

Binary

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I

In Chiapas when you greet someone you say 'Melioyot' (here you are) and they respond, 'Le oyune' (here I am) and ask 'Cu'xelan a vonton?' (how is it with your heart?) and you reply 'Lek oy—vote?' (it is good—and yours?) These sing-song refrains are expected each time you encounter someone, like shaking hands.

The Sun Magazine, April 2011

But then life always makes you choose between two possibilities, and you always feel: one is missing! Always one—the uninvented third possibility.

Robert Musil

Around a bend, and light that erases
such failure. As a kid, in a desert
full of fragile soils and beauty buckled
and spired, full of hoodoo-tent-rock, space
that could have drowned us.
And the lakes cast pink, dowsing
for the ley lines in blueberry
bush and frost dune and there's something
I want to tell you about the intervening
hunt and divine. It wasn't all *Peace be with you*
and then the wheels fell off,
not all duck duck and then
there's a bang and the goose is another
slow learner, stoic in soft blonde
moccasins. Flannel here, linen there, a little bit of tulle tutu
magic tossed in for the ballerina dream,
which no one originally believes
is a danger. I could crouch and crouch
within the invisible and never, ever
disappear. Which isn't what anyone wanted
but me, pinky swear. But then there's a rush
and no one dreams the seam of a self
could be blown at birth and a child
would emerge and always wonder.
All the long way to saying, it's a secret,
the deluge and the compendium
shaped like a narrative but fighting
with a small child who just wants to know
was I touched? And has all of this long
division into cells and ventricles
and fear of bodies a way of saying:
surprise. Yes. You had a good healer mother who never
unsheathed the right knife on the right
man, or at least never knew to. What
can we trust of our memories?
Never ever that they quietly pull
paint across the shutters and fade
baked in the sun. But that they travel
and gambol like passengers
in a story book, beloved and fantastic,

wrought hot and bent new.
I'm in my girl body now, foraging around
and no one knows the answer
but me, me, call on me, if I ever learn to love.
If I ever figured out a thing about love,
it was from disease mind and the way it enters
the currents of a child through eyes
that she doesn't want looking, hands
that she doesn't want near.
I've run out of ways
to bubble around it. If you are a hunter
of fossils, then I'm in charge
of celebrations, and promise me, promise it,
I'll even peel off my wild nets for you,
because if we can't celebrate
everything that came after,
and also with you
I will fold and die.

So it is good
to start

with a story

but to remember
that memory
harvests
and locks.

It is best
to be loved
in your story

but save loved
truth is
save refuge
there is
nothing.

A systematic lurking, a hole, a compass, a dream, *the romance of orienteering*.
Vacilando: searching for where the inner (w)hole fills with stone or light or fiction,
absence or lightning or dream.

Vacilando: going somewhere but not greatly caring whether or not you get there,
although you have direction.

Parts of a compass: base plate, direction of travel arrow, housing, needle, cardinal points,
degree dial.

A great number of years ago-estimates say around 2500 B. C.- some clever Chinese discovered that a piece of a certain ore, floated on water on a piece of wood, would turn until one end of it pointed in the general direction from which the sun shone half way between sunrise and sunset-the direction he knew as south, or its Chinese equivalent. And if one end of the floating ore pointed south, the other end obviously pointed north.

(Be Expert with Map and Compass: “Fun with Compass Alone”)

I am one hand in each hand
of my father's. I am walking
up his legs until his stomach
where I tilt back and flip
and my body circles
through the summer air.

I am one hand in each hand
of my father's. I am in a basement,
with a mirror, being quiet.
I am trying to draw
my body, what lies
under the skin
of my face. I rub
it out, tear the paper,
start again.

My ears are cupped
in my hands. Voices
rise shrill in such a stunned
sweep I imagine
one has hurled glass
or fire.

I cover the mirror
with my body,
I cover the drawing
with my hands
and my voice
begins to fade.

*

I am one hand in each hand
of my father's. I am in a pine,
high above the yard,
and the branches hold
as I disappear.

They have cocktails below,
and for a moment forget
and for that moment I stay
and the lake is there

like a sleeping breath,
and beyond that, the river
brushing Canada,
and somewhere inside,
a cache of maps.

*

I am one hand in one hand
of my father's, the other
in my brother's,
they swing my body high
between them as we walk.
Sunday has its own
voice, greedy shelter
against the winter.
I wander the church hallways
because I will not
be made to listen, or sing,
slip in for communion
and turn away from the wine
because I am a child
and save the little wafer, the body,
for later in the snowy yard
where I can pray.

*

To learn
without light. For a wind
from each direction
to argue
for its path. The inside
is a peninsula and the landed
end is bedrock. The ocean
end contains geological
time and between them
rifting, amassing.
Write in darkness.
Register nothing,
keep walking.

*

Abiding space
Abiding tremble
An unseen flight one—
Cannot hold within
Cannot hold without

That one end of the floating ore—
That it may point you home.

(...just swim, just swim. go on with your story.)

(...and being nothing you are everything. that is all.)

(Please keep all windows closed to prevent birds from entering)

As it turns out, you can't have me.
I live my life in widening circles, and in these circles
only birds are entering. Once a blue heron for a week
of mornings the Colorado river split open
like a diamond, and once three condors swirling low
across the Andes, late on an afternoon, chips of obsidian
riding the solstice light. Barred owl, nightjar,
jackdaw, thrush: I give them a home
inside my body. I prevent almost nothing
from entering. Not a goshawk, not the screamers,
not the smoke of your eyes—

*Go to Freud, then Jung, then read a textbook,
then read a fairy tale, is one girl's counsel
for a crisis. Some advice is priceless,
but when we talk about our problems, another guy thinks out loud:
Al Queda? 2012?
And the doctors say, Could you be more specific, like, something
more related to yourself? And in this circle
nothing is hidden, not dark cuts nor our desire
to never love anything, ever, ever again or to hop on
unmarked busses or what do you mean by Radical Acceptance?
By Interpersonal Effectiveness?*

I read somewhere that in 1972 the Brooklyn Tabernacle's
spark was almost out, but then the holy spirit
lit a fire that couldn't be quenched. Is that what
this is, just fire's refusal to be extinguished?
The lover imitating a diver, then a squirrel in autumn,
the choir initiating a love for everything
in the person who stops on the corner to listen.
The shoe-shine boy barely feeding
his brother with the tiny coins I give him.
The fog has hovered somewhere else
for weeks now, stringing a brightness
through everyone's eyes. I speak too loudly, and too often,
I will prove I am still alive,

and I will not take up with the quiet here,
not for screams we don't hear or the soft wing-beats
of the birds you can't prevent from entering.

When you have money, come to my room.
Bring a candle, this invitation, a ring.
We'll sit still enough to watch winter
ripen, will hear each other clearly
without noise or promise. What sun there is
shines as if cut from a new metal, what deep wind.

Perhaps you come in from a little town.
Perhaps your life changed directions, too
sudden. Or if it was a city, come in
from there. Bring a white candle—
the pines will try to keep you with them
and heaves of snow will beg you deeper,
bent knee after bent knee. Say *I am broken,*
but I brought this invitation.
I will see you there, at the window, come in.

What if you come in with a ring,
a bundle of wood, we let snow
follow you through the doorway, forget
our little hollows of grief, perhaps
we never trail off and wait here for each other
to become.

Mornings are clear, then clouded.
No coming, going, just the candle
tapered out, the wick saved long
in the length of this book. Perhaps
we open the window, let our hands shake
with cold as we touch. No looking beyond,
shuddering towards an afterlife. Maybe
we accompany our voices for once
staying close, becoming winter
then spring, growing wildly loose
then bound.

I wanted to know about humus like I wanted to know about ricochet
chalice chimera big loose country bones like I wanted to know
about work. Ricochet was a brother gone, the sharp aluminum
crack-back of that. Look up, pea. He was one of those people
for whom talking and emotion were the only parts:
light on light.

A chalice the moon grew long from, poured the lake into,
dissolved as our body. Bones were what streaked underneath. When I say
the sun exploded it is not hyperbole, neither am I trying to spell the edge
of a story. I mean the mountains below it suddenly poured
headlong over the skin of our hands. We don't always love that burning
yet we are here. And where the sun was slightly thrummed.
The most unabashed thing is light on light on light. The fact-checker
still talks like that, even as he clears away the places where dead stars
have intertwined.

To make amends I rubbed soil into the lowland of his back, he said he dreamt
a heron perched there. Summer is an adze
that peels the bark from our skin, and the place
where lightening rings out, totems
of smoke. Let us awaken,
let us pivot once
and take flight.

1.

Say you're in a moment where—*so this is how I learned to speak*—
Say you've gambled and won, culled a teaspoon of the bright and grand,
lengthened imperceptibly in your body towards this voice.
Suddenly there is a chance we will reach each other
through all of this wild dim, though I'm asking to quietly tear it
open and to darken a surface for our zenith, our nadir,
whatever comes in and echoes through.

It's true I lied about the horses,
about that first dream. Where I lay down with them in their warmed hay
because I like the pokey grace they stand around in
until you spur them to dance
and then they dance. But it was so dangerous: smashed thin-as-a-flag body,
stitched-into-strips body, ferry-me-across-the-water body, mine when it finally rose
ethereal,
rose crushed. So this is how I learned to—

Dance boatman, dance. Each Christmas when I stole the baby Jesus
from where he slept
in the crèche, supine furl of his tiny
porcelain limbs in their swaddling clothes,
each night I tried to keep him safe
beside me.

Say you've reached a moment where: *so this is how I learned*
to love—

And it makes a form, hot bowl of water in the mouth.

Blank milk morning, a bow towards touching, the scattered chance
of devotion—

You knew and made the signal for yes.

Lightly, lightly: my body/your body,
drafts and drafts of us on the corner

of endless and

It's called Be(longing) to:

a speaking low
into your ear in the bath, or spooking up
from a black

dream or sometimes wanting to be paid for it—

This is how I learned to love: plan B in the whiskery dark, give up the lonely broken
thing pass it gently from hand to hand.

It's not with my eyes I know how: open beacon/full our music island/the hallowed yowl
and beg of longing, the teeth it has still, the fine

grain into which devotion cleaves.

Say you're in a moment where:

want to be more moored, less warp
more welded less spark, less spackled more

yellow heart/stone room

making nests between my body/your body, faithful to nothing

but its aquiline feathers, its own blood

harbor.

where no one says
listen, the way is the wick &
and scar & the mountain,
where wind is not trodden
by talk. If we are a single
equation, if we are a single
equation ironing out towards
the invisible, if we are an
equation signaled by invisible
grief.

Still, it spells a kind of shouting,
lying there in the peeled black
darkness, the open mouth
a warped rift describing
nothing. Remember
that if someone needs to know
the relationship
between a nightboat
in the east & in the west
they'll want who is trapped & who is
humming. Beyond one's own
damage, the eye & the heart,
helpmate, helpmate,
rigorous axis.

When a little girl, I traveled back to sleep.
Ever since, by day, a grand adventure.

13

I.

By dawn we were in lock-step,
I purred and purred to know
even this teaspoon of emptiness.
I asked the shy questions,
he said everything
in the universe
is whirling.

I asked where is the papa-
body, why didn't I bloom faster
inside her? Why did the older brother
take to silence, bright fists?
He said bow, bow, I will listen
to that.

II.

But I was pollinated
by sound. I hold a cup
in my hand first wind
then water
fills it, again and again
we encounter each other.
I hear monks praying in a coffin,
if they go silent, and I recognize
them, how deep
is our passage?

III.

By evening we paddle to the sea
in a birch-bark canoe.
He says every time you love
I increase and you decrease,
I increase and you decrease,
it's like a warm front
moving in, why not
worship that?

Ourselves akimbo, the escarpment slammed with rain.
Teton, Talkeetna, I'm working only to tell the story
I never heard.

Pine-knot, slip-knot, everything concentric and gathering
like lightning, suddenly we're shedding our layers in the obvious
pierce of morning, and I'm being named

out loud like a bale in a meadow, which is to say
not at all. Sentinel of spruce were you sister or brother
and does it ever matter, can one hand keep the rhythm

while the other slowly dives. At the core is a fin
and in some places the river answers you if you let down
your hands and what anchors

and what travels. Through the weak-tea darkness, who is it
that arrives to score into your center
their pulse, a flash that never leaves you.

II

*I still have within me the lust to search for living water
with quiet talk to the rock or with frenzied blows.*

Yehuda Amichai

When I snuck into the garden and rubbed rosemary
across your cheeks,
I believed it was to keep God
with me. As the distance from Pacific
to day moon shimmered in the heat,
I promised to keep myself empty
for the common names of things.
Say it this way, say it that way,
say nothing. Today I want pure electric
amnesty, save the slack: Tack me down hard
into any scene where moonlight carves
parabolas onto the skin.
Lover, if someone
is hiding you, you can come
out now. If we are two
bodies, I want them to at least originate
from a lake, or some other fluent
topography. I loved the transparencies
in school where we examined sets and subsets,
diagrams, and then later, the body,
but they forgot to expand on the heart:
the depth of its cavities, how it comes unglued
during certain tides. If I made a Venn-
diagram now, I would shape it
like your hips and when I held it up
to the light I would follow the ellipses—
say, follow, say, farther,
I would fall recklessly
into your mouth.

*If the dream takes place in summertime, one dreams of volcanic eruptions.
If the dream takes place in late summer, one dreams of building a house.*

-The Foundations of Chinese Medicine

1.
Start in, kid: new vibrato and hum.
The world with its icy
in-roads and persistent
shunting. New notches
in our old columns of lust:
someone called it
local color.

2.
Tell me, friend, why an outcrop
of ash? It isn't such a bad thing
to live in one world forever.

3.
For the first time, in fragments,
hell & pitch-perfect explorations
of grief. Fingers pearl over
a rosary, discover a smashed
conch, then: wet smell of an iris,
its lonely intelligence.
For this we are grateful, the way
each body was breakwater,
jetty.

4.
I'll give you one
of everything tonight,
unless you are starving.
I stacked the chairs
in an easy dimness
broke only one
pitcher and its sibling
saucer, when the heart
is weak, one dreams
of fires.

5.
One dreams of laughing.
In the carnival sense
of the word: the kind of freedom
that's worth cementing.

6.
You reading this, hello,
thank you, I wish I could focus
on your eyes. But, in the shape
of praise, leap, but do
your grace in different voices.
Even if you don't, I'll pretend
you did.

7.
Shelter me, sister, lover, rusted
corral, re-emerge from the lee
Sierra, from the wise
and wild surfaces we steeped
up slow. The elastic fences in our
gaze. That was bliss.
You were wearing
your house like a rune.

With nothing in my belly but a darkness
that knows only how to be up
nights feeding bread
to a hungry memory
in which ten years haven't passed
since vodka we stole or bought
from stores in the city on streets
where low-cut women emerged
from shadows peered into our cars
in laughing breaths
sounding shrill and wrong
they asked if we wanted some
of them

Up nights with *Dark Side of the Moon*
and I am on the floor of your bedroom
getting so high I can't walk
to church in the morning
and you are unclasping
my cotton bra to slip it
slowly off
you slide it down

Because your grandfather has just died
in Colorado
we are memorizing the details
of our lives so far
into each other's ears to grieve
him a painter and you
a sculptor and me a painter too
we are so alike we are sewing
memory into our skin with yellow
thread so it will be visible
even as night comes

I want to be up nights tracing
the damp path towards
your house from mine

want to run

towards doorway number one
which I will enter no matter what
is behind it if you remember to send

at least a postcard from the mountains
or to think of the night
in the mountains where we slept
on the floor and waited for each other
to become

Tim, I can no longer afford
to not address you
but there have been winters harder

See someone's whispering
inside your old kitchen
they're pouring us a drink and
as we rise to listen it's clear
and so pure it hurts
it's just us isn't it?
Returning

I think his hands are full
of snow. I feel around inside
myself for the range
wind carves braved
after loss, feel for the ceiling.
I think we have to expose
the place where there is mentioned
someone rocking to sleep
and go to them, I think his hands
are full of hours.

You have to be willing to be so
slender and true inside it.
Who are you crushed
like a garden under
winter. I'll see if I can stay
planted in the quicksilver
gale, sit still long enough
to watch something dapple
in the sun, for the ridges to honey
and smear behind the nightfall.

The fences bow today
in a loose spring squall. Hoarfrost
stripping March its first
buds along the split-rail.
At first glance you would think
I was trying to stand straight
against it, but I'm fine
with leaning in, that this life
won't be all shotgun
and wood-stove, trembling
inside an invisible love.

I think he was pointing at the moon,
but I was looking
at his mouth. At where
the lines broke around it.
What do you grasp
for, and who reaches back?
In a funny wind, stepping out

of the river's layers, knowing
it wasn't the pyrotechnics
that ever made you
feel long, spirit, and true.

If every false sweetheart tossed back on the bed
if every pinpricked dress every plucky grip
if every fold and timber of reason praised
as it flames. Carve me something sweet

out of milk soap or locust, I'll poke holes in
your *ifs* and *because*s, your invocation
of god, such crux. If the apiary does, if the kickbird smiles
and does, if a fuckton of lovers singing dulce dulce

all at once, do. Ali wrote: *who doesn't want to drown
in the beauty of another?*

If I tinfoil heart and abey if I extirpate and exorcise
the x's, the o's if I follow up in gold
lamé, wrap you in eiderdown and mink
pink pin-up false sweetheart I was

wretched, I was wrong. If I spilled
the sugar wrong, under-wore my ring, toss me back
inside my tiny snow globe life and shake.
Tell me why I still feel myself think.

Somewhere in Detroit, my sister
steps onto a balcony. She leans out
into the summer and the pots of Primrose
and Moonflower don't begin
to pulse, exactly, but everything
in the night shifts
towards her. She points the telescope
at Arcturus: *it will keep expanding
before shedding its outer
shell*, she offers slowly when she finally
speaks. Her voice is an opening
during which the bowl of evening
fills, overflows.

Her voice is the field
you are standing in when your eyes begin
to adjust to the tin burn
of one, and then a companion star,
and then their splitting.
Because it has never been heard,
because it is a new small continent
of light,
her voice begins
to dismantle me.

If I have been alone my whole life,
if I have been sleeping beside a fire
and the backs of my knees have been dusted,
and my neck has been dusted
with ash if somehow my mother
is a jar I didn't bloom fast enough inside,
then maybe my sister and I
share this.

So I am sketching her there, into the evening,
and as she comes into focus
so does a dwelling inside me
which single stars cannot attain alone.

This sister she will live and die
as a white dwarf star,
planetary nebula blackest
she nameless, she bright.

Who was the first one to see me, gather me
in the flash of his bulb, without ever calling
my name?

Tell him—I will walk again.
I believe in the one whose hands
you can see, whose palms appear to be lifting
the cloud over the mountain.
This woman she explains the asymmetry
of my body by pointing towards
the moon, by placing a chair
at the foot of the sea each night
for me to watch it carve away bone by bone
until the most fragile dark.

And my sister closes her eyes
but just for a moment. Because it is April,
her pink coat is mostly unbuttoned,
and her thin legs are new and bare.
She is pretending to be blind,
of one being with the air in the alley
and a white wall just blackened
in a rambling strip as tall as she.

Our father is a giver of birdseed
and refuge. Alone in his room,
his three favorites perch atop
a domed cage. Their white bodies almost pierce
the shadows, but instead they turn dove-grey
and fade. He holds one in his fist
to imprint its tiny musculature there
before going to paint. Our father
is devoted to nothing besides these birds,
oils, turpentine, and moonlight.

Our mother died this morning,
but for years she lay topless, prone
like a fallen sculpture each morning
after another man left,
and we covered her and propped her
in the sun while the neighbors hummed low songs,
wet laundry glittering in their hands,
turning a half-blind eye.

The best lovers are out pacing the hallways.

-James Wilson

I imagine spindrift
sifting a long meadow. Sky
so white I could only
see white. Couple that
with empty. But not yet.
Sap not frozen in its line. Node of skin,
muscle, bark, easy now, he said.
I put on a yellow dress,
sweat and melody built up
like the marks of survival, and he named me
by name: for all of this talk
about opening
who are you? And when you're done
talking, or longing, and the wide green
waves of sadness keel
into the broad of my back.
The island I've never heard of,
lying still in the squall. By wanting
nothing, I redeemed.

1.

Come into the field:
first toss of rain in the wind.

Then, the high plains in autumn, full fire
and a blue fog gathering Spruce.

Most nights, I take phone calls from your other
lovers, so far down the mountain

I don't worry, and tonight,
moth caught in the candle wax,
I startle awake, reaching out
for your body as you arc a knife
straight into the darkness
towards a mouse
keeping you
from sleep.

2.

They named Messier 27 after a star that is dying, but can't quite disappear.

So much force trying to make it explode,
so much force from the inside
trying to hold it together.

Messier himself was a comet hunter.

The Apple Core nebula has a central star, contains knots.
The heads of the knots: bright cusps.

Renaissance doctors said that the essence of each person originates

as a star in the heavens.

And we think a person is only
what she makes herself to be.

3.

A little tea in tin cups, bee balm hanging
drying thickly down the walls: *We are on each others hands*
who care. The mountain's filled with names
that don't fight in our bones: hair-pin, shot-cherry,
ground-truth—you come by and touch my face
in a damp meadow. I look away
and think of winter, if it came now,
would we be ready.

30

Wishing to know you, I go and kneel by the river. Clark Fork of the Columbia in winter, and copper water down from Butte shines thick as a coal seam. To watch the rap-white soothe over the backs of rocks is to remember a place below reverence; you were right to ask the current: *make me better*. In my new dream there are less years between us, so at every crossing I will build a cairn for you in case you show. Long before I was born, you sat firm in the old fighter bars of Montana, examining the courage it takes to be a poet. I went to them too, but too late, too much beer in the whiskey, I was looking for you, a way to keep going. I looked down the long highway to where the Sapphires burn red at dawn, down Lost Horse, Kicking Horse, granite cathedrals with the wind whipping through. I even looked to where lovers pour over each other's bodies under a scar of Bitterroot stars. The lovers were always your favorite part. Sometimes, *what thou lovest best* remains a ghost. And now I am here in these oldest hills, no plains east, just ocean, and my body feels cracked and stretched so thin between this country and that one, and winter has finally disappeared across the basin and range, water carving fast from deep snows. Do we know a home upon entering? I know that every time I think about the drunk man walking straight into the fire you are there, you step in front of him and scatter him backwards while everyone else eats fry-bread and laughs, the horses stamping in the dark. Some part of us remembers everywhere that water comes from, and maybe that's as good a home as any. *The river we carry with us*, as you said, everything else, we leave behind. Thank you, for everything, and carrying on.

I started writing below a giant photograph of you
in a classroom in Missoula, your cocktail full
of ice and spilling. At twenty I wrote about light in the pines,
peaches on stale bread, the hook of a lover's hip,
so nothing much has changed. I escaped breakdown
when there were mountains to hold me in, but all grown
in a city where everyone is trying so hard not to be loved, Dick, I lost it.
I thought you'd understand. In Montana it's easier to hold together,
the cold keeps everyone humble and in summer
you are outside with each other and so far north
there's more than one day in it. My spirit has become
faded but there are always more words under the words
and for this I am grateful. I don't want to do fancy things
with words anymore though, just get back into that place where the five rivers
roll into each other, lie down, and be home. The best ones
I've loved are married with children tucked
under their arms, and often because of this I cannot
see well enough to feel anything besides the presence of root
and sand. The hills back east impart a kind of loose strength,
but in most places the land is covered up
and I'm not sure what else there is to see. When I close my eyes
I'd like to remember the sky in a salmon pink
over the South Hills, while back in town a band is jammed
into a corner of the Old Post, and boot heels are starting to fly,
and winter, for a moment, disappears. The valley,
for a moment, fills with music. The river, when it answers,
calls mercy.

Pang

33

Reading aloud
from the book
of embers

has printed
upon you
a diminishing

of margins
a brocade
of psalms

a sinew
a whispering
in the gallery

of permanent
shadows.
Rehearse

until below
the water
the vigil

of seeing
is the pang
before the fire.

I am asleep beneath the chaos
of the bay. Asleep above underwater
streets with names like Pescadero, Teutonia,
names like *Eureka!*

Archimedes said once: I found it!
He had stepped into a bath
to suddenly realize
how the volume of the water displaced by his body
must equal the volume of the body part
submerged

and me too, me too, rapidly dipping in
and out, small hands hooking the eye
of the shaky lock, pressing the long breath
of my hair down
into the water so they would know
I wasn't faking,
the next day the same, and the next

always hoping my thin tank suit was somehow like
a heavy roll of tape across my body
that I could layer and re-layer
like my mother did, taping down her breasts
for black-tie, for tight silks and taffetas

because there was a man they sometimes
let into the house, Christmas, birthdays,
he's family
and he had a voice like wrought-iron
as he noticed and then unnoticed me
with his hands for years and eyes after
everyone was gone.

Last night,
above those theoretical streets,
we slept in a glass-bottom boat,
and from the gallery of tides, this memory

reprinted itself upon my body.
I let your hands ring
my thigh as we talked and drank black coffee
to fend off the morning.
It smelled like paint and the hydrangeas
centered neatly on the table.
As we rocked, as the light pulled up over the Pacific,
I watched the water below us come
translucent, that thin stalk of it in the vase
blessing me, like your body, drifting gently
side to side.

III

The road is fresh and aches...

Tomaž Šalamun

After Edith Södergran

I am nothing, plus the idea of young rust,
which insists upon metal to darken.
I am pointing at Saturn to learn my cardinal directions.
I am a Zyprexa elixer, Abilify amplified, Seroquel's seductress,
Geodon's bright home. I am milligrams and milligrams
of shy side effects. I am partially checking in here
based upon my hidden knowledge of wire.

I am the feeling of *oh god*, but soaked in rain.
I am building something into the outback
of the mind. Here I am: still keeping my skirts down
even throughout the full Niagra
of night. I am splitting the distance between bruised hips
and eating dirt, and I'm having a second life cycle
with the days I thought I lost.
I am the man slung like a dead deer
across the morning doorstep and I am the cherries
I give him. Tonight I am folded,
like water, back into the skirts of the hills.
I am ramming my silky body
into the spaces between stones.

I am the soft diagnosis:
'You need mindfulness,' I am the river's rap
white soothe. I'm each friend who wonders
what are you doing there I am learning,
from the prolific fish runs, how to preserve food
year round. I am learning to stay drunk
on nothing so reality cannot destroy me.
I am standing on the peak of Divisadero
where you can see everything, plus the idea
of mountains, whose plates are always
broken, who rise there and insist:
I am.

At three o'clock when I need to pray,
I think of the house in Punta Sal, the stooped men
calling *Where are you going*, their shoulders
heavy with bananas still unbroken
at the necks. As the road falls to cliff all around us,
the soda bottle shrines are abruptly abandoned
the road either mud or hard. *What is it*
you were looking for, and always, *vaya*
con dios. Each chapel of the coast
with its proper saint, the bells in repair
wrapped like bandaged fists, some still ringing
a muffled noon. The Catholic murmurs begin
just as each day, in a breath
of sweet chatter, disappears. The smashed melons in the dirt
are like beautiful, ruined mouths, shimmering
alongside endless shards
of broken glass.

When I need to walk forward, I think
of a thin plywood raft full of fish,
the boy that push-pulls them home
with a long, flat, wooden spoon and the way
the ocean breaks gently around him.
From the road, a line of hovering gulls
is our ongoing correspondence—
Just now one dove so sudden, and alone.

This is a borderless passage
I enter and exit outside of time
I drop my bike and toss a bottle
I see the fig there and in the first moment
since last summer I can eat

it is blooming a hard unripe
turned gorgeous supple splitting
and the whipping in of summer
unfurling leaves and the air
I cup my hands to hold it

sudden thigh-high thistles up
and with them no name weeds up
would-be yard overnight
I am no longer shuttered in here
I am tall stepping out

and shaking meanwhile I lean
into the darkness as it descends
like an intricate breathing
in the upper rooms I am
a certain spacious knockoff

of myself I flicker against
stillness and measure hours
and in those hours come
un-nested torch my aerie
I pivot once and take flight.

I invented the name of the church

40

Mid-spring, popping green, rain
and rain again, the enclosure of it, and the vow
suddenly Benedictine: to keep *living*

together with—my broken shelter and loose angles,
darkness warm, bitumine—*myself*
as I am, a begged tithe, direct echo

meant to turn the breath.

I thought of the soil beneath it.

It would be friable, clam neatly in the palm,
grow good stones and then let the wind
do a gentle abrasion of them,
our line of talk backlit
by falling and silence.

I invented the church to tell the story—
when you gave me the wafer, secret
altar, when you passed me your slip
of body, and I stole out to bow, to pronounce it new.

Nothing feeds you. Breath runs out in the middle
of a stitch and morning is a measured dream,
suspended of arrival. You search for a tangle
of roots tight enough to tremble
below them, unseen. Desire to be sinew,
etchings on bark. The doctor understands,
says you must be checking in here
based upon your hidden knowledge
says just whisper *adios* and the wind
will let you vanish. Pray silence
is a compass you are strong enough
to follow and not call out to for an answer.
Desire to be pith, wasted, and bone.
Your hands are jammed into your mouth
because not even words and how they strike light
and make caverns of frantic grace in the body
could matter as you eat and eat and
nothing feeds you.

To the east, the slow accretion of clouds.
To the west, towards the mountains, copper night.

I forget that in the center
are hillsides and rivers
unspoken for,

that there are mountains and valleys
the strata of which we lower
into, perhaps, in the hollow
between breaths.

In the tiny pause
between the taproot
of summer
and its departure,

I nearly forget the long hymn
of winter, the absence,
the fractional glimpses

of light. Dear one, I will go
without speaking.

Ablaze, keep me
until I disappear.

Had to come in out of what moved me.
Nothing, a downpour of sparks.

Broken waking, punctuated by the honeyed tail
of an old dream. He's always hulking

when we reconsider the evening, I'm standing
in a frosted Easter and in the morning

sunlight calms the muddy snow. The street empties
into the shoreline as if to explain

all of this hum and watching
and our feel of taut taut between the spheres.

It would be easier to explain reading patterns
in the dust, but in with this sweep of damp, nothing left—

I felt like once I caressed the empty, I could go.

I learned by holding to the thicket of a stranger
that sometimes the body has wires

crossed so deep no fingers dare untangle,
felt like the mind's sickness was a river

I belonged to. I had come in
from the far edge of the mountain for an exquisite

invitation: I mouthed no.
For the first time in a dry county

I did not stumble, knuckle up,
I did not beg a drink.

The hardest part of touching is that everyone says yes, the sun and wind agree to yes, it's a miracle that yes is here and here, no, sorry, I meant here here here but then at some point it means I will carry you all of you or it means start backing away. I'm wrong to blame you, you never promised we would marry young. I won't dredge the lake for your sculptures I don't owe them sweet noise or a dime, but I will raise your monogamy against my lovers and call it a draw, and you will appear here clumped with other people which for me is like erasing the mountain back into a glacial sea and and you are the mountain. But let's be forgiven, realistic, I can give it a try, neither of us live there now. Snow is a lost dream, slot canyons are photographs and it would take a billion minutes to reach a scree slope, a boulder field, any altitudinally related fear. And what does that mean about the now our's touching, in the church of the lower elevations?

Today I was feeling brave, so I said the flesh, you can have it, the voice, let us not forget it rises, the heart, I mean carry me somewhere dark, anywhere other than home.

This is how I learned
to love: by the light of the silvery

whiskey bottle. My advice
in storm's garden is to continually

jump, but most of my decisions
have been wrong.

Forgive me my absence,
forgive these nights shot through

with velvet,
but on a friendship

level the reason we came
here was to edit out

the after-dark. Tell me your
name, your face, I like the way

they sound, tell me the cleft
glaze of your eyes is impermanent.

Fragile filter, I just wanted
to hear you say it again.

Growing into all of the voices
that barrel-roll through

the mind, magnets and circuits,
by what omen will we know

to lay down in the streets,
to emerge as the carving

between fears and if I'm in charge
of celebrations I'll hold the gate

open for this willingness to be wrong.
Where does your mind go

after years ago thank you
for a predilection towards

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survival thank you for closing
a door behind my light I found

I could see better then to navigate
the compound, gathering dark.

But it is good
to step out
of your story.

It is best
to give away
your story

to a lapidary moon,

pay out the coils
of each memory

and begin again,
but please do forward:

- * charts from the Langley-Porter Hospital (quiet, mild, asleep, gets along well
with others)
- * ground-truth (ain't too late for anything has a body)
- * a fistful of (your choice)
to be lost into (...)

begin again:
but please forward this:

he venido yo coriendo olividando me de ti

He typed his constellations on the inside of her ear

da me un beso pajarito no te asustes colibri

She collected the best places to lie down

he venido encendida el desierto para quemar

Hummingbird cupola in an opening of oaks

porque la alma prende fuego cuando deja de amar

and the three condors at Choquequirao, and the children of Sorata brushing their teeth
with apples,

the rest of it,

thank you.

Vacilando Territory Blues

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i.

Within how many first frosts
within how many coats of paint over the door
where we marked our names, heights at 15, 17, 22
within how many hours of your arms draped
across a bass guitar did I mishear every note, within how many circles
of lake-rise, moon-rise, rise: whoever you are, I will wake quick to watch you.

ii.

It's true I've stopped listening to the voices
that tumble through the river. I've stopped waiting for a ballast,
waiting for the level, stopped going out at night for walks
and trying to get spiritual, stopped thinking about sources
the gates we carry each other through about snow in the mountains
where it runs to, and all of that silence. I'd rather be lying in the lap of a Porteño
on a bench in a park passing warm orange soda from hot mouth
to hot mouth. Rather than already knowing I'd rather be learning
over and over how to say 'let's go' and 'you are my brother' words
for wheelbarrow for mud, straw and when and 'how about now?'
I'd rather be ecstatic naked and high in the pines in a darkness
that admits only terrific upwellings of heat deep passage
pray for me I'd rather be gilded palm to palm. I'd rather let the horse
spook and run off into the desert with my bedroll than waltz slowly
around the padded rooms of my heart with my hands outstretched
for the light switch. Again I hear the voice of the friend,
wicked and warbling me to turn on each of the tiny bones
of my ears, to turn on a bold kindness, to cling to the parting smoke
of these full, heavy dreams. And I'd rather have you in a crumbling house than continue
to revise your ghost into a poem, much rather see than all of the looking
hear than all of the listening I'd rather burn and in the burning singe, maybe never
even shine upset the balance affix my hips to your hips and make of the heat and pressure
a stone bowl to place into the foam at the edge of the sea.

iii.

And whenever I hear Richard Thompson do *1952 Vincent Black Lightning*

just like the other night I want to be more like the words I couldn't make out
or misheard I want the bar to be darker the touching more sudden
so that I barely have time to kiss your arm around my collarbone
because they say everything that rises
must converge and it's true

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I am mixing metaphors and conflating the bodies of most
of the people I love, but if I stay here, and you weld scraps of iron
into a rough box then I will feed it and feed you all day
I will leave everything
to the mystery
you won't believe how clearly, if you'll let me, I'll arrive.

Page 4

If You Are a Hunter of Fossils is the name of a children's book by Byrd Baylor.

Page 9

“And being nothing...” is a quotation by the Tibetan teacher Kalu Rinpoche, excerpted from *A Path with Heart*, by Jack Kornfield.

“Just swim...” is a quotation by Diamin Katagiri Roshi.

The concept of “tzu-jan: self-ablaze” comes from David Hinton's introduction to *The Collected Poems of Wang Wei*.

Page 21

The Foundations of Chinese Medicine: A Comprehensive Text for Acupuncturists and Herbalists is by Giovanni Maciocia, and the poem is after Tom Andrews.

Page 27

“Who doesn't want to drown..” is by Kazim Ali from *Bright Felon*.

Page 33

“We are on each other's hands....” is by John Berryman from “Homage to Mistress Bradstreet.”

Page 50

“He venido corriendo...” and the italicized lines in Spanish that follow are lyrics from a song titled “Celestina” by the late Lhasa De Sela.

Page 51

“Vacilando Territory Blues” comes from the title of an album by J.Tillman. The poem is for Alex Cullen.

Dream Dictionary and *Ellipses* appeared in *The Owl Eye Review*, *Out of the Blue and Into the Black* in *Cavalier Literary Couture*, and *Poem for the Langley-Porter Hospital* in *Copper Nickel*.

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