

Endlings

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Sleep lingers all our lifetime about our eyes, as night hovers all day in the boughs of the fir-tree. All things swim and glimmer. Our life is not so much threatened as our perception. Ghostlike we glide through nature, and should not know our place again.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Experience”

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Migration Exhibit

Among the other stuttering leaves, I see one flare—my first in years.
I step out to meet the wanderer, glimpse its signature black-veined hindwings.

This tiny flying carpet of tiger-skin. It's unseasonal—it will ice, lacquer over
or starve for absent dame's rockets, coneflowers, other weedy confections.

In girlhood, I swooped the fields by the playground alone
with my makeshift net—a tunnel of gauze knit between sticks.

On my clipboard, I catalogued what I caught:
Yellow, White, Monarch—and always too many to track.

During my lifetime, over half Earth's mass of insects vanished:
more than the human weight on the world.

And of Western Monarchs, ninety-nine percent. So, most. They die with roadside milkweed,
the only place to lay the single green or cream-colored egg, minute, beneath the velvet leaf

on the mass journey south. Among our last mysteries: this serial migration.
That it happens at all. The Theory of the Inherited Map, useless.

How they descended into those valleys, odd as black magic, blanketing
the sacred firs in their ardor, fire-spearing the blotted, spangled sky.

Once, a flaming cathedral, enormous as a city. Cell dust
shimmered down like radium. Now, relic temple—

the single acre's burning edges well contained.
If this is my last sighting, then, let me recall how it flashed here,

splicing the light, faltering,
beating skyward again.

Understory

Listen to me. I am telling you
a true thing. This is the only kingdom.
The kingdom of touching;
the touches of the disappearing, things.

—Aracelis Girmay

Afterimage

In dreaming, it may be possible to meet.
Your face, beyond the opening, almost a likeness.
Not shaking, not smearing away.

Don't stay dead too long, I say.

Awake, the same room is still projection.
Photons, just signals that pass through receptors. A code at most.

As the woman died, 1950, she saw a house filled with clean light.
It was waiting for her—or she said so.

What I see is made in the brain. If the scenes match, or almost,
we're together. (Open shutters, stirred branches,
a hand forming an awning for a brow.)

I love these optics, bright squares that cut across your visage.

Light passes like that; an image configures.
Without light, or with recollected light, we dream—
rebuild those endless dwellings. I know that house. I saw it too

when I was told. Scene, seared. Each direction viewed at once:
whitewashed floorboards, lit rafters, fence and swirling grass outside.
This can happen in the mind.

As her daughter died, not having spoken for three years,
she said to my father, "I know."

While in dreams there is no time. Or: a going-across.
If you dreamed of me like this, it's enough. You see me here.

Or you saw me,
this simple room. Boughs laden with snow, lowering

to hide the door. He said how much she was loved, the names
of her children. I know. In my dream, you hold my shoulders—

we see a dark cloud of flamingos, thousands. Black wind touches our hair.

Dream this too, or have dreamed it. Remember or don't.

The green glass bead I took from her house as a child:

still slipped away, meant for an aquarium or a vase of water.

A dark plunge, then the sudden feel of your hands.

Your face splits into clear minnows, leaves.

An afterlife lived in parts between waking. Brief, alarming.

When she spoke at last, he wept against her bedding.

That kind of weight: real. Now, dim imprints. And for some reason,
flowers. That miasma invading even this world.

See what I see. Get it right. I know, it vanishes.

Grave Marker

Charlottesville, VA

In the cemetery behind my apartment, someone has planted a beach umbrella,
small and upright in its primary colors. Protecting a person

I never met. I pass it daily on walks over the surface. There's a paved path,
and I'm happy here these days, if gnat bitten. I haven't gone to see the sheltered name.

Mornings I look up from the wash basin, and the hill of headstones
past the window is mirrored there, behind the face. I don't mind—

I look alive. Pierce dawn's mist and pace around. The statue of the war horse
and the general is still standing, downtown.

The sky is massive, torn. The window of graves—painted closed
—and the tree canopy blooming

with lobes of light some mornings. It shocks me.
As if I could touch them and dapple—

—months pass. The umbrella is bleached by sun
and rain, almost white now. A seam is opening.

Understory

Crossing a paved road through woods, cold morning rain, the dog leaps suddenly away from a mound: a deer, still alive, heaped by the wayside. We all freeze. She studies me. I want to reach out for her, like a child reaches for the brow of a tame horse. The dog barks, blameless and excitable, and the deer is frightened. She drags herself on two front legs. The back two are shattered. *Please stop*, I say. She walks on bright stumps of broken bones as she heaves herself across the path and vanishes into the thicket. I call out, as if my voice is not a terror to her. I go home, phone animal control, feed the dog, walk to the stop. She lies in the understory, feeling what I would feel.

Murmuration Exhibit

The flying birds were setting up, far over my head, a sort of time-pattern, or rather patterns...

– Elizabeth Bishop

All through November, each dusk, starlings descended over the same graveyard where the dog bounded into leaf piles, dodged headstones—and we’d both pause at once in answer to that wild clamor, the drilling racket fixed in one bare tree. They joined to it as if magnetized, or doomed to endless repetition. Thrilling maybe, or panicking, or just seeking the warmest patch of air. Each time I’d plow into the chill, half expecting nothing—but they would arrive on the hour, first in small parcels warping through the radiant plain—flash and vanish—then tuning closer, mass gathering; foliating into one tree like a thatch of black inked leaves. A sudden hush—then—how they’d burst up at once, emptying branches of their weight: a banished canopy erupting in noise. Invasive things. Victorian eccentrics, trying to introduce each bird in Shakespeare, loosed them in Central Park. Just watching the patterns almost hurt me. How they pulsed and formed a glassy knot of nerves. Kosrae Starling (*Aplonis corvina*): an extinct subspecies. Crow-like. Gone by 1825. Bilge rats leaked from European whaling ships caused the decline. Such blight trailed those vessels. Mysterious Starling (*Aplonis mavornata*): found off a ship captained by Lord Byron’s cousin. The records note just that the island specimen was “killed hopping about in a tree”: the first and last record of the dark little bird. *But not these*, I’d think. Not that I could tell them apart as they combed, then plaited the air. Churn and flicker, bloom and clench. Listing west a bit each night as they quickened from tree to tree, over the street, then became, in the last light, a distant daydream, barely remembered later as I scrubbed mugs or fed the dog. They always left when the sun did, and I surveyed the brittle unlit remnants: doomed communal garden, blasted squash blooms, frayed stalks. They say the future may include no birds, at this rate. I’d stare and think, *no birds, no birds, no birds*, until the thought faded. Still I was happy, looking—couldn’t help it—I was living. But when the starlings vanished this December, I didn’t notice. I forgot to go out before dark. Or I glimpsed, through the window, the silent flare and turned away. I knew I could walk straight out into the miracle, the cries like crystal xylophones, splintering waterfalls, pouring around me. How they roiled the air, desperate as a netted shoal. Yesterday, I stared from bed as bleak branches filled with snow, I hurt for the birds no longer zooming in their matrix of black divination for me, but simply living elsewhere now, living somewhere else.

Mud Room

The leafy voices rise to meet the rain beating past the screen. Liquid stretched in the mesh, tiny squares. Slow-motion rise of tender toadstools in the damp. I know how we floated in the rowboat once as it rained quite hard, how we flung ourselves in through the scrim. My watch stopped from that wet. I found your saturated mouth. Now, a fine grid, and my hand bending it, nearly invisible. Now, cold remnants: hung slickers, rubber boots. It's true I can't leave, can hardly move. It's true I never want the rain to stop. I hate this quiet. Want the world to shimmer, quake.

Sleeper Car

I love my bunk in this train's tiny ward, its pilled fleece sheet
and disposable pillowslip. How each object vibrates slightly

on the nightstand. Past the window's spittled sheen,
creeks behind cul-de-sacs suck on their shopping-carts

and highchairs. It's easy to mistake *awake* for *alive*—as
on waking, to say aloud, *I'm alive*. Dawn trees flash, tattooed

backs of warehouses collapse. *Don't ruin everything*, I say, drift off.
Small weights tether silk balloons. A cream-colored palace burns

down to skeleton. Tiny grey plumes. A vole skittering through ash.
Then kids run laughing down the rickety corridor. The conductor

makes an announcement on the intercom. My brother is stricken
by night-terrors, imagining his death. He's young and healthy,

I remind him. But it's the concept of nothingness, oblivion,
that keeps him up. I say, *you won't be there to feel it*. But that's the thing.

From the train, sun on frost makes fields of glittered lace. But today
I'm so tired, I'm hardly living. Despite the rocking, the ambient rumble,

no-one can sleep on this train. Through the dim hours—gentle voices, foot-
steps, weeping, card games, ancient doors sliding open to the night winds.

You can point away from the self and touch with your finger
an atmosphere of common loss. And now in the woods

past the window, total beauty, neither good nor bad. Flailing half-
eaten salamander, webstuck moth. Wren returning daily to her nest

of crushed eggs. Here, droplets worm across dusty glass.
The fogged sun blares, and I want to be here for this, alive—

At a station, the attendant lowers a blue stool, opens
a black umbrella. I won't rain on everything. I'll arrive on time

and spread my arms. Find the words to reframe, reposition the fact.
I slip back into dream-life, its endless compartments. Into the knife-

straight lines of the rainfall, which look warped from here. Which
on hitting the ground vanish. When I think of being awake

my secret body trembles. We know death's nothing like sleep.
Becoming part of something else is small consolation. Somewhere

fir-branches dangle their thousand glass beads. Sugar-spun
opals, smashed. Bright yolks pulled slowly out and swallowed.

Exhibit

How obvious: pay attention.

Still, I need reminding.

I don't know the language of repair.

I only know you cannot touch me here—

where my footfalls echo after-hours
in the exhibit of spot-lit fossils,

furred wings pinned open in display
over the tiny placard. Unfeeling.

What it's like to be gone.

Who will fling open the doors
on the dead, and catch them at it?

We who, in our living, bleed out?

Who feed time's watchdogs, fruitlessly,
each small dark cherry of the present?

Attic Room

Climb the ladder through the endless house. Close the hatch and sit in darkness total as the inside of a body. No light here to gleam the slick kidneys, which must be lovely, brown. Red chest. Past the wall, a muted scrabbling sound. The trapdoor cracks open on forked footprints. Dust burns in the ladder of light—as if a message might be spelled there. *Clean me!* for instance, or, *stop your search here.* A keen piece, bright as a blade, falls out of me, leaves no imprint. Far below, the eaves complain. Once a jar was opened, emptied. Once a cadaver opened. *I'll find you,* I say, light the wick.

Quiet Car

Cities hold their shape as they recede. Into mist or distance— I lose them looking from the train. Below, the secret world waits. What is enclosed in each house glimpsed through the bright halls of trees? Where are the families, if not in the junked yards, the woods by the tracks? A sudden, clear sound. I sit, watching my passage over the country of stolen children. Memory fails to collect—we start over. A policy of family separation was considered an effective deterrent to entry. From here the damaged world looks half abandoned, or abandoned whole. *Please don't go, don't leave me. Or, Don't take her.* It's that the system is coordinated, that each person on the line does his part. Even from the tracks, it's easy not to see the shacks or clumps of tents. *We are not responsible for what happens once we hand them off to ICE,* said the spokesperson on the radio. What you love hangs delicately in the meantime. Towns rise and vanish. The woman across the aisle rubs noses with her baby, who stands, giggling, on her lap. She blows raspberries. The evening light shifts. Train conductors, I heard, are advised to look away from suicides. The train's momentum cannot be overcome in time. One conductor watched a man walk towards him, down the center of the track, staring into his face through the glass. He left the job. The sun flares against the window, and briefly the woods are translucent, breaking. Passing through a town, a young boy tries to keep up on his bicycle. We wave to each other as he pedals, as his mouth makes the shape of laughing.

Record Room:

A Haunting

Week 1

So little's revealed in my post-apocalypse. Bodiless, I stay to keep watch for your traces, flip through each space. So what, if I make myself a toy of time. So what, there's almost nothing left. In the mind I sketch your figure and wait. Wade through a shadow pond, untouched interior: lamp, teacup, thimbleful of water in the bell of a vase. Slipping through a crack, a needle of light. I won't evaporate. Thinking hard, I almost will myself a form, a face.

Week 2

I don't dare leave the house, which needs attending. Plus I cannot face the blight outside, the shucked climate, the air so bird-less. Here, I watch bared items sit in their bruises, each one become sundial. Grief's needle invades the ex-heart as I look, then look harder, through time, at the toy chest and what it held. Mere Ephemera, now: doll-sized chair, carved cup for catching a strung rubber ball, dear dear photograph in which you figure.

Week 3

What I see burns, so alive. Memory halls fill with chatter, one figure after another sliding through. Like anything could flood into this plane. Faceless visitors in sleepwear, shrugging their silk shadows, voicing. I could cup each word in my hands, if I had hands. I could unclasp a long-dead pocket-watch and feel it click awake. Beat before the second hand falls: tense, as a windup toy -box waits to spring; as a phonograph, heartily cranked, waits to drop its needle.

Week 4

I can only search the shades so long: time's collection agents come to needle me, to set the cold tap dripping. I won't go. To stave them off, I calculate figures in my head. I can't let myself sleep, refuse even boredom. I can always toy with the mind's archive, page fondly. Or try to divine. Imagine I pull cards face-up from the starry deck, recalling the useless Arcana. Say *tower*. Pace the watches of the night as I draw suits in endless configurations: sword, rod, pentacle, cup.

Week 5

So this is all in the mind—afterlife—so it's nowhere. I open the ghost cupboard, select a ghost glass. Over and over, dawn inserts her syringe-needle, drops the plunger—and the window seeps with dangerous colors. I must watch my step not to fall from the world. Edges shift into static, scenes reconfigure as nonsense. My vision's dimming, cataracted. Cruel ploy. It hurts me to face death down, each day. I want to stay past usefulness, like any disowned toy.

Week 6

So much to see in each cranny of light—as if through a cutout aperture, or a toy Viewfinder's slide. Prod each leftover pixel, repeat. Draw again from the cup of memory. Still, the house cinches tighter. Still, I catch a note in small typeface: *you cannot stay*. But even here there are bright spots, as if a spinning needle forced peepholes in the blind-cloth. I must keep watch for you, or must figure out what to do if you're gone, if it's empty, if mine's the only mind to keep watch.

Week 7

A wall-slumped toy flung in a tantrum, I tap and tap at the cold wristwatch. Wait for a tiny brass cup to lower, snuff this flame. Hear the compass-needle spin blindly. I figure it's true, now. Quite dark. And I begin to lose your face—

Holding Room

I can hold all of it here. In this dream:
underthings; foam turning into water;
a cupboard (which is otherwise so barren);
your likenesses. Repeat the lonely word:
Nowhere. Here, my eyes. *Nowhere*. Yours.
Those bunches of flowers could choke
me. It closes over me: the piled sheet.
I watch the bruise move over the walls,
but even now the sleep won't come.
Now the telescope is almost useless. My
skull (beginning at last to be exposed)
filled with voices once, then drained—
and on its own the door swung shut.
The great globe of the world just spun.

Ephemera: A Crown

One need not be a Chamber—to be Haunted—
One need not be a House—
the Brain has Corridors—surpassing
Material Place—

— Emily Dickinson

Bedroom

I watch the bruise move over the walls.
The way it spreads, floral. The warm hand
of the bed opens. *I'm not content.*
Soft voices pass through—but wordless.
In the dream, masted ships part
the curtains as they exit. The sailing voices
so alive in their consort. But I was
loosed—a hat full of doves. Days shrunk
down like blackening teeth. No silent
body here, nude and bent—my form
collapsed under the flung sheet. And you
were walking in your cap and mackintosh
into the field, now empty of horses.
And on its own the door swung shut.

Living Room

On its own the door swung shut.
Then a note said *get up*. Fine. I can visit
the real world, hang new curtains.
White gauze swelling and sucking.
Opened sewing kit, the thimble examined
too long. The gleaming pores so evenly
spaced. Past the swaying membrane,
something is approaching over the
endless yard. Tell me why I'm here,
Polaroid. Miniature household containing
my far-off body. What is it I am doing?
Pulling pilled wool from my housecoat.
What's out there? Wet remnants.
Hung underthings, foam becoming water.

Laundry Room

Hung underthings, foam becoming water, split skin over the knuckles. I'm trying to scrub out the spreading bruise. *This is the last place I saw you*, I say. Between wash-board and basin. That's not true. Last night your face haunted mine, then fled. We studied the astronomer's gestures. Galaxies circled their own drains. The dream changed—a shaggy beast in an ancient garden, tethered and pawing. We retreated into the maze. I held your face and knew it; we took stolen wool to be combed and spun. And even now, the sleep won't come.

Playroom

And even now the sleep won't come.
Sleepwalking rooms, little statues watch
me watching: porcelain horse, Allosaurus.
In the forest, toy owls dine on toy mice.
Snowy cutouts, wintering. Mildly, the
thought occurs, my loneliness. Turn the
page: a giant peapod for nesting babes,
and a sleepy frigate passing the night
clouds. I place the water vase, drop in
clear marbles. (*plop, plop.*) Those red-
vested capuchins, chained and singing:
a windup reminder. I face the tiny relief
of a mermaid, left behind, etched into
a cupboard which is otherwise so barren.

Guest Room

A cupboard, which is otherwise so barren,
holds a ghost of the hand's reaching. Toy
train tunneling through a bare wall. The
bedclothes are cold when empty of you.
I almost feel them move, toeing memory's
folds. Past the morning window, blasted
blooms, frost-beds retreating from the
edges of a tree's grassy bruise of
shadow—how, at the sun's touch,
crystals die into dew. I would like one
more blanket's weight. Yours, you,
falling on what's left of me. Meager want
now. To make just one small sound as
it closes over me, the pilled sheet.

Panic Room

It closes over me, the pilled sheet
of stone. When I turn over the snow
globe—the sky churns, and my hair
stands straight up, a flaming tree. Those
two bright wires might meet. They can't
erase us all. The needle pricks me as
I wait. Embroider what I know—suture
the dark to dark. Or nurse a guttering
glint. Old tins, someday I'll raise the lid.
And what? Climb into a field of empty
forms? Or shades of centaurs, maimed,
loping over the dead white moors? Still-
warm ghosts, or worse: I'll thread
your likenesses. Repeat the lonely word.

Dining Room

Your likenesses repeat the lonely word
from hung frames in the dream. I die
in it. A knife comes down between the
bright jade of the world and—this. But if
I can be allowed to stare, as you sit
there, with both hands on the table. While
you look where I look. Bright blemish.
The puckering suns, with lost petals
enough to shuffle through—this can be
sufficient. Light approaching then pressed
away with the hand. Things you left:
opaled egg, dead watch. This house
crouching inside me. On a green night,
it filled with voices, once, then drained.

Storage Room

It filled with voices once, then drained forever, this dust-pasted cassette deck. It's mad work now: unspool memory's black tape from each clear canister. Gone: your father playing harmonica, chamber music, loving deathbed testaments. Still I can tinker, pound my little hammer of recollection. I can wind through hanging musk, whatever else hides here. Your dissolving newsprint sketches, my black-penciled figure. And paper blooms, cutout petals wedged by fingers to the end of each green-wire stem. I think such bunches of flowers could choke me.

Garden Room

Such bunches of flowers could choke me.
Thumbing bulbs with sheer skin, I'm
unaccustomed. Here, I can tilt the rain
barrel, crouch at play in the myrtles. Or
palm the sticky glass. Here, you are alive
and a child. Clay pots hold potions of
crushed buds, humus. In the game, you
feed, from your pail, me: the sickly runt.
Bees thread shadows of tiny hands. Stop-
motion blossoming. Through the lens
I say *hold that pose*—quick thought, or little
spirit, appearing as a thin splotch on the
vellum, or rooting here at the knot of the
skull, beginning, in spurts, to be exposed.

Darkroom

Skull: beginning, in spurts, to be exposed in the black bath, a night-blooming flower. So silver gelatin swells, so the stain develops. Why shoot this creature's head, its sun-bleached horns? Or snap the child watching a cardinal from her lean-to of lashed boughs? I watched you like that, wanting. You'd say "capture" a moment. So, your last captives: cow skull, redbird—then, in the living room—me, with my needlework and face turned away. Glare floods out the window's image. I shudder. Child no longer. Cardinal no longer. And nowhere here, my eyes; nowhere yours.

Empty Room

Nowhere: here. My eyes nowhere. Yours un-searching. When I vanished, nothing noticed. Not the web-dangled leaves hung stunned in the air. Not the darting barncat. Not the faraway cargo ships, cresting apocalyptic waves through the squalls. Or the last flaming acre of Monarchs overwintering. Or distant limbering acrobats, about to step into deadly space under the tent's meringue bellow. Or the invisible, paltry stars. Worse things happened. The weather here grew obscenely lovely. The great globe of the world just spun.

Map Room

The great globe of the world just spun
under the brass scythe stills. As if that
atmosphere might be shorn off. Adjust
the lens over the legend. We lived here,
at the end of my finger. The warm spot
where every line meets. *I hardly know
that place.* Serpents and krakens curl
through fine inked seas. Caravans must
trundle – there – bearing festooned
lemurs, green salts, pilgrims. Enough
poring, Ephemera. *Turn on a light—you'll
go blind* is what you said, very softly. Now
light heaves itself in through the glass.
Now the telescope is almost useless.

Reptile Room

Now the telescope is almost useless.
So long, now, since touch—and even
sight is blighted now. But I was a lively
child, even with eyes well closed in
thought. Of what? Cryptids, teratons.
Mesozoic light sheering the stretched
membranes. Absurd bugles of their
crowns. I feathered them in. And now,
I (see) your face inside the dark of mine.
Imaginary, yes. Mythic remnant. Each
lens says: *turn away*, says: you *can't just stay*
(to see). I won't be made to leave. Mind
makes up what's lost to sight, extinct.
I can hold all of it, here, in this dream.

Tack Room

I can hold all of it. Here in this dream,
we take bridles and approach the
winged horses, who toss and tremble,
flaring. In our fists, cubes dampen, form
sweet grit. We wait, only children
at the velvet muzzles, but the swan-wings
unfurl. The thousand suns start closing.
Wait, I call. Now, bare rooms pass under
swells of dark. Now my hands are empty
even of themselves. You left, and I stayed
to see. Someday: I know. I'll go. But, O
World, let me look a little longer. Even to
watch dust spin in the last beam. Even to
watch the bruise move over the walls.

Afterimage

Ephemeral things! That which is a mortal's, O End-maker
Even the vigor of all the powers, they wear away.
Even a whole life is slight indeed.

—Kaṭha Upaniṣad

Between Stations

Deep rattle, and I surface here. Thunder of pigeons. All these strangers, the way they move beside one another, making the right amount of space. Each face a crude replica, an opening, an unbearable glimmer. Half the sky gently darkens. Behind me, a bright rectangle asserts itself between two buildings. I don't look. I pass through the corridor created for me. A critical aggregation of starlings or small bright fish can make such heart-breaking shapes. Murmuration, shoal. An algorithm will do the same, given certain constraints. Bin-lattice spatial subdivision, a way to sever and measure the whole. In that geometry, each particle set to move as closely to the others as possible, without touching. Without ever touching, I move here. A diagram traced between us in the air. Separation, attraction, cohesion. One gaze travels a line, intersects with another. Rain, random scatter over brick lattice, mass sheltering. Seen from above, the flotilla of umbrellas, black bubbles pulled against the underside of creek ice. Another principle. Circles overlapping. One person lifting hers to keep the spokes apart. Each in one clear column. Me in mine. I can leave at any time.

Pyrosome

Rain over my part of the world. Trolley faltering
along its cables.

I watch as droplets chase one another down the
glass, a sad silent film. The larger

consumes the smaller. Each bead so discrete, then
not. Invisibly, the barrier

is slipped open, suddenly sealed. That
consummation. Somewhere in the deep

of this world, I recall, that rare creature: a great
translucent tunnel, pumping

and spiraling in the dark. A bio-luminescent super-
organism, built from tiny clones. Clear

zooids. Each embedded in a gelatinous tunic.
Those thousand i's, held together.

Through the coordinated beating of cilia, they
propel, swelling. I pulse my hand,

forming a bulb, then a star. When one zooid emits
light, its neighbors join. A way to speak.

Past the glass, swirling mist cast in the lamp auras.
Free floating colonial tunicate is the phrase. It repeats.

The trolley shudders and stops.

Crying Room

You were here and gone so suddenly,
Mayfly. Once I reached down, and
my palm kissed the face of the water, like
that. Contact, then suction. A split along
the waterline. One rowboat, painted
green: a lily pad, tethered on the other
side to time. Vertiginous looking. And
touch, a way to divine. Thousand fingers
spread over the surface, parting the clear
garlands of the water. Opal lobes,
bunched. *Come back*, I want to say,
won't say. Now I'm locked inside: bone-
dry time and neat-seamed walls. Here in
my body, another paper wing dissolves.

Ever: A Vision

I was there, at Ever, and it was mostly poignant and it was cruel. – Lucie Brock-Broido

—it felt real, the dailiness of marking time in that dream
clocking my visitations—

—friends waiting inside

just past the blowsy windows.
As in life, I could go to greet them, stay up talking.

We spoke in signs, soft reassurances. *I am still with you*—
and over, across miles.

*

I was dead and knew it. Still, some remainder.

In time my movements faltered.
I began to track the steps in a system of vanishing.

*

—but I could fly in the night—
barely hovering, then swimming low in thick air.

Leaves shone black. That lamplit path
I'd loved to walk in life.

*

In time I reached the little house.
Outside: sundown, disorientation—

as when I slept so long—a child down with flu—
that I mistook sunset for sunrise

and wondered at the chiming of a far-off
ice-cream truck. I opened the screen door

and sat on the stoop, my father there, palming my forehead.
(Bewildering dusk, broken fever,
relentless lilacs under a slip of moon.)

A jet's pink streak.
Fresh world with the dressings torn off.

*

Inside: cutlery and candle-sticks laid out
in reception. Parents and brother waiting,
alive, everyday, as if I hadn't vanished.

At the table, we talked logistics
of my diminishment.

When my father knocked wine onto my dress
he wept. *Now you'll always be stained,*
he said. *We can never wash it out.*

I tried to make them laugh,
but the stain grew larger.

*

To explain how I knew I had to go—

I began to cry very hard. I could hear this crying far away.

My brother placed his living hand on mine.

Have I ever loved anyone so much

as then: in sleep, phantasm—alone—but not alone—

I would have lingered if I could, without
arms, without words or form, to be near.

*

Far off, I heard my own voice ask: *Not yet.*

I promise, I'll just watch. I only want to look.

Plow

I wake up in fever, in stuck sheets, to the snowplow's skimming wave-crash. Salt chunks hiss. The neighborhood's sheet-wrapped. Night-shirt pasted to the chest. Those dreams filled me to choking. (Pink-lit pool rooms. Whale calf lost in the frightful red deep.) This body beside me boils. Because the government's shut down, there's no work for the body. In the earliest light, stripped kudzu vines, wire fence, telephone lines, all made frail and heavy-laden. This body waits for invitation. Shrinks from weather's cold compress. The radio sounds distant, foully voicing news all night from the chilled kitchen. And the sky's red glow casts squares over fields of sticky skin. The news is always bad. Snow stacks up on the tiny red bench. Ice-fanged mouths of pipes protrude. Someone gets up and plows, lacing boots in the dead of night, fogging the dashboard with the first hour's breath.

Dining Car

Time-travel capsule, shaking silver hideaway—where an old veteran
once bought me dinner. We'd talked during the shimmering smoke-
breaks, shared lighters in the city grit, desert, violent mountain wind.
Each day, the same blue suit with gaudy buttons: a suit on a sleeper train.

We sipped burnt coffee under little chandeliers, which always
shivered. Over the white benevolence of tablecloth, paper placemats,
chess on a thin magnetic board. Slip off the band, unfold the miniature
grid. He'd learned in prison on a set he whittled. Control the center first.

Stack your castles when you can. Now I might surprise you and win.
He showed me print-out photos of his nearly bare apartment.

His teeth were bad. Today, I wish I hadn't let him pay. I was nineteen.
We sat for hours by the lacy curtains, under leaping eyelets of sun.

Strangers filled the other half of the table, ate, and left. Teacups trembled
in their saucers. Relic lace and china—Amtrak won't survive this decade.

We met Mennonites, German tourists, young mothers whispering Spanish
—and when I questioned them about love, they answered. Or paused

to study the windows: scrolls of cow fields, water towers, power-
lines. Everyone was so kind, as if we would always be there, held together

in our gentle vessel. At sundown, we returned to our seats to sleep. White
canvas shaken out and folded. When I reached him at the end of the ride,

my first love would leave me—I knew that. I clicked on my reading light,
caught my ghosted face in the window. Woke to the chess set left on my armrest.

Sunroom

Hard rains provide such pleasure now.
If only I could, I would name their doings
a thousand ways. Perch in scrutiny
over the streaming text. Proceed
to translate each violence—how an orb-
wrapped parcel of air smacks the leaf,
perishes, so. How good to be here, to hear
this, patterning, sultry, past the bared
square of window. I love the treetops'
false-tropic sway, empty as they are—
filling with invisible hosts, lushly
whorling, as I think, scrunch in focus
like the puckered glass mouth of
an hourglass letting a grain drop down.

Strong Room

An hourglass, letting a grain drop down,
knows it's the last. I'm empty now; brown
recluse in stop-motion over the window
screen. I look out on all this green
complexity. Cicadas. This in-between
season's best for pain: recalling this life
of mine I mostly ruined, wasted, half-
asleep. Now from my shack, prodding
some not-Beyond, only this world
(already) only (remembered), I adore, click
by click, spinning the wheel, the infinite
list. I keep it for her, the dead woman,
for me, this spiel of thanks which no
one needs. This afterlife—it's imaginary.

Periodicals Room

One needs this afterlife: its imaginary gravitas, deprivation, fields of clarity. If my voice comes out so lonely, know I touch this page to grieve this time. Mind that flies and falters over burning acres. These useless lines. If this blaze goes on much longer, it will become unstoppable. Which is what they want. Amazon Basin, emptied and charred—*fine* I say—*I'll cry every day*. Feel it all, almost. In increments. Fill the inkwell. Later, embodied, I'll go out and laugh with my friends. I am a glad sort of woman. I look you right in the eye.

Primate Elegy

In parting, my sweet friend used to say, *someday, I'll never see you again*.
Now, through the phone, he says the words evoke nothing

but nausea now. *Yes*. His difficult winter. *Fuck loss*, he says. Here,
crocuses spear up, laying sutures after the snowpack's scalpel.

Birds make their Sunday ruckus—but we're twins in gloom.
He cites just twenty remaining vaquita porpoises. I describe footage:

an orangutan walks down the diagonal tree and throws her fists
against the steel jaw of the excavator. Falls into the understory.

And small boys lie on concrete under aluminum sheets, awake. Still.
In this park—hopscotch, teenagers lacing cleats, fierce music, cages of forsythia.

We're quiet. I feel I can hold almost nothing, here.
In Philadelphia, he can see white petals blowing from a tree, like snow.

Cloakroom

No more spirits come out in answer—
though I chalked the arrows, I scattered
the beads. Nothing to glean from their
landing patterns, or the bright stream of
cirrus passing the window. Still, hung
velvets, old mink stoles that sway in still
air. Twin beats, and two parcels of
shadow pass like bodies in transit. I turn
over a series of cards, waiting. Here is the
hallway that never ends. It leads
everywhere; to a single door. Here are
the gloves, hung from pegs. Here is the
wheel (reversed). The placid white-
eyed statues that seem to watch us all.

Terminarch Elegy

You want there to be a survivor.
For the Thylacine who died neglected in the Hobart Zoo

not to be the last. Somewhere, a secret
Tasmanian tiger, kangaroo-wolf—however named.

In some burrow or cavern or flat patch
of grass: let there be a slick new litter. Monstrous pups

mewling, pouched—or wobbling into a slice of light.
Dream them in, wet-eyed, hard striped.

Likely, you've heard of a sighting, a marsupial marvel.
A kill with telltale bitemarks, wind-snatched yowl, rumored glimpse

of the conical tail zippering through brush. There's no proof.
Bountied, bagged, crossed out—

it matters what we shared the world with, what we can't admit. We have
ochred pictographs. Scrubbed bones linked with wire, a rigid spook.

Grainy footage: she paces the cage in mid-century greyscale, rippling
the barred shadows. Unhinges the impossible jaw to fang the camera.

Caged holdout, taxidermied husk: it's not enough.
A specimen, a mere lyric unspooling of phylogeny.

Feral remnant, revenant—looking back with kohl-lined
eyes, past mythic—what noise is it she's making?

Washroom

Shapes seen in the mist cohere,
like yours. Then a curtain is drawn
between the dream-artifact and its
significance, between the way I look
at your afterimage and the way you were
standing there, bent at the sink. Soul
a gauzy clump, soft in its nest, or the
cabinetry of imagination. In clean
broad strokes, I part the fog from the
glass. This life is so often compared to a
soap bubble, a drop of dew. It exhausts
me. I wait for you, the way you spoke. I
know there's no knowing, no afterlife,
no ghosts in the way I would hope.

Metaphysics is a Dead Field

But in the conventional world, light tilts in. I stop to make a shadow of a hand—

because today the birds are sounding out so furiously; because earlier I passed
a small child singing *happy birthday, happy birthday...*

Driving west, you saw a vision of your late father in the Book Cliffs.
He looked out from a high ridge over you, the fading hills.

That day I sat on the porch after the guests left, holding a cold glass to my temple.
I closed my eyes against the sun, watched it's imprints. Now it is raining softly.

What do we remember from life? Almost nothing. Not this.

Not the way the evening cliffs are halved by sun. You thought to scramble up
the rocks to find him, but kept driving. Wondered if you missed your chance.

I felt his presence so strongly in the world then. I was certain that he was, and that he knew me.

Now water shakes over twigs and shingles. That gentle noise. I am saying,
I'll still love you after I'm dead. I mean this—

I'll find a way. How a life could float by, in wait. Hard listening, bucking hydrangeas,
a sudden spatter of gray, then clearing. I'm asking it all to surprise me—no—

asking myself to be surprised. Your red truck, small as a toy from that height.
How the soft heavy bees stay afloat like that, even wet.

Last Dispatches

Having reached the top of the gliding staircase
wheeled to the lip of the dirigible—I cannot say it.

I wanted to leave an offering. Petaled
or feathered, captured from the quiet chant

which forms, in its constant insistence,
a spirit language. Untranslatable, impish—

tickling the air before it settles down
illegibly. A velvet cloak of pollen

the needy breeze rips through. What is reading for?
Each sentence dissolves as it falls through the mind.

Once each pigment's been tapped from the brass cone,
a sand maṇḍala—imagined temple's map—is swept away.

Severed buttercream violets, practiced calligraphies
of hard frosting that cave under the knife.

Passing strangers, I've adored the words
your mouths made, even as wind bore them off.

I tried to trace signs in the air for you,
tracking patterns, though it's nearly dark now.

Thank you. Attention I never earned,
beribboned present of your listening.

The snatch of song you catch before you leave the dream.

Notes:

“Terminarch” was a proposed neologism meant to describe the last individual in a species, along with “ender,” “lastoline,” “relict,” and “yatim.” The poignant word “Endling” was ultimately selected.

The opening epigraph is from Emerson’s essay “Experience” in *Essays: Second Series*.

The epigraph for Section 1 is from “Elegy” by Aracelis Girmay, in *Kingdom Animalia*.

The epigraph for “Murmuration Exhibit” by Elizabeth Bishop is taken from the essay “Time’s Andromedas.”

The epigraph for Section 2 is from Emily Dickinson’s poem no. 407 in the Franklin edition.

The epigraph for Section 3 is from the Kaṭha Upaniṣad, trans. R. E. Hume, *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads*.

The epigraph for “Ever (A Vision)” is from Lucie Brock-Broido’s “Still Life with Aspirin,” in *Trouble in Mind*.

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