
on a slain dog's nose;

days form
a wending course
of longing and surfeit,
of endlessly desiring
more than we need,

convinced it's less
than we deserve.

man, both beau
and brute,
conjures myths
to justify ignorance,

aspiring to godhood
in ways he's already certain
that butterflies
and dead dogs
never can.

HIVE MIND

the whole world is aching
beneath the weight
of needed change,

a Longing
the Earth herself
has whispered in our hearts
so deeply,
so compellingly,
that we know not what we do,
never question why

collectively we buzz about
without the wisdom granted even bees,
the smoke of sleep
blown in our hives:
a stupor of distractions
to keep us from stinging
the thieves
stealing
all the
honey