

The Flexitarian

I am trying to go vegetarian but finding myself weak,
week to week browsing the meat aisle at a linger
close enough to chill my arms to gooseflesh. I only buy
stuff so processed it doesn't really make sense to call it
meat. Saveloy, nugget, continental frankfurter;
whatever gets extruded pink beyond possible memory
of the preceding body. Between the red and yellow flags
delineating the PORK section, I fondle sheets
of pig skin through their clingfilm. Flaps of fat and dermis,
bloodless as the nude silicone on a sex doll. Sad rubber
reanimates briefly in the oven. Whimpering fat
melts away to breathless squeal. The grill huffs,
puffs, fogs my glasses like hot breath. Like kissing
someone else's boyfriend, right outside her flat in winter.
Sometimes the pig has not been properly shaved. Needle
hairs prick my lips. Sometimes draw blood. Sometimes red
ink from the slaughterhouse is printed on the sallow skin.
Lipstick; damp napkin. The worst possible outcome
is unfurling the limpid rind from its plastic tray only to find
a nipple tucked inside. I try to cut it out but no knife
in my house is sharp enough. The nipple stares
a pert pink accusation. It follows me around the room.
I score the skin, scrub it raw with salt and rapeseed oil.
The nipple winks at me. Weeps in the pan as it shrinks
to helpless hiss and spit. The crackling bubbles perfectly crisp.

Terrarium [poem after *Annihilation*]

with no marrow suck or nectar syrup
the starving bear's belly fills
with my pleading until I'm reduced to mere breath
and bloom anew as an epiphyte
not bromeliad nor orchid or mistletoe
but some new growth
living now on sips of light and air
where the world rings like a finger
dragged on the lip of a crystal goblet
I am helpless to vibrate with it
a stick insect hypnotically windswept
twiglet metronoming in the sprig
or else I dissolve to froth next
spittlebug nymphet extravagantly boiling over
my foamy bower so acrid and diaphanous
where I rummage my proboscis for sap
in my due turn punctured for hemolymph
skewered in the beak of a questing oriole
and then I am laid as wet gold
yolk to become stoat supper
in this way we all eat sunshine
and what moves through plants
moves through prey
and predators
then returns to taproot via maggot and loam
until we are all eating each other
this ouroboros ecology in perfect containment
an autocannibal biosphere
in which there is always enough
for all of us

Lenticels [poem after *Annihilation*]

the young physicist explains how people scoff that she's too sensitive but if the trees are anything to go by it's
actually about being too thick-skinned

certain plants can't breathe through their bark.
numb impermeable armour

suffocates the core. coursing sap
thirsts for light and air. ekes years

in tight haloes. sufferings
inscribed concentrically

circling the same centre.
the original desire: to exist.

as the skin toughens new necessary
lenticel slits are gouged for letting the world in

and out. together raising our scored limbs
skyward like a stand of silver birch.