

Haibun for Early Autumn, Haibun for Buses & Sobriety

HALEE KIRKWOOD

38th street, a half hour before the east horizon begins to pink.
Empty schoolyard, a couple walking toward me, no staggering,
no whiff of rubbing alcohol mushrooming in the air, they clutch
each other's elbows. All the stools are turned on their vinyl heads
at Nighthawks—I haven't been there since the bartender bought
my beers. An empty hammock I've never seen used, paling
Echinacea, Echinacea turned black, petals at my feet like frills
off out-of-season gowns. I've learned this is called the blue hour,
hour of mothers, last hour before the wail of the day and it's
always off to work again,

Andromeda hung
upside down her crown winking
a blush above me

The bus at night. Faint whiff of black tea, iced, 46th street
station, where I've come to expect perfumes of oil and coal. A
semi-truck dragging down Hiawatha stops at the curb, a man
gets out, frowns at the exhaust pipe and shrugs, the truck scuttles
on again. Blood-red convertible driven by a man with a red
Mohawk, he throws his mouth open to catch night air, gone as
soon as he's here. Again a man, a man, he batters his girlfriend
with a grocery bag and out from her curled body rolls brussels
sprouts, cans of tomato soup. A mother pulls her son close and
says *don't ever hit anyone else no matter how mad they make you.*
This week everyone has stared at me, one day from ugliness, the
next from my body in a tight, striped shirt

still, I am the knight
 of wands, riding down sleet black
 tracks my flames in hand

What I've been leaving at your apartment—tangled earphones, ruined socks, my pink apple, the blue ceramic cat I bought one morning instead of wine. Last night we fawned over glass snuff bottles, jade and malachite, turquoise, glass and coral. Early autumn sun turning my legs to matchsticks in black jeans. I think I could catch on fire. Waiting to hear more of your hero's abuse of speed, starving away my blue desires, un-remembering another you who drew me baths and read me Rilke in German and spoon-fed me coke. I wait a half hour each night for the bus outside a bar, with its tater tots and amber beers,

little glass worlds I'd
 lick from the inside, sharp dew
 pearled on these red tongues

I can't deny anything free—candied bacon, tartlets, cheese, three glasses of wine, cocktail attire required, matches, pitless olives toothpick massacred, a white tablecloth, scattering little golden stars. Click of heeled boots with somewhere better to be. A catwalk, mysterious elevated doors, technology to make us all look so good, the balcony and potted ficus, where would you rather sit for tonight's program, wing-backed lounge chairs holding no one, my bank account scooped clean like a precious avocado, no one needs to know, what do I even have to offer,

a meadow made of
soft muscle, where a doe leaps
out of dinner plates

The sun finally setting beneath the city market. I am golden,
high-ponytailed, I can finish a book in one hour while you talk
to a girl in a wine-colored dress we both know is crushing on
you. I will drink curry powdered latte after curry powdered latte,
I will stare at whatever I'd like and drink all the bitter you have
to give me. The dog you cannot pet, the woman who always
remembers my name, the pierced barista blasting AC/DC after I
complimented some artsy bass-heavy Thom Yorke album. I know
you're in love with me across the bricks. And it is always worth it,

water falling in
reverse, brass throat, trombone slide
into minor keys.

