

three poems by BECKA MARA MCKAY

URSUS AMERICANUS *AS MISTRANSLATION*

when I lived in the woods when the trees were made
of metal hammered senseless when the harvest
crossed a border into roots and tubers when I slept
beside the moon when I woke beneath a sunrise creeping
out of velvet

when I couldn't always fall asleep when coyotes called
each other out from every elevation when daylight stayed
a fever nesting in the mountain's throat when something
woke me

something woke me: vibrato of intrusion
wood on wood on window I left my bed half-cautious
and half-peeled

man in a bear suit I thought first for the way
he stood upright

he stood upright to reach the seeded feeders
more light filtered through my brain (I was darker then)
I slapped my hands against the glass

was I darker then or simply sitting too far behind
the shine of possibilities

the bear dropped to all fours and
fled I'd been advised: keep them wild
make them run make them fear humans

I wished the bear back anyway all gawky elbow and belly
just as I wished winter would shoulder autumn aside

fillet the hot-hued leaves from the branches
wipe white paws over everything

LIGHT WITHOUT MERCY

I lived in a room that was all angle. I had no reliable way to index everything I did not know, and so I let birds roost on the sills of my open windows. All night the fruit bats were an accident of flight behind the fig tree, a détente with gravity, a way to engrave your name in oxygen. I vowed to lie in wait for the thief of sleep, but when he arrived I was too drunk, as though plied with tequila cocktails by that famous actor whose first name is a last name and whose last name is a beloved Swedish pastry. In *The Little Book of No Consolation*, special dispensation is given to victims of unexpectedly brutal hangovers, as if we could pad our words with cotton wool and watch them whisper into the margins. The sky, my beloved, is an impossibility of hauntings. Each ghost is sea-star-shaped but sated. The air is a warning for bandits. The garden, which I have neglected to weed, breathes lavender and afterthought.

THE LAST YEAR FOR WHICH WE HAVE DATA

The first time the other life was leaving me I begged but I didn't bargain. What did I have to offer? Not even when the trickle became flood and the flood itself began to beg. I tried to tell this story in the room of emergency parts and was cut off after the *when* and the *I*. (You did not want to hear.) What could I have bargained away to keep the swimmer on the screen? I feared the needle of keeping my word. When the eyetooth sank clear into my palm I knew I was never meant to care for anything at all, so I auctioned off all possibilities like calves at a feedlot, only I was the calf as well as the auctioneer, and the gavel, and the bidders in the creaking bleachers