

4x100 (SEASONS)

I.

The apple trees hide behind ancient white pine, low hills. Gripping your sack and trowel, you hope the brainy pops of morel have returned. It's April, green as money. Winded, you bend your knees like seeking absolution. So many alien gills, the stalks gently lifted, gaping the humus. Your sack fills like a collection of dreams.

Working your way back down, you think of her again. Even though she's married. Even though you're not. The mushrooms will need salted butter, cracked pepper. You will hand them to her warm at the counter as the sheets on her bed grow cold.

II.

Splayed oceanside, the sun buffs your skin a furious hue. Wordless and wretched, you bite a stick of gum and your mouth rains like a carwash. It's the second straight weekend she's made other plans and her absence fills you completely.

A sudden kick of sand blasts your face and you gasp upright, brushing your eyes and mouth with both hands. The jogger unaware keeps jogging, escapes with your pride. Nearby women pity you, a deaf child laughs. The waves continue breaking like a chorus of baptism. You stand, spit your gum, and wonder when your world started falling apart.

III.

Maple trees blush heavenward like painted fire. Everywhere, sunlight sweet-talks the edges of things, the purple wheels of aster. You embrace in the center of a covered bridge. Underneath, the river charts a course sluiced around boulder and bank, shiny pebbles, a high pitched gurgle as if someone were drowning an angel.

This is the last time we can do this, she says. You close your eyes and wish you were brave enough to argue. But the idea of her retreating back to her desolate home, its frigid rose bushes and perfectionist lawn, a death squad of white picket fences.

IV.

February still believes in sunsets; this is what you tell yourself to stay warm. Long whale of road left unplowed. Feet making tracks like stitching the past to an unrecognizable present. It's nearly midnight. Maybe she's waiting at the tavern like she promised. Maybe she is inconsolable in her husband's arms.

Grains of ice chandelier your beard. Streetlights beatific in the blue fall of snow. Over the hill you look for the bar lights, the door's swept entry. Is that her climbing out of some blinded vision? Is that her voice filling the space between you and all this dark?