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nate ndosi
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andrew ross
patrick moran
ryan cameron
madeline kreider-carlson
merideth sine
rebecca m. morgan
jenn hare
justin dainer-best
Writing forms a hit or miss,  
first an a, and then a b,  
something something rhymes like this  
Petrarchian form, then devolution, the observer’s mocking hiss,  
satisfied with nothing but the pre-canorized, criticizing happily—  
writing forms a hit or miss.  

Struggling, I offer ee cummings a grateful kiss,  
but am fast drawn back towards rigidity,  
something something rhymes like this.  
The muse of rhythm bestows upon me no inspired bliss,  
and, turned again, I run towards my verses, flowing free,  
writing forms a hit or miss.  

O Milton, Thomas, if I dropped this act would you dis  
my work, would you insist upon the established, the Forms That Be?  
Something something rhymes like this.  

One side of my brain strives for greatness, one for free and happy bliss—  
and so we, my creative voices, my better masters, disagree.  
Writing forms a hit or miss,  
something something rhymes like this.
We found him in an orrery of lashing branches,
brooding like a drowned city,
The black tongue lunged from his mouth,
A sapling or a pulsing stinger.

His gaze, a smooth, stripped screw;
its fingerprint effaced,
strained from the socket and clutched the sky.
The empty eye gummed the roaring night—

but he let the rope stretch out, its coils aching
until his hand found the splayed ash
and the whole orchestra of branches
conspired to lift him.

We saw him haul the spear from his side;
Now he can pull a fish from its phalanx
and demand its secrets.
Now he can burn his bloody gums
with bitter cavern liquors.
Now he can stand in the teeth of the wind
and call it by its right name.
I want to cover my skin with words
I want to father a golden page
I want to silver your ears with love
I want to watch us with eyes of God.

I want to swim in the shape of birds
I want to murder a foreign age
I want to offer the wolf a dove
I want to turn myself back to sod.

I want to winter with wooly herds
I want to shake up and blind the rage
I want to live by the sun above
I want to float in an ocean broad.

I want to cover my skin with words.
I want to burn up a golden page.
I want to pull out the tears with love.
I want to forget we don’t need God.
Having been told to save awe
for the face of God, I sweep above us.

The clouds roam with
the menace of white magma.
Nearby, ducks watch with princely distrust.
Their eyes red as berries under heel, they are
wary, unaware of our
escape from forty miles
northeast of here, our emergence from
the steep dreams of industry.

Your pauses are like wet bread.
They fill, they swell, so homely
and bulbous. They settle
beneath the small circadian crises that make up
my blood’s metronome.

With a twig, I conduct a small ballet
starring many bony sirens,
their tissue tutus hang
from hibiscus hips. Oh, are they noxious
and unnerving against my macintosh hands.

I see the nervous motion of the ions in the air (preparing).
Whatever comes, comes through
the rusty fence squares turned sideways and
melts over us and over the waxy stealth of the ducks and also
over a lizard in a cinderblock nearby.
Thick as the bottom of an ancient window,
whatever comes
does spill in rivulets.
We are quiet as mineral,
except for my ballet, molasses-slow and bending
our souls into octavian
lenses until it stops.
Done, the twig falls like a star
or like a twig.

For Garrity

rose howse
Her painted fingernails drag sand:
A magenta metal azalea broom
Sweeps up the broken towers,
shards of future glass. Modern crops,
these pink nails. The humans bloom.
She chews bright plastic flowers
And smells roseflesh tabletops.
To smile a stone celery
Is to steal beauty from truth,
growing two red lies
like lips or Siamese flies.

There were columns of light leaving her eyes,
Refusing to support the amendment.
Glitter drained from globes into the sea
To be eaten by a new firmament.
And yet, by taking in this refugee,
The ocean lost its wildness.
It roved about without identity,
(Her bikini was a brilliant mess)
Wandered confused into sandbars,
(Where water drinks the glass)
And lost itself at last.
A snake bit him and he fell down, dead

almost like a shock
or a jolt of cold air—
only burning and hot
and the stinging wholeness of it,
that's both him and me, brother.
And he falls onto the forest floor
onto the wet leaves and dry dirt,
the red slithering leaving him
as though we were newly-separable.
Past the sullen boughs and the whispering
groundplants, the trees grow huge
like sky-scrappers, only we don’t notice
because he is dead

and we are alone in the woods,
watching his body
and shivering. The roots plunge
beneath us and carry their messages
while we are so entrenched within our
selves, hidden by the shadow of his death,
that we miss them,
we see the snake leave
and watch the end of it
long and sinuous—
never-ending in the dusk
turned to night.
Before

Before, you looked at me like your daughter
Smacked me lightly and laughingly when I was smart
Teased me
But then you said, oh. The things I could teach you.
And you smacked me a little too low
Hands too hard, touching too long

The New Dog

The new dog next door, Cuttler, an Irish setter, wouldn’t stop barking and running off until one day when he ran off and got killed by a car. The new dog next door, Cuttler, an Irish setter, eats food off the table but otherwise he’s pretty good because he doesn’t bark too much or run off.
Sasha on Skis

Sasha skis down the mountain like he wants to die; arms loose at his side and a frenzy of powder flying up in his wake. Fir trees arch back to avoid his plummet, sheer cliffs shiver against the whip and slice of the ski, now veering, now slashing in his suicidal descent.

Boy breaks neck in ski spill, Friends mourn loss, thinks Sasha, tasting the elixir of celebrity, the sweet high of I-told-you-so and your-love-was-wholly inadequate; it’s that pure adrenaline that drives him in a blur of wet snow down, down, hurling himself off chasms for the sake of whatever point he hopes to make.
In the drowsy late afternoon
I’ve searched in the closet below the stairs
within the brass bowels of the piano
and inside the jars on the sill
that catch the light in angular shafts
refracting and reflecting

in the garden where the toads sang in the starlight
where we ranted at the stars
I’ve looked for that half-glimpsed place
fracture of a dream, all mercury and moonlight
but summer’s gone now, the frog princes are departed
and that may be fine

because the dream was one of snow: crystallized saccharine hillsides
and driving white curtains that sweep past the windshield,
snow that falls like lace and forms improbable fractals on my black coat
and on my dog’s black spotted eye
when I was young,  
mornings when the white outside my parents’ room seemed inviolable 
and deep  
I imagined we lived in the ice-dripped cabin on the maple syrup bottle 
an ice house beneath the bowing branches of firs  
a haven where silence was no obstacle  
some place of warmth and redolent spruce

I’m only a visitor, but it’s where I belong  
on white-sky days  
when the frigid northern gales halt the dew,  
bind each sliver of grass, smoke my windows  
I belong someplace below the sloping, snow-laden branches of a pine  
curled against the earth,  
interred and embraced

---

A City Dispute

1.  
Bass rattles a traffic light  
and liquor is poured 
onto the ground.  

A faint face peers through 
speeding glass  
to glass.  

Your green eyes turn white  
when people see your hundred 
dollar gloves.

2.  
I know it was here that Xerxes tested 
the sea and pronounced it 
conquerable.  

I understand that if he stayed in Persia  
reigning over Eastern fields  
he would drown

dragged down by 
the weight of nothing.

---

amy tarangelo

patrick moran
Thoughts on the Disposal of a “Dead” Bird

I would like to think the bird was playing dead. Maybe dressed up as a dead bird for Halloween, got his little birdie friends to crush up some berries and paint a ragged ring of blood around his neck, helped him work on a compelling pose of a painful window-induced death, coordinated with some ants to really convince me he was dead and they were slowly beginning the process of decomposition to take him away from this world.

On second thought, I hope he wasn’t faking because now he’s two layers deep in blue plastic bags from the supermarket, nestled somewhere in the dumpster where I laid him to rest.
I dreamed of going to the Galapagos but I ended up here in Kalamazoo, Michigan, in a cramped one-bedroom apartment. I bought a box turtle and set her up in my living room, and, with a toothy sneer, she told me I was in over my head. ‘You are in over your head.’ I named her Quiet, because that’s how I liked her, and, between two rocks and wilted foliage, she watched me fall apart.
Sometimes I walk over the ground
Sometimes the ground walks under me.
Pure white darkness fills up lungs as
Whole worlds tumble together.

Sometimes the ground walks under me
And once or twice that dream was real.
Whole worlds tumble together
As color breaks in two.

Once or twice that dream was real.
Forever stops on an airport floor
As color breaks in two,
Keeping you from sleep.

Forever-stops on an airport floor
Disappear into the air,
Keeping you from sleep
The way I once did.

Disappear into the air
And bury a friend
The way I once did
On a humid night.

Bury a friend.
Pure white darkness fills up lungs
On a humid night.
Sometimes I walk over the ground.
Mute blued brood. The grey sky matches my mood. The vague similarity keeps me company; I have someone to commiserate with, and am calm. But the tree-limbs, pregnant with rain, now verge on bursts of fresh lush leaves; The wind I know must exist up the sky’s sleeves will let the clouds disappear in their own smoke-screen, and the blue ness and the blooms of green will hide the land. When that day comes I will be ready; My palms like wood, my balance steady, Mind resting, like today, but in a different place, A bower unshared, but a flower shared, a colossal space dreamt of at an old woman’s vast pace.

Moving less, she travels more; The rubble of sidewalk leads to the sound of the door bell to the market. The drab white linoleum floor bears shopping carts with a creaky grumble; It’s old, grown white; it’s allowed to rumble like the carts down the gravelly ramp, outside, like Louis Armstrong’s voice. But we digress. Tied to each other, like a family’s arms, asparagus spears the air, a warlike clan in drab green camo. Tiers of grenade-like lettuce briskly wait inspection. The drill sergeant, this twiggy old lady, come with a cane and a merciless eye, lancing lettuce with that beat-sting eye. The cane, I guess, as much for hitting as for her pain-crippled pace; But she’s old. She’s allowed. It’s her place. She makes it. Look at her, berating the vegetables! Getting em ship-shape, squeezing their gasping syllables like a beep. She owns this great world of a market. She makes it bigger than it is. She knit. The world tied together like a flowering cloth. The sky swathed in a light blue t-shirt, froth With grey saliva. Golden back trees pillar up the fabric, like big fingers making pup tents in a light-blue bed sheet, which grown grey When the light’s off, and dream thoughts rain. A womb; a bloom; a bower. The bed where bodies bend, and arms exchange hands, and kisses are shed in half-forgotten, always remembered sighs… They covered me then, but could not hide a sunrise.
And the sun collapsed; swiped away from the arc, swerving, shooting light at everything for a second: colliding with night, dark at day. Realigned to slant illumination on startled misery.

His eyes are scarred over but still pained by brightness. He must fall to ground and dig into dirt. Slightly covered so others might see him but enough to soothe his burnt skin.

She cannot know where he lies. She, enveloped by granite cliffs and an alabaster sky.
& it was difficult watching him
lit up like a power plant with a million
different fires in his mind burning as
bright as they did forty years before,
the music that poured from his hands,
the brilliant songs
that lived in his head
were replaced (to us)
by the soft hum of  machines
and replaced (to him)
by the silent ballad
of painkillers.
& the doctors said he would
start to become incoherent,
but a few days before he left
he said “Jim I believe my dreams
have come to keep me company, ‘cause
there are vibrant red birds on these
powerlines in my arms, singing a
beautiful melody that I’m sure
you’d love to hear.”
his voice cracked and broke and faded
and so did he three days later
but all my favorite songs
just don’t do it anymore.

As if the stars had suddenly
aligned themselves into bright twin arches,
suddenly, every car in the world
was turning into the  McDonalds drive-in:
into the broad, bright parking lot were
silver SUVs weighted down with toddlers,
sleek black Jaguars bearing dot-com geeks
and venture capitalists in huge sedans,
and nicked beige Camrys filled with ravenous seniors;
into the take-out line, silent and docile,
the cars lined up, lined up around and around
the long highways and freeways and causeways
of America: dump trucks and pickups, fire
trucks with their ladders at their sides,
limousines packed with celebrities,
paparazzi in their Priuses, waiting for their
Cokes and Diet Cokes, their McGriddles and McFlurries;
and the world was at peace, the stars were aligned,
and the hungry waited to be served.
He sits blocked in a fortress of pixels.  
His world is woven on a microloom of fine, silicon tapestry warp 
and two-dimensional light.  

He’s a concubine  
confined by complex configurations of coiled computer-generated cosmos.  
He’s defined by his lineage and ductility and might of mouse.  

With finesse, each click stitches him in.

They say that it’s a sin...
I want to be lost in Los Angeles again.
Palm-tree streetlights make eyes at urban night air
that smells the way a warehouse full
Of tires feels on your body in the middle
Of a hot, dry, July. Stoplights give me forever
As I drive to see what's left of there.

It's not here. In this city there
never becomes here, but we try again and again
To force it into place wherever
We are. I take some air
And stow it (just in case) in my mind's middle,
So if I find a copilot unwakeful,
I can breathe it into her careful
Ears as stories of here-and-there.
But then I'll drive down the middle
of an empty road and be alone again,
With the love of beach-warm air
And lights that go forever.

This isn't a town I'd live in forever
But right now I'm full—
Not to bursting—with dull electric air
And liquor-store lamplight. Left here, right there,
Past the icon and then left again.
Brakelight-beautiful quiet fills my middle

As I become, finally, all middle.
I will drive forever,
Discovering the same scenes yet again.
Nothing else will keep me so full
Of here and then and now and there
As all the things that taste like LA's tire-hot night air.

In the City of Angels, life is only air.
Sometimes people die in the middle
Of the night, and someday I'll be there,
Having forgotten about driving forever,
But not remembering ever being so full,
And knowing never to be again.

The middle of the night is forever again, miles from the air
That's full of time, and here, and there.

For Love of Country

_diamondben_
my speed-dialed two, my fresco-tiled enigma, my gold hopes smiling through the gold hoops orbiting her eyes. A chest is opened and its richest coins revealed as her eyelashes, thin dark locks enmeshed, unlock. Eyerise and I rise to the occasion.

Bread buttered with our secrets we eat with bites soft as whispers. Kiss purr sought, the teeth extend not and protect what is given them.

Moccasins

Honestly, I long for renewed honesty with myself. I've been keeping so much locked, and if I were to leave would I unlock? click clack! Would the cold resin crack?

Do I know what is beneath do why no what is? beneath. beneath. beneath. beat heart beat hot beneath white heat cold, cold resin bearing whiteness to the cavity's captivity.

a caveat cave inn chinese tin pantsuit lead me a way laid in the dark and yes!

Simplicity. Simplicity.
Silence, silo ence, thence isle oh end so whence lens i alo.

ne know. secrets see credits seek retains in me thee retain sin the only one won now two.
You and I, Sister
are lost travelers.
And we search for ourselves in sandboxes that we never played in
and that never existed
We sit between silences

You and I, Sister
we were never taught who we are but we
learned ourselves
You charted uncharted territories
You spoke volumes through generations and those words
reached the crests of waves
You came so close to truth,
you almost climaxed at what is real

You and I, Sister, we danced on concrete
until our feet bled under the hot sun
And we never gave up
We bandaged swollen, red soles
just so that when they healed
we could go back outside and dance again and again
danced again until we
remembered who we were
Bandaged swollen, red souls
so that we could realign them with the tilt of the earth
and the placement of the stars
and feel human
like dirt

You and I, Sister
We pushed our ways through life
with some kind of God, every once and a while,
tapping on our left shoulder and tugging on our shirts
so that we could never forget
where we came from and so that we could never move too fast

You and I, Sister
We redefined the gritty darkness of Black
I stretched limits on both sides,
and then crawled my way inside of them
I became grey and ambiguous
with your shadow
two steps in front of me

I said
maybe you are “new”
imposing geography
on our discrepancies
dye
and sugar in blind doses
in our bodies like tonic
in our veins like a small
religion
clocks distort how
we see (which is inward)
and we skim along
this crowded-room
geometry
Home again.
Just when
I thought I’d
made it outside.
The tether in the
heartstained mind rebounds, and
I am the arrow-head
My hairs point in every direction, even up.
The thousand incompatible commands are laid bare
in the mirror’s glare.

I am cleaning.
Bad memories are like lint.
The mind is a well decorated home.
Wall-to-wall personality,
comfy achievements furnish it,
beloved pictures of people decorate its walls
but in the corners, under overarching triumphs
are shedded grays that make my eyes itch.

I am cleaning this
my house,
mapping angles and gutting crevices,
bringing lemon scented justice
to places the mop missed.

I know a man here.
I wonder if his aorta is looped
around the foundations of this home,
if his hair is gripped tightly in the clenched teeth
of the floorboards, if his libido is screwed
and welded to the fireplace?
I love him well, but I’d prefer if the haunt stayed home,
in his uterine, urine-soaked closet and under the bed,
in the rusty darkness of the thumping boiler-room.
My dealings with him have never been friendly,
so I don’t want him following me, if he can at all.
Are these terms acceptable to you?
A thought after reading poetry or viewing art

The whiteness of the wall behind you
distracts me from you
as teeth from a smile.

I try to ignore it
and see you as you intend.
But the wall is always there
and you are not.
beloved.
: slumping from the primordial cave, still humming of ooze, we shrug our shoulders at
the blunt roar of rising tide, at the cosmic shift towards drought. my cilia rolling in their
death-sleep, i hear you stumble; some chromosomal shudder as i point my blame back-
wards.  beloved: this was not my fault.
(forgive me.)
The drive back from West Virginia is wet; white cliff of fog stretch up to the white sky, and we can’t tell hill from lake; the world is white, the road is gray, and we’re driving too fast for safety on this steam-clouded highway.

I.
you did what you wanted and you never said sorry
the night I found out I said it was okay
but then I lay under the covers with the lights on
for an hour.
you were out wearing rings and mascara when you told me
and then you had to go cuz like you were with all your friends.

II.
the next time I see you, I want to be fat –
really fat.
enormous, and slovenly.
I want to eat everything and let it stay smeared on my face
I won’t pluck my eyebrows and
I’ll have zits you’ll want to pop.
you’ll shriek at the size of my stomach,
and I’ll smile and take another bite of pancakes
and let the syrup drip down my chins.

love letter to my sister
You read in the paper, your fingers damp from the fountain staining with newsprint and news-ink, of a girl vacationing in the northwest, run down by a bus, her body bouncing underwheel like hay in a combine. The driver noticed nothing except the thud from behind: her body so fragile and thin. You hold your breath for five seconds, exhale. Again, twenty. There’s something about this, you say, that I can’t escape. Your breath is heavy and smells of butter and oregano, and it mixes with the chlorine-water odor of the fountain Friday spring afternoon.

I dreamt last night, while the cool breezes rustled your hair and blew open the cotton curtains of the pale yellow room, that I fell through the massive boughs of a city-tree, past the great mottled knobs and knees of its height, to my inverted death in the smooth moss of the forest. Each of us our distant brushes, like the arms of a clock which circle but do not touch the frame, or drops of water thrown in the air from a stone mouth, only to fall again into the pool below.