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Introduction

Lisa Zou

A Vicious Culture

In Nairobi, let in the lions, take up fear—
and now the river welcomes the lunge
and cut and danger and spilling.

You need to learn how quickly the distance vanishes
between the men and the lions. I am the ticket buyer; “Lion,
give me two pounds of human carcass.” Hesitate—

death awaits. On the sidelines, a women drinks bloody sangria,
her eyes stumble open, her limbs released next to the beasts
in a pool of red meat, the stitches of her bones untangled.

Somewhere, the lion sees the tremble and chases.
Somewhere, the handsome man mours the name
of his lover and the sky wears grey a shade darker

than the hair of the clapping audience. We watch the lions attack
the fighters, pouncing upon a hungry crowd, twisting their spines,
stroking the desert terrain awaiting their next targets.

You cannot go; you need to remain abstinent from violence,
sweep the remnants of lost martyrs, follow the lion who swallowed
your sister’s fiancé, as he cried out “They have made lions’ meat of me.”

We stood silent as small children with smaller hands
offered water from the curve of their palms and
a stillness swept through the lions, their tongues parched.

You need to learn how quickly the lions
hunted those creatures in Nairobi,
how the cubs of the human beasts let in the lions.

D.R. Wagner

A PLACE OF HORSES

The smallest of delirium broke off and floated
Away like music.

In the dark of the moon I took leave
Of my senses and left for a primitive oblivion.

No one had ridden this far into the
Barrancas for many years. It was said
That the stars themselves often became
Lost out here. Mysterious fires
Would flare up very intensely, but briefly
Then unravel, at various times of the year.
No one knew their cause and no burned earth
Was found. There was no singular, no plural.

It was impossible to have a destination
Out here. This was a place
Where the ends of stories went to
Escape. Where, it was said, tears could generate
Flash floods. They rushed through
Arroyos like ghosts from the mind of God,
Wandering waters with no beginning
And no end.

I have seen the people who lived here.
They are furtive and very spiritual.
It has been said that when they open their mouth
To speak at night, fires come from
Deep within them and spark the night.

They have never been seen in the villages.
They are an imagined history.
They are hidden springs like those found
Deep within the soul.

If one can read the birds,
One can understand that time has
No dominion here.
A blanket on the ground
Like pictures of saints on old prayer cards.
The conversations of coyotes about
The pronouncements of the moon.

A crackling moves through this place
As if lightning were walking through.

Still we ride here. It is
A place of wild horses who can be heard,
But are seldom seen. Perhaps they are the same
As the people, perhaps they are a shared soul.

An overhearing of the special conversations
Of the dead, a quick cord
Tied to a weighing of souls, a collision
Sharpened by forgetting what we thought
We knew, driven by this reverberation
At a masque devised by nightmare.

A QUANDARY

I found myself a fiction.

No one believed me.

Everyone read me.

I remain the truth.

A REALIZATION

I probably have this all wrong.
Even looking up at the great dark
Flocks of birds coming in low
Across the acid green lawns seems
To give an indication that something
Is not right but has not yet gone wrong.

The way the beautiful golden orb
Weaving spider moves quickly
To see what it might be that rips
The strands of his web has more
The flavor of a necessity to eat
Rather than a drama or a broken
Hunk of darkness detached from the night

About it. It hangs from a perfect
Strand of perfect silk and is spun
Round and round until entirely wrapped
Into the shape of a teardrop,
So smooth light from the fire
Reflects on its impossible surface.

For weeks I have been waiting for the jungle
To open some kind of path, a path
Back to creation, a hint that its womb
Might attract something other
Than stinging flies and columns
Of large ants with scimitar jaws

Flowing over the ground, up the trees,
Into the eyes of everything that cannot
Move fast enough to give them way.

There must be some kind of resolution.
I think: "It may lie in the birds". Still
They seem too dark to be such.
Then it comes to me in the cough
A jaguar makes on a fine afternoon.

"This is all we shall ever have, all we
Shall ever know, all we shall ever be."
I draw my knife and proceed.

Rony Nair

Mental Deodorant

"and in the morning
they woke up with each other's face"

we wear mine and it is no struggle
to conceal
that every breath that goes out
isn't thinking of you
it is pretence that falls
on its head in pantomime.
The rouge washed away
On the floor
Sodden.

The acting was always slapstick.
Gauged to fail
to walk past
a new inattention deal maybe
and can stop and think of nothing but you
how you tread on these same steps
every day
a few hours later

once a month. I heard you say.

your mosque
that leads to that temple in my head.
and those prayers of redundancy and hope
turn around and read meanings into letters
that cigarette from long ago.

does she even think beyond the block
does her world spin like mine does
are my walks just templates
to exercise
the years
of pretence
of feelings that were meant to be
yet never to be.
crowed up
spat on
As casual as the next encounter.

Wrench

And there are paper tigers
The wishing wells
The shoulders

The terrace looks yonder
Shielding you

A wind vane hastily pulled away
after 5 p.m.
you can't be training anywhere.

Yet under the buttress
the south bridge
I look
And see you
In reflections
In the rain.

The winds blow down slopes of hearsay
And people stop to stare at
The last man who walks across
Vanishing bridges

You would be far away by then.
Nestled under someone's canopy
Someone's' rules.

Juwairiya

Her eyes when they rise up
Make mirrors seem extinct.
And behind the faultlines of one's brow,
All that is left behind
Is a wolf in step to his empty drums.
Tangoing to a beat
That even he cannot understand.

When you think
You've lost it
Forever;
That feeling so rare,
She comes along to let you know.
How unattainable
It always was.

Conk

the moon looks like the eyes
turned,
against the grain.
a nomad passing the buck,
she calls time
on the game.

the loony bin upturned;
draws a final breath,
between the first fire and the next,
plastered across the training school;
and the next young thing.

Redemption is charity.
A game.

the moon looks like the eyes
tilted
at the rain.
of you brooding over
the steps.

we began the climb.

while you called time,
on the game.

the cretins lie in
refuse bins crated.
the alligator bags
and the brocades that pass
for fashion.
for sport.
There's the small alley way
and the next
big thing

the moon looks like
your eyes-no way around it

while you called time;
on the game.

The what's app coda

every door being shut
and the last one smiling through those cracks; left there
to smile and say
that you'd been explicit in your
instructions
and i in my transgress

women;
you used to say
would turn away
and then never turn back.

Where there's no rain

What's there to miss one
as badly as this?

when you're pictured
resting.
your elbows across those legs,

the lips trembling even as
you sit there
in repose and you seem
to mock,
to know
how every night
one needs to look for you
but one does not see.

when theres only shadows
and theres no rain.

one look you get
before its all put away
mothballed
for the rains

where theres' no rain.

Nitrogen

the old tyre shops still backfill,
the crater tyres, themselves
in dissension.
the roads given way;
they're now landfills.
of grime.
refuse.

the staccato bursts
are not tyres in retreat.
they're the newest metro rigmarole
the newest development spin.

the air,
starved,
of air;
like clam.
Populated with the thousands of tyres.
No second thoughts
In passing.
My Sanctified grounds.

I once stood by.
4 hours after we met
and a white taxi
with nitrogen in its wheels
almost took my knees out.

and you'd asked me
a little short of breath.
To climb in.

i took your hand that day
the first time.
and you blushed.

There's a first time for everything.
There's been none since.

Telling tales

Tell me where that place exists
Tell me so I cannot know.
Tell me where the myths capsize
And you and I remain afloat.

Tell me where I have transgressed
Tell me so I cannot know.
Tell me where the days extend
And you and I remain so.

Tell me where the paths twin up
Tell me so I cannot know.
Tell me where you will give in
And you and I can now go slow.

Tell me where the myths run dry
Tell me so I cannot know.
Tell me where the silence ends
And you can loathe me even more.

Mangalvan

There's travel and rumination,
In the absence
Of respect.

Carapaces floating in deep drawn out bird sanctuaries,
Hidden,
Behind courts of legalese.
Procedure.
Recess.

Where justice is often wrung out
Even as,
"Highers" court the birds
And provide them fundamental rights

You've given us the bird all right!

Redemption

redemption is for the lucky, the blessed.
never for the fly on the wall;
Or the possessed.

Joseph Farley

Bad for You

Poison in the air.
Poison in the water.
Poison in the soil.
Poison on the table.

We look at it and say,
"It is bad for us,"
Yet it looks so good
Beside the decaying dead,
And the taste, well,
That is to die for.

Pig Out

Pile it on
While you can.
The grave has a great
Diet plan.

going through the motions

life is ritual,
sacred and profane,
moving the same object,
following the same path,
reciting the same words.

master kung told us
to respect these
day to day commitments,
these small obligations
that are the pillars
that hold up both
heaven and empire,

and the mystics and monks,
repeated the name of the creator
aloud or in silence
while engaged in every action.

if a part of you
is lost or trapped
by this slow repetition
that constitutes
most of life,
you are not alone.

we are all caught
as much as we are freed
by this turning wheel
of days and moments,
some of us just try
to mumble our way along
hoping that will
somehow
transform
this tedium
into a Te Deum.

See You In The Sulfur Pits

You have chosen
your path to hell,
and I have chosen
mine.

While we
can not see
eye to eye
here and now,
I'm sure we
will both be
dancing
on hot coals
In the world to come,

and that,
if nothing else
should bring us
closer
than we are now
by the end
of time
if not sooner.

Unyielding

Some requests seem so simple,
Just bow your head when directed,
Mumble words in lip service
The same as the masses,
Bend over a table on command
And think happy thoughts,

Such simple things,
But you cannot comply.
Maybe you are just stubborn,
Or unwise.
You listen to the shouting,
Try not to feel the kicks,
Or the machinations of the men
With their cruel instruments,
Blades, gallows and flames.

You will close your eyes to the crowds,
And stop your ears from within,
Rigid as stone before your accusers,
Until the snap of the rope,
The whistle of the sword
Or the crackle of sticks
Becomes the only sound
Left to ignore.

Scrawled on the Walls of a Cubicle Prison

The hours go by and we have nothing to show.
The world has turned, and we just nod resigned.
We shall go on trying to look busy,
Racing chairs on rollers down the hall
When the boss has gone to lunch,
Smoking out of sight of the cameras,
And giving the finger to the machinery,
Both inanimate and human,
That monitors and controls so much
Of our limited tenure on this planet,
Refusing, despite the memos and emails,
To believe that this cubicle existence
Is life, or any approximation there to.

Strider Marcus Jones

FASCIST FRACTALS

the clock
has stopped-
it's epoch
blocked
to evolution
and revolution-
the face and fingers
with second singers
reducing time
to war and crime.

now ancient tribes,
propelled by propaganda scribes
rag religion and race
to demonise each others face.

these fascist fractals
become the pixels
of photogenic
eugenics,
subliminally imposed
on genetic
bigotry exposed.

all those who remember
are gone with each ember-
of starving skeletons and oven ashes,
piles of clothes, shoes and rimmed glasses
that mean nothing to new masses
mouthing thuggish or intellectual notes
at more demonised scapegoats.

THE DOOR

the door
between skyfloor
topbottom

is rankrotten

portalbliss
or abjectabyss.

it contains conversations
confrontations,
hiding loves two-ings
in lost ruins-

shuts us inside ourself
with or without someone else.

we,
the un-free,
disenfranchised poor
have no bowl of more-
only pain
on the same plain
as before,
homeless
or in shapeless boxes,
worked out, hunted, like urban foxes-
outlaws on common lands
stolen from empty hands.

files on us found
from gathering sound
where mutations abound
put troops on the ground.

THE CUP

a smelted celebration
of victory
and carnal coronation
moulded in dark history-
the chalice divine
to inhuman crime
blessing unjust law
and futile war.

mine, holds the coffee
i pour into me,
or sometimes tea
when i want to see
who are different
in the present.

upturning the cup
and turning it such
to read the leaves-
a gypsy's
lore and ancient blood
has always understood-

who and what
controls the plot,
keeps us in the base and dregs
looking up, without the legs
to climb the slippery clay
into dark deceit
counterfete
deception and decay.

take back how to think,
stand at your own sink
and wash away
this cold custodian,
old Eton and Bostonian
suited slick affray-

of corporate hoodies
and big house bullies
hunting and shooting
laughing and looting,
smeared in oils that anoint
herding us to the vanishing point.

I'M GETTING OLD NOW

i'm getting old now-
you know,
like that tree in the yard
with those thick cracks
in its skinbark
that tell you
the surface of its lived-in secrets.
my eyes,
have sunk too inward
in sleepless sockets
to playback images
of ghosts-
so make do with words
and hear the sounds
of my years in yourself.

childhood-
riding a rusty three-wheel bike
to shelled-out houses bombed in the blitz,
then zinging home zapped in mud
to wolf down chicken soup
over lumpy mashed potato for tea-
with bare feet sticking on cold kitchen lino
i shivered watching the candle burn down
racing to finish a book i found in a bin-
before Mam showed me her empty purse
and robbed the gas meter-
the twenty shillings
stained the red formica table
like pieces of the man's brains
splattered all over the back seat
of his rambolic limousine
as i watched history brush out her silent secrets.

COMPOSERS AND MISTAKES

when I see the evening,
with it's ordinary sounds and shapes
so full of unbelieving
composers and mistakes
coming in-
something wakes,
and I begin.

what I can't affect
is getting colder
as I grow older,
retreating inside-
I could be your wreck
if I was bolder
and called you over,
over this side-

through the honeysuckle arch of midnight,
moon like a lid bright
shield in the sky;
on the grass
where footsteps last
in this light-
making a cast
where you walked by.

ANARCHIC MOSS

lo lover.
you give my blood this colour
to warm my marble heart
to beat for you-
and make me sing
like a minstrel lark
melodic tales that bring
you deep contentment too.

in here,
we are one sphere
changing the atmosphere
to sweet intoxication
and equal liberation
with orderly chaos
and anarchic moss
like a poultice peace
healing false belief.

this cataplasm
fills the chasm
with our thoughts saying
what role we should be playing
to preserve Mother Earth
or be cursed
by the circumstance
of evolutions evil advance.

our motive and mind
should be humankind-
equal as one,
or divided, then gone.

Cassandra Dallett

We All Have Our Kryptonite

I grew up around a lot of ex junkies
know the reminiscing done in recovery
the fond way mom would speak of heroin
and I know that some men are just drugs to me.

There's a certain way they ignore and adore me
I am seen but not quite enough.
I like a masculine hand on my head, on my ass.
I want to be good, to please.
This guy was like that
something about him in his big ass truck
the machismo of it
the way he took over my house with his belly
and his squint stare smile, I melted
into a place as old and familiar as glaciers.

When I was little my Daddy
used to plow the driveway with his doodle buggy
it was an old pieced together truck
with no doors just a big snow plow on front.

I wanted to ride shotgun so badly
be near the whole manly action of him
smelling of smoke and wool
I wanted to be out there by his side
in his world of metal and gasoline
and I would run out of the house
in only my t-shirt unfazed by the cold
him yelling at me to go put a coat on
but I'd insist and climb up into the cab
satisfied just to be there beside him
I'd curl into sleep as he drove one handed
holding onto my t-shirt so I wouldn't fall out the door.

There is something about this guy
he has me like that,
like that girl in her goose bump arms
waving at him to come back for me
to please, please come back and get his little girl.

American Death Over Dinner

Eating noodle soup under the TV
a black man's murder looping and looping through the meal
I want to climb up, cover the screen with my body,
hide his last moments from nonchalant dinners.
I am not brainwashed enough,
always react to the inoculation.
Every murder a loss, no matter how they point to criminality.

After the restaurant we walk the lake under a confused sky.
Sunshine glares between big black clouds moving over us fast,
so its rain then shine-
then shining in rain I yell, "Where is the rainbow?"
two sisters on a bench smile, all dazzling teeth and natural hair.
Cubes of buildings hug the choppy lake
and blush flowers hug the Masonic buildings.

The wind has pushed pools of green sludge to the sides of the water.
I wonder at the spectacle, the piles of black bodies
we witness, and witness, stew into a frenzy but cannot stop.
Posting photos of Kenyan students bullet ridden bodies
like the man on the news, will not bring them back or honor their lives,
it will not help to show you a thing until you are numb to it.
It is deliberate.

This barrage of bodies, the reading of autopsies,
the dissection of black flesh,
are they always surprised at the pink humanity revealed?
We all bleed the same, but we don't die the same.
Heaping holocaust piles of black bodies inhabit the news
if they are reported at all.
Those students barely made the evening rundown.
The news channels too busy repeating themselves
about fallen planes full of white folks
burning up the Swiss alps.

San Francisco Show us Your Tits

The plastic cup in my lap is blood red
wine for a three dollar donation
I'm staring at the photos where planets are floating
above the San Francisco skyline crashing into North Beach
and I feel like I'm on mushrooms,
long to climb to the top of the Ping Yuen
like we did when were kids
staring down the lights of Broadway
Carol Doda's nipples winking at us
and the Garden of Eden and The Hungry I
The Stone and The Mab Piss Alley, Clown Alley
and the arcade where it all went down.

The poets introduction is never ending
I'm staring at you, you are as red as my wine
your face tells me you want out and so do I.
If only I smoked cigarettes or needed to pee
and I'm not the only one looking for an exit
seats are emptying, my whole left leg is asleep
and I think if I try to get up and make a run for it
I'll end up like the waitress at E Tuuto Qua down the street
who slipped and crashed sideways on the floor
in a great wet spill she rolled to her side
a flurry of waiters rushing to lift her
brush her off, check her make up
The look in their eyes is not gay
though they are prettier than her.
They are intuitive, saw my dead phone
on the table whisked it off to charge
and we toasted writers and waiters who just get it!

They recognized my Sophia Loren smile
lips dipped in Balsamic
and we drink a bottle of Primativo
not just a glass it goes fast
we toast writers and waiters that bounce back from a fall
and the customers dab at the girl's wet arm
with white napkins from their laps.

Then somehow we end up stuck in the second row
listening to the longest introduction ever
or is this the poem?

When at last we run for the door
and whoop into the windy motorcycle air
I realize I left my coat on the chair
My lonely diva leopard is in there
witnessing this poor snobby poet bomb
and freedom is so good
only the bite of the wind reminds me
I've left her there.

Breezy

Thrown by the January summer
a tree blooms tiny white petals in the empty lot next door
drought flowers in the wind
the porch covered in confetti

His mother says
you must get married before I die
I want to see my son marry before I die
she coughs blood in to a Kleenex
carries one last cigarette to the bathroom
her oxygen tube snaking behind her

I'm biting my own tail
not sure if this is how we start our story
or end our affair
I keep having one last fling
a bachelorette party every night

It's about the newness
I like them young spring blossoms
lips buttery on sapling hard bodies

I shop, buy more purses
big and shiny they line the closet walls
to my girlfriend I say
the boys are like the purses

I don't invest much
and I always want
just one more.

Jonathan Beale

Perception perception

Look – in their eyes.
“You” *can* see – in their eyes
A gateway.
A gateway to their soul -
Or no – *mens rea*
You *think* you can see -
See the truth.
“they are this, against the *all - eg - at - ion!*”
“You’re so wise.”
“And you’re so pure.”
Doli incapax
Look back –in anger –in fear – in grief

The words are black - on – white;
Not grey, no, no grey places here.
Assumptions cut – play – here
The devils playground - his payment
Compromise - is a minefield.
A minefield.
Look back, look forward.
What is evil questions the philosopher.
Someone seeks to justify
Among the wild witch hunt.
As the sun sets on another day.
Everyone sleeps and grows toward heaven.
As the days lose some passengers
And collects a few on the way.
The paper no longer gathers
The chip fat and vinegar.

Another Night scene

I

Night scene - indivisible
Leaves shadows - larks
Behind the lines.

Art is nature's goddess
Women politely speak a "yes"
Men too need acknowledgement

Night Rivers current
Blurs lights nebulous cry
Voices grow back to whispers

II

Each heart can barely restrain its song
This moment's glory can never be too long

Short Term

The tugs drew out the great liners
Bound by just threads

The grease burdensome cement
And the tyres randomly cut in half

The strange dynamic: odd little pods of nature
Wielding them in every direction.

The woolly capped men ants in their life
Made from god or simple cellular forms

Life marquetry in formic patterns
Scatterball mice on the seas bridge

There pub life with accidents of birth
Before their 'today' and lost yesterday

They get up each dawn against the sharp air
Dry and greasy as smoked mackerel

They take to sea as the tides and all the oceans
In their feminine complexity

Days are with harbour – this is, as-
Life short term help by ropes long thread

Michael Ceraolo

Umpiring

"The human element, the human element
We can't eliminate the human element"
endlessly chanted those opposed
to any automation as a solution
to unreversed mistakes made by umpires
(though
it did not escape notice that those doing so
were rarely,
if ever,
on
the receiving end of said mistakes)
Throughout history,
on and off the field,
those who had power almost never
voluntarily relinquished it
(such reluctance
perhaps related to how they had wielded that power),
and such was the case here,
but the Lords
held even more power than the umpires
Through the principle of collective bargaining
(which made a comeback nationwide
in the mid-twenty-first century,
though
it had been strong a century earlier in baseball)
the umpires were able to maintain positions,
but
umpiring did change in significant ways

Umpiring the Bases

In the twenty-second century
a technology was developed to determine
whether the runner was safe or out
on non-tag plays;

 this technology synced
a signal from the runner's shoe touching the base
with a signal from the ball reaching the fielder
standing on the base waiting for the throw
As a method of preventing outright cheating
and the pseudo-cheating often called gamesmanship,
the detector in the ball was sensitive enough
to determine if the fielder was still touching the base
as he received the throw,

 thus eliminating
the in-the-neighborhood tagging of second base
by the pivotman attempting to complete the double play
This made it a little more difficult
to make the play safely,

 but the slight increase in risk
was more than offset by a change
brought about by the automated signal;

 now
going headfirst into the base wasn't just
a different albeit risky style,
it was a strategic disadvantage
because you didn't register as reaching the base
until your foot touched it and gave a signal
Human umpires were still needed
for all plays where tagging was necessary,

 and
where tagging was used, usually because of an errant throw,
as an alternate way of making the putout

Three base umpires were no longer required
to officiate the game;

 henceforth,
two umpires would officiate the three bases,
necessitating both more teamwork
and better physical conditioning
due to the increased amount of running
needed to position themselves correctly
Because the conditioning requirements
was phased in over a few years
and in a non-punitive manner
thanks to collective bargaining,
very few umpires lost their jobs
due to an inability to meet those requirements

Keeping the Fourth Umpire

In return for eliminating a base-umpire position,
the union pushed for a new position,

and

the Lords accepted the proposition;
the fourth umpire, and the fourth umpire only,
would now have a single duty,
a duty that previously all umpires
had had according to the rulebook:

that of determining intent

where such determination was needed

The ability to determine intent
was a very narrow specialty
in the brain-reading community,

but

one that had application in all areas
where such determination was a part
of the administration of justice

(baseball

was one small field where it was used)

The umpires holding this position
were subject to rigorous yearly testing,

and

if their scores on those tests fell below
the community's accepted minimum standard,
they lost the position,

though they could

be assigned to one of the other umpire slots
if any such slots were available,

and

if they had the requisite training and experience

Steve Klepetar

Memorial

When you leapt to your death
in that hall of broken sounds

when your daughter found you
bleeding, after all the talk

had ceased
I would have cursed you

with a thickness of flies
crusted on your face

I would have buried your name
at the crossroads

driven a sharp ash stake
through your desperate heart

laid the heaviest stone
to keep you pinned in the earth

when the aria finished
when the final notes of peace

vanished in the air
when dignity fell heavy as mud

I would have chased your ghost
down flights of urine-scented stairs

rough end of my broom
scraping the vapor of your miserable face

Transformations

It makes very little difference who you tell, even
if your words become crows tearing at plastic
flesh of trash bags at the curb, even if they swim

upstream against the wind. My secrets lie deeper
than wells, further down than driving roots of oak.
I am the night man, whose breath is on fire.

My face is a mask of scars, my eyes exist only
in spaces between worlds. They penetrate
a thousand minds. I have left the newspapers behind,

crumbled bread at river's edge, where foam laps
against white rock. This morning I saw moon's
faint ghost pasted in a cloudless sky. If I could hold

that wafer in my calloused hands, I would turn to silk,
unfurling in green sheets while your tongue froze,
too amazed at this transformation to sing a note of praise.

When She Smoked

I'm through lying, it's hard to penetrate
this humid air. When I thought she was drowning
in those black shadows,

when all those capable men were left
standing with their backs against
the wall,

when pleasure
shot through my veins like some burning
drug, I can tell you, I was
scared.

She didn't know me then, not really,
except to say hello or sometimes lie
together in the shady grass.

She owned a red van and she smoked
sometimes, but only when it rained or fog
built chalets on blue-green hills.

I would walk down to the river holding
her hand, but I never noticed
she had disappeared
until dogs wouldn't quit barking

and all night blue sirens flared.
It's not that we were in love, exactly,
or that I held some secret balled in my sweaty

fist – no, that was vanity, a way I had of looking
past her face, into some mirrored glass
just to see that my eyes were where I left them

here in the middle of my head.

Talking Blind

We have talked ourselves into blindness,
ridden our mad way down this cataract of words.

We have emptied our lungs of sound. Together
we listen to rustlings of night, mice in the attic

roaring of moon and trains and wailing sea.
Here's what you say, how a green world explodes

in fragments of light, how stars align along
the floodplain of our blood, how our hands,

scraped raw with digging in these tight, leathery
weeds, bring us close to tears. I balance

on a thick black branch, my coat flailing out
like shadow wings. Here I drink only wind,

my father's desiccated draught, his fault line on a
frozen pond, his last breath, his cold and ghostly rope.

Cold Eye

Surely there can be peace
 high
on this vertiginous
hill
beneath your cold
marble
eye.

Coppery
coy glide
brilliant

 through slate
blue
pools there beneath
your raised
arm, horse

 massive beneath white
thighs under wispy
rags

of cloud. All winter you
have waited, like held
breath

 or a pale-knuckled
fist. You have clenched
and unclenched, muscles

 knotted hard on forearms
and wrist. Patience

marks your clear
 brow, you neither
smile nor frown.

Downward you gaze
on this deadly
 march, parade of idiots.

Proudly you proclaim
your misanthropy, embrace
the broken shards of your solitary will.

Post Scriptum

Mark Blickley

Mysterious Waters of the Naked and Nervous

She begins her life
along with nine-thousand seven hundred fourteen siblings
in the shallowest part of the pond,
just four days after being laid as a jelly egg
attached to a fern leaf bent over humid water.

On day seven she sallies to neighboring weeds
using a very circular route
quietly clings to weed, watches with terror
as brothers and sisters are attacked
by sharp beaked birds
swooping down to chew helpless tadpoles,
devouring membranes that cover their gills and necks.

One of few tadpoles to survive to day ten.
officially becomes a tiny pitch black pollywog
with continuously wiggling tail and small round mouth
of horny jaws that scrapes across tiny plants,
searching for something to eat.

She greedily swallows microscopic animals
found inside pond bottom ooze
and slime which clings to pond's surface.

Devouring a particularly tasty ooze meal,
she is horrified to witness
tadpole brothers and sisters eating each other,
siblings extending their bellies
by swallowing extended family.

Mostly tail with fine stippling of gold,
within twenty-four hours she breathes
from two gills at each side of her throat
as hind legs suddenly sprout
rounded buds that soon turn into toes
amazing her how fast she can propel
away from murderous dive bombing birds of color.

She first demonstrates courage
by a successful attack of black fish that menaces her for hours.,
sucking on its fish fins until they are ragged,
not in anger or self-defense
more for tasty algae trapped within them.

But it does feel good to be able to destroy instead of being destroyed.

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COMMENTS & SUBMISSIONS

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