

Sentenced

Every morning I dragged myself
to that sulphurous prison at 7am. Even in the winter,
when snow grazed on the mountain tops
and everything turned to ice. Maybe that was the bravest
I'll ever be. My bloody determination not to quit,
to get on with it; a young vet unprepared
for this world. There, even if my being there
meant nothing. Didn't stop 1200 sheep from being
slaughtered in a day. Each afraid and resisting
that conveyor belt to death. Even if I stopped counting
and instead just walked between the cells. A mindless guardian
of lost causes. Some mornings I stood still as a gravestone
in the chiller, at 4⁰C for two hours, watching carcasses
hoisted into a coffin of trucks. My official seal a thread
of numbered plastic locking them into the cold darkness.
Their only eulogy. I did not know of the nightmares
that would linger then.

I wake crushed in the morbid grip of bleating
bodies on the conveyor. Moving me away from the light
and closer to where I press my skull between the steel
rods; let the current stun me into a dissociation while
the shackles hoist my ankles to the rail. I am suspended
between the twitching bodies bleeding beside me. Until
they too clot into stillness. I lose my hands and feet first,
then my head is tossed into a bin. My unblinking eyes stare
up at my carcass, now skinned and gutted. Liver, spleen, heart
hooked apart; I am quartered. Inspected. Roller marked
and tipped over the precipice into imprisonment.
An icy room without an exit. This is my exit.
I am another beast good only for slaughter.