

Joshua Converse

The Crucible at Breakfast

The corners of the room are filling up.
It has been days of this.
Something substantial is gathering its dark bulk,
Is rolling into the center of the room,
Where you and I step around it
(carefully,
carefully)
and pretend
it has not grown in the night.

At some point, maybe in a month
Maybe in two,
There will be no moving at all—not here, not for us.
Dark matter will fill even lungs and eyes
We will chew and choke it down, grow thin.

It will, in the fullness of time, press us flat and unmoving,
Pin us to the valium-blue bed where we cannot
Move even fingers to entwine
Mummified by inertia.

Unless
Unless the gas stove cracks, or the water heater,
Unless there's an earthquake,
Unless some angelic arsonist
Comes with kerosene
And burns away the dark.

Maybe one of us can escape the flaming wreckage
and have the good sense not to go back
for the other.

Perfect Moment

Three kids at home. Three napping.
Quiet ticking of clocks, soft snores, distant
thunder.
I hold a book and a sleeping baby.

Piracy's Maiden

When I think of Piracy,
It isn't Bluebeard I picture,
Nor Lafitte.
When I think of Piracy,
She is a woman
bare-breasted with a dagger in her teeth,
a hull aburst with hearts,
and she, with dark curls and a grin,
pistol drawn and level—
Taking and never giving back.

October

(for Deborah)

You could have held a prism up to the light
And not broken it.
This autumn afternoon was charged
With an orange and undaunted fire,
That, flaring, never burned the gold-girdled leaves
Spiraling on the breeze down to
Streets as black as deep water.

When would have been better to know
That you would not always be there
Than this late afternoon in Fall
When the light dazzled
Bright with the promise of darkening?

Letter from Andromache to Helen

Before you came to us,
The walls still stood.
Ilium still stood.

My husband came to
our bed by night.

When you returned to
Menelaus,
your conquering Spartan:

My home was a memory.
My son, a memory.

My Hector lay dead,
dead at the feet of
Raging Achilles.

I owe you much,
And can never repay.

...let me give you this, sweet sister:
When the Underworld receives you,
May you wander and never find the Lethe.

May you ever remember Troy,
as I do.

Joshua Converse was born in the San Francisco Bay Area and grew up on a horse farm in Louisiana. He spent 4 years in the U.S. Army and deployed to the Middle East during the war. He holds a bachelor's degree in Literature, and a Master of Arts in English. He now teaches English at Monterey Peninsula College and Hartnell College, and lives in Seaside with his wife and their children.