

DEAN YOUNG

---

*Self-Medicated Tour of the Sunset District*

My grandfather's father stuck his face  
in the furnace to prove what was mortal,  
what im—. Not him. No one knew the word  
institution. They said, Orchard in wasp season.  
Said, Over the falls in a pin cushion.  
When his son's son was an archer in the sugar  
fields, something terrible happened he'd never  
tell, it left him with cavities melodious.  
As a people we eschew allegory, our mutinies  
are blunt and literal as throw-rugs. A stomach  
full of static isn't butterflies. Closer  
to modern times, my uncle-once-removed ate  
a lump of coal every day like Schubert,  
bituminous, eyeball-size. Either it caused  
his longevity or early demise, the turn  
from prolonged yearning to clustered burst.  
Certain smells set him off: talc, strawberries,  
mercurochrome, but it was when light flashed  
that its murderous intent was revealed.  
The whole world flinches, or at least  
perception does which no one has made clear  
is what percentage of the real. I'm thinking  
high. I'm thinking when these pills kick in  
I'll finally be able to survive the next  
sixty seconds. In the fire season, the wolves  
come down from the mountains to drink  
from the water hazards. I don't know how  
they rise and twist but I'd guess it's hormonal.

Studiously, they hover over the periodic table,  
over cardboard boxes turning to mush,  
paper-thin skeletons of sketchy plots,  
what could it all mean? then PING!  
it's time to put your pencil down.

Now.

Perhaps I should introduce myself.

I am just like everyone else, a cactus  
in a modest cinder, singed as long as I remember.  
I cried and cried when they brought me back,  
they had such awful taste. Mobiles full of pixies,  
a cosmology that ran on fossil fuel but when  
they set me in the sprinklers, I became a silver  
sliver in the biomorphic glump. God in his cricket-head  
sniffed and though I wasn't done, ate my wings anyway  
then barfed in the heliotrope where I'd have  
my first sexual congress after fierce factional  
lobbying. After that I could hardly fit my britches  
until one day I wrote my name and it meant  
absolutely nothing. I was on the pool-bottom  
at the time so couldn't hold that thought  
or any other long.