

Driving to the Bees

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Black
Lawrence
Press

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For Sarie, Griffin, P.

One

Everything That Will Be Earth

I.

It's the month of slaughter. One by one

the fields are turned. Grackles pick the wheat.
November scours the hill; I
hear it, know it

in my sleep. Long months ahead with little day.

Time to mend tools,
go over the books.
I don't hide from you

it's hard to like the shape of my work.

*I have such a fear of separating myself from what is
possible. Yes, separating, from the roughnesses
of the thing itself.*

I have noticed the farmer tastes his soil, rolls a little

between his fingers. This should be understood
as reading. I follow the example,
hungrily.

Do you think your city friend took your meaning

when you said
*My ambition is truly limited
to a few clods of earth?*

2.

The thing. And the felt thing. Write to me more
of how they merge. What we mean
when we stand in the bare field with crows and speak

of ‘troubled skies’
—what you call the spell of the external life.
As for me, after this, I don’t know what after—

*...to know what I am the larva of
myself perhaps*

We will not argue
over nothingness or
the treachery of beautiful things.

Bedrock. The shovel sparks against it. Against emptiness
all the senses lie. And we take their evidence. —*In that way we
remain ignorant and hopeful.* Like believers.

The oak at the edge of the field.
Paint from the tube.

Your words reach me in time—
Color’s retreat and newly sealed doors tempted me
to an ideal. But you say *No trompe l’oeil in any case.*

Ochre, red, green, lifting
under troubled sky.

3.

Bury your easel in stones you say, mastering wind
and equally the burning midday (*I
revel in it, like a cicada*).

•

Today in the field the dog was happy to 'fetch' a beet.

4.

Winter. I'll feed from the storage bins. Perhaps a potato

can be the *atom of chaos* you spoke about
for the days I don't know what to do.

I too prefer the cultivated ground to wild. And agree:

no bible where human gesture's testament
enough.

The work is to see. I can see you, painting
through the mistral—

How good it is to read that you have undergone *the scorched*

and so often melancholy fields. Friend,
I shake your hand firmly, too.

Assessment

Day begins with a moon
that pulls to the west, close and big
over my head
as hills delay the sun—

Soon the others come
in boots, in gloves
to work until the sun
in fewer hours
drops & leaves
the cold unlit.

We lay down our tools
turn off the tractor
climb the hill, close the gate
let slack our arms.
Another day. *Hear that?*
With strength enough to stare
into dimming woods, we
listen to the acorns fall.

There were things we saw today—

The hawk with feathered legs
drew gut from a hen
whose feathers splotched the field
evidence of her run

& did—

The skunk that made it
into a pen & killed
everything moving
won't again

Straw we tossed
into the pigs' shed
the boar shoved briskly out and wore
like something festive
on his head

The day was good.
I say, the day was good.

Returns

Once they know it's home, they all come back. Poultry's
nostoi, their
dusk returns from piled manure, the yearlings' pasture,
hayloft, acts

of raccoon terror—more than one exsanguinate, her head
expertly off,
gutted, carcass good only for pigs. That was summer. This
is March

at the desk, in possession of no vision. Stapler. Staple remover. No
pasture bird, no fox across my path; color itself a thing
of recollection.

I wait. For the movement of chickens to return to me, and
out of the welter, beginning to shape as light dims—yellow-footed

convincingly, talking still among themselves—chickens
pull away from the woods, away from the open places. Shadows'

reach (basswood, mulberry, sycamore) shrinks the safe world
to the tilted coop we built. In not quite haste

a foot
contracts lifts
hesitates
drops and spreads one
eye glares;
the other.
Neck
stretched feathers
flaring.

Grass: insects.
Something
of interest
there in the bull's
dung pecked
and scattered.

In March's memory, they come
from behind the tractor wheel, muttering from a crate on end, or

burst July's tall grass apart; from laundry's snap at the top of
the hill;
from the darkening of the barn's red, from the sheep meadow,

the dog's bowl, fear of the fox, they come. And what does
it matter.

Details, culled by much forgetting. What comes back must stand

for something. What's a fox to me? (A killer.) Or half light?
(Another.)

If day's end is not remarkable enough, night spills something
of itself

forward, always forward like a hunger. And the hens—see—
as if not

ruled by the race of angled light against the yard, as if

by accident or will, cohere, a flock again after a day farflung—
as far for some as down the heat-struck road.

Red-combed and -wattled as before, rust-backed as always
as long as light insists, before the barnyard all goes black
and white

the words become the thing I see: the homing in
the bird by bird

the single
line the bobbing one
by one up
the slatted
ramp and in (dust-
filled wing
flaps
clucks)
reeking straw
-filled racks
the quick
gate latched the
beautiful
fox
outfoxed.