



women

&

roosters

Fenn Stewart

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FENN STEWART

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the earth's on fire so I go camping

woodsmoke & damp sea air

I know you hate camping, but it's a thing I do

you're gonna have to get used to it

SAMPLE

After I've been on the island for a few weeks I get obsessed with Dungeness crabs and spend hours by myself at low tide looking for them in the reflecting water. They halfway dig themselves into the sand like flat and dull-red plates with eyes and brains. The sky and water and air are all the same grey-silver colour. It's May so the crabs are all trying to mate or, y'know, not just trying but pulling it off, and so when I find one it's often actually two, with one on top grasping the other firmly in six places. I pick them up gently with my stainless-steel spaghetti tongs and they stay clasped and look at me with small small eyes with brains behind them. I look back at the pairs of crabs looking at me and then I carefully put them back into the sea and they (still clasped) slide quickly down and sideways underneath some purple slow-floating sea lettuce or whatever it is. I never eat any of them and I tell myself that this is because they're not big enough (six inches across is big enough but only if they're males) or else I tell myself I better not because my cousin (she lives on the island full-time, hasn't eaten meat since she was three and accepted sausages from our grandmother) wouldn't like it. I carry around a thick splinter of cedar that I believe to be six inches long and I measure it against each crab to see how big they are. I check the lines on their pale bottom shells to see if they're maybe full of eggs (if they are, you can't eat them). But really, could I turn them upside down and, with all their small legs waving at me, strike heavily across their midline with an axe, like you're supposed to do, then pull the two sets of legs in half so all the guts fall out into a bucket, leaving just the pale meat in the legs and the ribboned cartilaginous bits inside the body-skull?

Walking back up from the beach. On the right-hand side of the road there's a small dead deer in the ditch, which is otherwise filled with daisies. The deer must've got hit by a car and tossed there, or else, having been struck on the road, made its way painfully into the ditch.

Looking at this small dead deer. I think about how in school they made us read Earle Birney's "David," how he falls off a cliff, I think, hiking, he makes his best friend kill him, a mercy killing. I can't remember how he does it, how he does him in—maybe he puts his hand across his mouth and holds his nose closed? Young men in forests, broken bodies (virtuous bodies), the most grievable-est lives, the most glorious-est accidents, the very best of ends.

Later I learned that Earle said he didn't read Pauline Johnson, which I guess is why we didn't read her either; in English class we traced the Northwest Passage with Stan Rogers, seeking one warm line through this land so wild and — thought ourselves like David, brave as a mountain backdrop, noble as a wilderness suicide, inevitable like holidays on European patios.

The next day I'm walking again & somebody's dragged the small dead deer out of the ditch & back onto the road. I don't know who, though—not a raccoon, surely & there aren't any coyotes here, nor wolves. A cougar, maybe, though wouldn't it have eaten more? & do they scavenge?

Would you scavenge, really, if you looked like that, & screamed like that, & jumped like that from trees onto living bodies & bit into their spines?

& now somebody's driven over the skeleton & the jaw's in pieces

the deer's skull's full of young & unground teeth

I didn't know maggots could run so fast

the vultures' faces reddened by the eyeless deer in daisies

a vulture's such a sour bird

I haven't heard from you in days & don't know why

didn't you say that we'd still talk?

I'm sitting and watching the birds on the thistles, on the
thistle-heads

I'm sitting on the thin porch made of two-by-fours looking
out over the thistles, which are as tall as me, and at the birds
that are eating them

I want to say without you I'm a joint-stool, without you I'm a
rude mechanical

without you I close my eyes so slowly like they do in Sligo,
but you're not here and nobody's watching me to see how
quietly I take it—so it's no use

I want to say I marvel at how sad I am without you:

I marvel at how sad I am without you

sad like a thistle-head entirely eaten by a bird;

no, sadder, like a thistle-head completely left uneaten

sad like a black-and-yellow thistle-eating bird eating thistles

without you I'm listing sideways, a bark that's been shaken

without you I'm cross & itching

I liked it better when you hadn't gone away

I liked it better when you were mad

SAMPLE