

## PILGRIM HEART

*Water is everywhere around you, but you see  
only barriers that keep you from water.*

-Rumi

In the dream last night  
I was in a strange bed.

Red numbers on a clock  
told me *I let them down.*

That's where my mind goes.  
Even in sleep.

*What can I say  
to make this alright?*

I keep missing it,  
my life—

my pilgrim heart traveling  
from one town to the next,

leaving suitcases at the front doors  
of buildings I never enter.

That which is right before me,  
I refuse to see. Instead,

my notebook records disappointments:

*I don't like this winter wind.  
The cold nights have failed me.*

*I hate the unpredictability of the sky.  
The fucking trees. The fucking trees.*

*These clouds are punishing me.  
These clouds—are pissing me off.*

What kind of a breeze will change me  
or release me or remind me—

Don't mind me.

It's a terrible habit  
how the heart turns on itself—

how we turn against all that is good.

We find our way out  
by letting the wind be the wind

We find our way—  
by sitting our asses down in the dirt

and just stopping our feet.  
Or, we stay circling

like stray dogs sniff for scraps,  
for one dry and quiet corner to rest.

## OVERFIRE

First we became the dark  
then we became a whisper—

We wrapped our bare feet  
in the wool blanket.

We wrapped our feet together

then we asked a question  
we would never answer—

*What holds us in place?*

## THE TIME IT TAKES TO PEEL A SMALL ORANGE IN THE MORNING

1.

When the only thing to lose is time,  
you ease your fingers  
between the peel and the fruit.

You take one long breath  
and pause—

before placing the first slice  
in your mouth.

2.

The morning sheets are cool  
and so is the rain outside.

You find it worthwhile  
to stay right there,

to say  
*I'm not going anywhere—*

3.

There's nothing to gain  
or to earn back. No question to ask

or history to uncode or unpack. There's no catch.  
And there's no hurry,

only these quiet layers  
in our skin  
where we let go—

We have grief  
in our arms  
but it was never ours.

4.

If I had recalled the sweetness  
I would have known the loss—

I would have called it heartbreak  
because there's no other name.

But the heart never breaks,  
only our idea of it

and the new idea only comes  
if we go slow enough to feel it.

## THE TRIBUTARY

*In Lethe's lake they long oblivion taste,  
of future life secure, forgetful of the past.*

-Virgil

Where is our wild desire  
if not found behind us,

in the past like the penciled notch  
on a timeline we erased.

There's a faint ghost of it there.  
If only our instincts haunted us enough to keep us awake,

to notice what we no longer care to see  
or what we have forgotten to love—

You can't know the relentless eye of a hawk  
unless you stand there for a while

and let your own eye learn from hers.

She is a rise of power that rushes  
from eye to muscle to wing—

There's a feather between her hunt and yours,  
between your pang of hunger and your fit of rage—

You wear an ancient glove and protect your skin.  
The layer persists—

Thick leather is how you commit to oblivion—

It's like a tributary you drink from.  
You drink until it murmurs you to sleep.

## THIS IS TO THAT

Pink is to valentine as blue is to shy. The sun is to setting as I am to prone to gnawing on thoughts like a leather strap. Lately, I've been collecting artifacts in the form of art and sometimes facts. They are hard to sort. I put them in buckets or small pouches. I consider where to leave them—or if I can part with them at all. Lately, I've been asking if there's a difference between ideas and awe. Lately, we've been walking the dirt road and finding rocks in the shape of hearts, clouds in the shape of bearded men, dozens of sticks in the shape of Y. I try to carry them all. I photograph them, grasp them in my fingers, then uncurl myself, my whole self, or even half of a self. Then I let them go. Or I let myself go. Mothballs are to sweaters as I am to falling apart. You can crawl to the edge and fall. Or you can crawl to the edge and claw at falling rocks. This is how you stay fastened to something unnameable. Surrender is to snow falling as the quiet of winter is to loneliness. The little house is to lonely as the coastal clouds are to family. It's in the middle of the woods, the little house, and so am I. In the middle of the woods. In the middle of things. When it's dark, I go to the little house and unpack boxes. I place ceramic urns with dog ashes on the bookshelves and hope for the best. Dog ghosts are to dusk as lazy flies are to winter. The mud swallow nest is to home as the swing set is to sadness. I find the bag of feathers, the coyote jaw. I find scraps of paper and pencils in a dusty can. Pen is to paper as your mind is to a magnet. I'll keep walking these fields and following cloud formations with my fingers. I'll keep listening to dogs running across dried blueberries. I'll keep pausing at the old stone wall, the threshold between this world and that, that world and this. What else is there to do. What else.

## BETH ANSTANDIG

**Beth Anstandig** holds an MFA in poetry from Arizona State University. Her work has appeared in *Caesura*, *Clackamas Literary Review*, *Flint Hills Review*, *Yale Anglers' Journal*, *Louisiana Literature*, *Phoenix New Times*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *Chestnut Review*, *Big Muddy*, *BODY*, and *El Portal*, among others. She is the author of *The Garden of Forking Paths* (Prentice Hall/Pearson) and *The Human Herd: Awakening Our Natural Leadership* (Morgan James Publishing). She has received a Pushcart Prize Nomination, Willamette Award in Poetry, The *Clackamas Literary Review* Poetry Prize, *The Atlanta Review* International Merit Award in Poetry, and three-time finalist standing for her first poetry collection. Anstandig is a licensed psychotherapist and founder of The Circle Up Experience which focuses on wellness, leadership, and culture and coaches Fortune 500 companies and executive leaders on culture change in their organizations. Her work and writing also have been featured in major media outlets and online platforms including BBC World Service, NPR, Forbes, MomsRising, and Kahilla. She owns a horse ranch in northern California and currently lives in midcoast Maine.