

A M E R I C A N F A N A T I C S

Each has a conversion narrative to tell,
a genesis wrapped
in exodus:

*When I watched Waco burn, I thought about the black
contracture of babies' spines in a furnace of
women melting, and I saw
that I should go to Oklahoma City
and set things right.*

It begins in outrage and ends in resourcefulness:

*The author of treason marked a dozen grandfather sequoias for clear-cutting
with the chain I used on him
before he could drive away.*

Empire of signs, bad gods
in every restaurant, and sometimes
propitious error,

as when a lover of furred animals throws a Tupperware
of blood on a college student
leaving an abortion clinic.

Jesus starts some of it. Allah, senior partner, is grave.
Then the avenging self rises to impose
its sense of terrible injury on others

and we will not stop watching;

nor can we shield ourselves
from glory's
compensatory grief.

Wound, here is your body,
demotic and estranged.
The anti-vivisectionists pass the disciples
of the internal bath
in the hallways of the Marriott conference facility.

Reading the newspaper lately,
you'd think America had been educated

in a single ray of handsome and murderous light
by which we see
individual belief is everything, being free.

If not now, when?
the fanatic asks.
If not me, the president says, then who?

Voice in the whirlwind. Long-fused nights.
When assuming the desperation position,
crouch low to the ground,
arms completely covering your face and throat.

It begins in correction and ends in error,

unless we are speaking of Brown
Debs Stanton Robeson Sanger
or the storied others
we did not love in time,

and the moon might be better spent
as a surveillance camera
for all the good it does
illuminating the matter.

2005

L U C K Y N A I L S

Behind the cash register
a shrine pagoda,
incense, oranges.

If I could overcome desire
I wouldn't be here

choosing between Suitably Ruby
and Malaga Wine

or wishing Mai would look at me just once
as she trains my cuticles
to clean borders they ignore in a week.

She dips my fingers in scented bowls

but her jaw hardens—
I see it and feel ashamed—
when she labors, labors

on my raw feet,
calloused, of course,

for which I apologize extravagantly,
bumping the glittering top coat.

I always over-tip

(would have over-tipped Jesus
on Holy Thursday).

Mai shrugs, says something in the nature
of silver bells
setting off bronze gongs,

and the salon owner laughs back
clangorously.

I'd like to think their joke
has nothing to do with me,

and in a way, it doesn't.
This is karma:
we're barely in the same room.

Starting over, Mai yields
three quick strokes per nail,
bending color like slickest candy from her
perfect brush.

I will be careful, careful this time, I promise.

If she hears me
she doesn't let on.

Any woman may become a Buddha
theoretically.

Mai abolishes the old paint, re-buffs
to a brighter finish
my mistakes.

S E C U R I T Y

Los Angeles International Airport, November, 2001

Each checkpoint
was different.

At one we were asked
to recite
The Lord's Prayer.

At another,
to sip from the wheezing guard's
cold coffee mug.

Are you a wolf?
Have you ever been a wolf?

Pancakes were fried
in a gentleman's hat
who wished only to visit his mother

in flat Cincinnati.

A rooster was decapitated
and his head thereafter
reaffixed;
though we knew not how,

it felt like love
to be considered so carefully.

The woman behind me
began to cry—
was there a little leak in her fate?

It was the world and the next day.

It was the apprehension of things unseen:

would, for example,
the sky accept
our names today?
The crossed blue circuitry
of the sky?

A pipe-and-curtain stanchion
was erected
around a toddler
who'd made a verbal error.

Outside, whipped cream was being pumped
along the runways—
“emergency foam,”
we supposed,

though no one ever landed
or took off.

A stewardess with a nosebleed
ran past,
chased by her suitcase.