

Witness



Megan Kaminski

for Marthe Reed

what, love, are you

a fissure tonguing hillside
deepening dirt into limestone answering
mother fictile in unquiet repose
 each spring there is gratitude a nodding
 symmetry of blossoms grazing stalks
 the press of green into gray

stories we tell buried in tallgrass
what one may cure another may burn
mouth an aching expanse that cannot
say what it ought what could bring light
into this quiet room this no longer page
it is not pain just slowness into rocky soil
into clay (what remains after flood what
remains after passage out of sight what
remains in broken images in fever dreams)

what do you remember

toe-sink into damp soil
field patchy with bluestem with dropseed
a poultice of root applied to sores to sorrow
always returning borne in pairs a sequence
of exclamation across prairie

chest-flutter of spring afternoons
language through fingers through throat
making claim to eastern exposure
cup plant holding water waxen-lined
verdant chalice offering sea offering sky
with sun: abundance,
with radiating heat: a softer home

wind farms coal plant Tyson chicken houses
(these too and I)
trafficway through wetlands over graves

a box that holds what my heart cannot
a table engulfed in smoke and flame

who water gathers

and what this gathering asks
geese flock north fields
answer early crops greening

an eye making home for many
blue buzz sweat-drunk
each sting a haunting
ancestral migration from ground
to body and back again
lakes and rivers remember
as does dirt under fingernails
each day's toil an offering:
fertilizer
heartache
a song to guide us home

who we leave behind

bark diamonded to touch
toothed leaflet and winged seed
 (who do you love)
kin until it is no longer
left arm reaching out in dream

I try to stitch the pieces
into something pretty
a blanket to warm these still
cool nights everything that we
love will fade someday tell
untrue things to sleep lonely nights
never ready not quite whole
an island sinking beneath the sea

where we are situated

high in the tree canopy wind pushes
branch into branch one limb becoming
another the morning gray and sun pushing
cloud cars abating as the commute softens
blackbirds in the gnarled black locust doves
on rooftop squirrels chattering on and on

picture: seas and glaciers that once
covered this place

picture: limestone erupting bison grazing
tallgrass

picture: prairie grass pink orchid, Indian
paintbrush, large-flowered coreopsis,
prairie parsley, funnel-form beard tongue,
pale purple coneflower, lead plant, prairie
blazing star, Sampson's snakeroot, goat's
rue, rigid goldenrod, and azure aster all
flowering to open my hands breaking
to blossom the fields the grasses the fields



2019