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THE BLUE WORD

By

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B.A. Northwestern University, Evanston, IL, 2006

Thesis

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts
in Creative Writing

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The Blue Word

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Electricicle

You say don't go like Neal Cassady
found by the railroad tracks
a victim of the dew.
If I froze you could wake me
with a hairdryer, in as many years
as you wish. You could
help me pass through ice
back to you.

Electricicle, the street lined
with iced metal wires, the powered lines
cut through homes, stretch never ending
arms above blank ground.

But to return to you and to pale air,
envelopes of eggshell-white wallpaper.
I can die of insposure. In heat,
the heat you can find somewhere
stuck in my body now.

We could watch the people
whose sweat is metallic, after
running down the street
they may be enclosed
in metal casing, the sheen
from inside, to sweat myself
conductive. Only one tree,
the snow blown off—
to shine blue out of night frost,
to shine blue
out of yourself—

*

A something-please-happen longing
looking through webs of crystals
on window glass.

A black-barrette party where we all
switch hats
dancing, the beat is lead
falling on linoleum
(and nothing breaks).

This world's cold sweat
plastered on the neighborhood
as proof.
The snow is my running through.

Snow or footsteps,
we are talking from
both sides of aluminum
siding, and the outside
living in. A small pine, branches
braided with blue lights. I thought you were
with me when your voice passed
through walls.

I lost the song from the film

but the bassoon was you.
You blew my name into a plastic bag
curled in an ice-puddle.

Somewhere a jug of water
still sloshes back and forth
but the ice tightens between the floorboards
of a gazebo between the strands
of my hair

you once plucked a pocketful.
Slush was once my ribs against your fingers
my pelvic bone tucked in your palm.
The tire marks of your finger pads
smudge no road
just the noose you traced
on my collarbone.

But I cannot stop—
In the front yard
you spat smoke into the snow.
It is not my snow. But what evaporated
from the curls of your breath
is the pink bruise that is my skin now
and the thoughts that flinch like a hanged-man's spine.

The cars that pass
are the sound of your breath
let out
slowly before you spoke—

“O God”
and all the mold in the world died
never making a sound
of their own
in the clearings cut across
in the cold closed eyes of space,
dim white lights pock the reels upon reels
of wordless credits unraveling around us—
the stillest.

the tiniest of us
longed to be more than just one cell.

Bridge of the Gods by Carlight

Down the nightjars.
Blue fog at 4AM
clings to the Columbia river,

steel beams, as fishnets,
knit across night,
headlights yellow the air.

The nightjar's silence, almost
soundless feathers, as a jar's whirr through air,
a moth in the mouth,

this damp winter. You pointed out fish scales,
I cannot see what the nightjars see,
down swinging claws

across water's surface. If you were
three-hundred years old
again, you would remember

the river divided in half, earth fallen
from a mountain,
a dirt bridge

two-hundred feet high,
and crossing to me
in sky-cold.

After rainshower, I am old
my bones untied by you
and the weight of wet clothing

pulling down on the skin.
And ash for the river, not enough from your body
to build a new bridge. Enough that if I drank

the water as it passed
I would lose my voice
for nine years. I remember you

feeding the birds that do not come,
you releasing a jar of gray moths
into a car's headlights. This is something

I would remind you
if I could see you again,
not just a body's char. Now

I must wade into oil spots in the river.
This silt is sunken land
that tried to connect two banks.

Down the nightjars, somewhere, and all we see,
and what we remember of seeing—
my skirt mimics the movement of river,

reaches into ash on the surface
for your wet hands— the water gives me
a fish's tail. Dark

blending river with steel,
with bodies seeking to cross,
all whole with lightlessness.

Braille

I will write another poem about rain now. Only if you speak to me in a voice that drops low from your mouth, *turn*, you have torn every button from your coat. When it rains, you swear to cover every blade of grass in sight with sheets of metal. There's a grief here, but only if I ask you to *take me*. I still feel the white slap of your words, though you don't touch me. You still see me as I was in the city-dark, my bare feet indented by pebbles in the pavement cold. I crumple like paper in so many doorways, not creased by shadows in streetlights or from growing old, but from the lack of your breath on me. Groan is a word I could shake in my lungs, but it would not mean the same as the water falling on the tin tiles of your yard, where you undress a stump of its bark and braille the years of its life when it was fat with water. You turn and say *this is something I was not meant to see*.

Little Deaths

A suitcase filled with smoke
opens and empties in the train station.
Only our footsteps
nudge the cement
and you lift the lids
of trashcans and wrestle with chewed gum
and your own fingers. And I love you
only when your breath is not the clear of the cold,
when you are searching
and filling this metal-walled world to its ceiling rafters
with the steam from your nose.
What only before could quake (love it is four o'clock,
someone is arriving and someone is leaving)—
but there hasn't been a train since 1920,
lord how we still shake.
How you blow and huff into candy wrappers—
and the lungs make their torn bodies
look whole again. In the train station
with no passengers,
I hope I can snort your skin cells
from the ashtray. I hope I can know you,
but you untie my dress.
You hang it from a metal hanger,
from a sign post,
and smoke into it —
the fabric fills again
to a billowing body
and someone lets in the rain.
The ceiling has cracked
like puddles of ice under my weight.
The blue cursive line of sky
reminds us of so much world
just let in
and a god must be watching us undone.
My frozen nipples point to the pink ceiling
of your hands

and my hands
 pound the ground
a suitcase filled with smoke—
we are
 begging for words,
I spread my legs, you speak into me
and the walls of the train station echo
“don't stop please don't stop”
and all the ways we ask gods
 not to be lonely

The Desire Projects

An accident, like a paper lantern
catching fire from the light it mutes, I want
to be kindle for the hollow city's windows,
the darkness that ripples around Bourbon street.

Who will arrive to live in soaked stone?
The projects, what do you wish to build? Stroke
the stone that lines the street Desire. Without
anyone to switch on the light,
the buildings are only an outline
like opening your eyes after a long blink

and the world is yet to take shape again.
And yet, the curve of the balcony as I open
curtains, the light leaks
in through the walls—
stones have crumbled from arguments
shaking a neighborhood. From the crash of a body
or a radio against a beam, the mortar spills
a white cloud of dust. The words *and what I want*,
are thinning the stone, pumicing
the bricks in their exit
from the neighboring room
toward the sea.

You cannot ask me to be stone, as *stelae*, words carved
or painted on smooth planks, stones outliving
civilizations, outliving words,
weather-smooth, speechless rock heads
propped up by earth, now alone, built to say
what victory won, which way to go,
and who has died. I can but close
my eyes

and there are no gravestones
as I step out into night. The clucking of shoes,
an invisible companion in the cloaked street, passes

and I turn down my sleeves. This orange dress
is a citadel of heat
in an old city where they built
a street, misnamed for Napoleon's Desiree.
Where I may never speak to a neighbor,
to the man who stands outside my building,
to the card players and shopkeepers
over the horn and its echo in narrow
streets. Only to the marble mausoleums
do I speak. Over and over they repeat
only their names. To my questions, their names
answer, to my confessions, their names
counter, their names echo with each eye's
glance at the stone.

I would give up my grave
for someone to touch the nape
of my back, a space sandstone white, where
a stranger pressed to move me
from his way. If only for someone to scream
my name from below a balcony,
I would sway as the sleeves waving limply
from a thin dress. And I know I return
for a body so warm in New Orleans heat
that I feel I must ignite—
Do not ask me to stay upstairs
when the city spills into the new sea.
Faceless car windows cut each other off
and the dead are slipping out of stone.

Not yellow lines under a thousand car wheels, not
sick-sweat leaving the surface of a leaf, not my
hand knotted to yours *AS WE RACE*
TRAFFIC not window-glass fogged with
fingerprints, not your unmarked bones marrow-
empty after millennia, not the nerve's broken
message from my palm-skin, not your newspaper-
world to break up like cement to silt, not a
pelican's shriveled beak, not a four-hour-tired
grip, not poems in a bucket tied to a fish, not saint
pulled to sky, not ash packed in ice, not an exit-
crowd drizzled from a stadium, not earthless-
swimmers, not purple-exhales, not spray paint in
rain, not heat, not this burn-world, not this full-
lung, O you in coal-colored night-smolder & blind
not you

turning the corner without looking back,

not the way a human evaporates.

A Sandalwood beam
 blossoms bits of mold, encased in ice,
as if in a museum of the living.
The mold seeks space too, unable
to rage through its casing. It waits.
A car slips into the embankment,
headlight iced over, and not a scratch.
Still, in a world made of ice
 you need more space to slow.

Last seen
 under the pavement bridge
waiting out the rain, wringing out the hair on your head.
Trying to fill these hands—all you could do
was stand near a drainpipe, as the water calls out to you—
 the skin is waterproof.

*

The water stiffens and releases
at daybreak and dust-set.

Where particles of skin and wood discarded
into air, are only visible by light that cuts through the window.
And you need to see yourself detached in them,
suspended airward and mingling,
unwilling to fall
on carpet.

And you let go
needing to call it something,
needing to call out to something
in the sealing-time of closed windows, ice as glass,
of four cryonics patients in Moscow
who wanted survival by winter,
to continue to live, to always remember
one face
and what it meant besides the name
after you go. A lantern
as the orange-colored ember of a cigarette,
sways in the night,
seeks you
from the backyard fence.

You watched it go
and wrote nothing in the register of vanishings.

The Cutting

1.

How can it be
what it has always been?

 You live in Reverie,
Tennessee, a city that changed
bankside East to West and I live
on the other side. You dream
next to an empty bed, an indent in earth, the trace, river-ghost
 whispering, you will never know
 you will never know.

What mad rift, one hundred ninety
six years since the river traveled this way?
how can I feel such old
earth-cut? indent, waiting to be filled
like cupping your hands in rain shower—
earth waiting to be filled
after the shocks
 and the bloom.

River that cuts straight through a country
but not into equal halves, not cutting us apart
in equal halves. It bends and juts like a lightning slice
from a god.
But numb, wishing myself porous enough to feel
the pain of separation,
a cool blue water-wound.

The "Body of a Nation," everyone knows her name—
but we cannot remember, the Great River's one waterfall,
St. Anthony Falls,
 for now the river is also cut by dams—
*Saint Anthony, Saint Anthony, please come around,
something is lost that can't be found.*
I reach
 for you in a memory
at twilight

2.

A river returning home,
a couple on main street that cannot hold hands
a jailer that lets the light in through a pin screw,
however you want it, however you will allow it.

I will visit you like a flood.
I contain whisperbows.

Wednesday ferry boat, going home
the shocks, where there is no real fault
line.

When the river floods, forgive her,
she is returning to where she used to be.
Water visits like wet explosions, and there are
no zones in water-logic, only where we want
to go, and what course we take to get there.

3.

What machines will contain our words, after this?
For now, these letters, cross the water, in such
quiet gasps

a language of zeros and ones,
through wire or in a wave
reaching for a satellite. What connects across mountains
and rivers?

Cities without end and car doors?
Connect me to your fore-arm bone,
a straight brown line as you pour coffee
for your bosses, differently than you pour coffee
for me.

And it doesn't matter who you are
when you watch the clock or watch the river
or that you can no longer
kiss your father's cheek
after twenty.

In the café, I watch on T.V. the I-35 W bridge
collapse over the Mississippi.
And why don't we gasp, though we see it
two hours later. I slip into the restroom
to call you from a separate space
though I know you were not on the bridge.
And for someone to tell
the bridges are collapsing, and the people around me
are quiet.

That I dreamed
of family and plates slammed down,
that I dreamed of my town, and threats made across oak countertops.

The Mississippi mourns the cutting,
in the evening light,
the people staring down into the water
from both sides
of a broken bridge.

Overlook

We should stay in different rooms. The thousand geese
we saw resting in a field on the drive, on their way, shook me
and the highway that grates along the sea. I didn't know
the fat in my breasts was rippling until you stopped and we pulled
into the hotel parking lot. These mouth-foaming waves
gnaw at cliffs but take centuries to hollow out a boulder.
My flakes of body in your fingernails are the same as the piece
of turf caught in an elk's antlers as he crosses the highway.
Come with me north (I can't stop north, I cant stop).
Judging from appearances the geese were resting, but they
are not far enough south, not far enough away from the Canada storms
to stop bashing the wind with their wings. You argue
a redwood branch is more resilient than a root because
it can sway. But I see the roots in the 1964 flood,
the water tearing at the dirt and the first twenty feet of bark.
Then the ghost of a logger etching its wood with his fingernails,
white ocean-fog in the shape of man. on highway 1
we stopped at every overlook to dig our toes
into whatever earth we found. Nothing else stops,
not the motorhomes or the elk, just the geese,
to stare at the weather. I predict
your eyebrows the arc of a wave, the smell of soap-foam
at the tips of my hair, my fingers sliding in the lonely crevices
of your knuckles.

2. Vandals

And who would build a house of glass?

And who will call for me when I have changed clothes in front of the highway,

And who will write my sorry, everyday deeds down

eating over the computer keys, having affairs with playwrights,
and the split seams, the sinking on the couch in twilight.

And whose eyes will not pierce through glass as they pierce through televisions,
syndications, neighbors' mouths.

And who will throw stones at me? And who will throw the stone?

In such bloom the glass directs the light. Glasshouse and the dwellers

are plants, growing to be shipped off to shine from your dining room table.

In such bloom, such things grow, in the warmth and the heat,

directed from cool panes of glass.

Or a place to keep the vandals, no not those who throw chairs at shelves.

A place to keep the unwelcome, their clasped hands unroll

like a word rolls,

like light's single-ticket journey

through one-way mirrors, a type of seeing,

a type of glass.

How eyes do not shine in a glass house, how eyes do not shine

in a place to keep the vandals, but cement walls, not even light enough for bars.

3. The Blower's House

You see how windows sag with age, grow bumpy,
 like they are rolling out toward the ground.
You see them reach for sand they used to be, drooping like your under-
eyes. A part receding from the whole.

You have known temperatures' height, and made the glass to take form.
You have known the glass as dancing liquid, as caramelized sand.
 Others see it merely melt, over centuries of longing.
You have known the center of a cupola, by the heat blown in the face,
 And nothing will reform it, but a glass blower,
 from an ax, shatterer.

You have known to shine is to ask to blow it whole again, that
what counts is to shine through sand, through soda, potash and lime.
What counts is the retelling,
 how you missed your mark,
 how you stuck your hand in fire
 part of you into ash, into pieces.

Still Life with Bedpan

Sometimes two plastic chairs
filled again with puddles.

Sometimes the green tile
left without grout.

Sometimes the fridge hanging open
for the light.

You, my soonest pilot, fade the paint
from the roads.

Your purr up the gravel home-road,
the bacteria in your mouth, I can always keep in mine.

Don't pass the liquor store, we're hungry—
Liquor on the eyelash, lime peel green vodka,
so builds the body. There a "building"
on gravel, foundation of pebbles,
where we live, when wood can be trapezoid,
where you come and go, overgrown oak leaves

rattling on windshield glass, hanging by a stem.

Three Days in Cuenca

1.

It is hard for the buses here
at such height, scarce air, the road angled skyward.

The ground sutured into three great steps—
a city, a basin where four rivers drink from each other.

We traveled from the coast
and no passenger can see through the cloud cover.

Arriving is like sickness, stale exits out of bus seats
and into the air. The Canari called this place

Punaypungo, the land as big as heaven, a name
for a land closer to heaven. The bus driver's jaw

slackens as he settles for return. As we leave him stroking his hat brim
he says at such height, it's easier

for god to hear your prayers. But what can I tell you of arriving?
In a blue hotel, painted ice on the walls.

In this air, at such height,
this voice thins as thread.

2.

Curled vowels
in black smoke pulsing, in blue bus passing.
At dawn, the city is quaking with people
on their way to work. If I was Cuencaño,
I would sell flowers, or burn notes sent
by the treasury.

Just to know treasure,
there's a bus I'm eyeing, for three days
thin knowledge.
The traveler is a negative shape
like the sky cut up by prayers on their way,
the sky cut up by church spires,
the white church spires
knotted up in clouds. Or the city cut by a cliff
between the new and the old.
At such height, clouds roll past with cars.
I'll find you
with hands as basin
sunk, in the river Tarqui.

3.

We all buy the same hat and stare
at painted balconies.
The travelers are learning how straw is woven.
And the weaving of straw into brim.
What is brimming out of this woman's hands
resting her head against a clay wall
to keep it upright. With eyes turned downward
her lips mimic the knot. Knots to contain what used to grow,
what grass used to lean in sea wind. But transplanted
to such height, no longer to grow, but to be a fixed shape
of a hat. To be made into something.

4.

Please, silence tonight. The slow aging
of the hotel walls, as they are canvas for mountains,
as they are canvas for travelers
who eat breakfast in their containment.
But it wants to see you sweat, to see you reaching upward
with a bus ticket, higher to climb
dropping brief glances at another city
drooping at skydown.

We all buy the same hat and stare
at painted balconies. And the stranger,
I watched you hit by a taxi at night,
I called for it to stop and he drove away
and I could not help
for you were stabbing the sky
with the broken body of your glass bottle.

Behead a Mountain

Through his car window passing
he yelled he would drag my hair through coal.
And so much in my own skin,
and so much in his own
(the breath passes out
to meet purple exhaust)

In a snow-blached city
fire works. Fire does its work
coarsening air.

A police car camouflaged in sage grass
(each breath a visitor) stone after
riding stone he listens.

In nightwinter
you refused to leave a swimming pool
(this is what I can do, this is what I can fight).

The hills black, naked and headless,
you are watching, on the patio,
smoke yourself into gray light,
out of the oak gone,
out of the raccoon lead-sinking in the river
out of the white lips
heat slices from a mountaintop—
exits to sky.

Toward Newport

In June we will reach the cape
aligned to water
by water
and the cliffs hungry for taillights.
We will stretch out sea-wind across both arms
cutting our body's shape out of the wind,
and we stay through night for little else.
In June we will tuck
into white sheets
lifting them up and down again
to waken the heat.
And the old slice
of my stomach like ham
in the cold, like cutting bone
in soup.
Do you know what will replace
winter's dust? In a car,
the world can pass—a blurring of buildings,
while pedestrians wait for a white light, man-shaped.
I wish for a human-size slice of world
to pass this stream of city night.
Like when your body first feels a season
come, our pores are potholes and we thirst
for someone's else's movement and sound
to cling on to when so many cities pass by,
when so many seasons pass by, to cling
like crumpling light
in a dawn-streaked fist.

Without Messiah

I string green glass across the living room (I gather green from my eyes after you asked me to open them in the bathtub.) I cannot see underwater but I see in the puddles our bodies dripped on the tile—
how you came home from class to tear apart a book and paste the pages over the walls, to shoot a fire extinguisher so its dust paints the room and you paint your body in the colors we call American with green. In my dress and stockings I dipped myself in the tub, just to coax you in. You slipped your body into the water with me, my dress drenched from egg-blue to the blue of night. The paint hid your skin and all I wanted to see was a human-color beneath.
I scrubbed you like you were my brother (you are my brother because we have shared a tub, because I have curled your hair a million times in my fingers and worried you would drink more Pabst by the fire and listen to me coo, slam porch doors, know nothing of gods— gods you worry I will make friends with.) You keep asking if it is night, it is night in my uterus
where paint has slithered up bluing the god-hands that grow there. That you have told me grow there, but I think I grow no messiah, just a fatherless finger-painter, muraling my insides, so they are not gray as organ walls but scenes from exodus, an ash-sky, starless to a million travelers blind in sandstorms, asking how their family can make it through the red sea. Your bathtub is red with paint and blood that leaked from your glass-scratches. So Ethan, it is night.
The streetlights burn into the room, the fire-extinguisher dust flickers in its shine. We have washed your body of paint, and my eyes of my family's tint, that green-red to rust, that must, you will make us fight, as fish forgetting water, as gods hovering over the sea.

Underair

1919-1920

1919-1920

1919-1920

1919-1920

1919-1920

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Glass/Metal/Ruin

As I lean my body into your arm,
I remember your elbow once dust,
and the white streak on skin,
from the colliding that scraped
the ice from a stone. I must
live without you and without salt water.
I must drag my feet on pavement
not walking, but wading through the lines
on the roads, the starch in my clothes,
the words I will never have for you,
you, running into you on the street,
your eyes black as pavement in a storm,
your eyes that shatter our
clothing into tiny threads. The starch drips
with the rain from your skin, the salt I taste,
pulled up from inside you. I pick up
the parts of us, as if the burning-red glass
shattered from a taillight, the seat belt bruise
across my breast, the growling of wheels
in water, the door unopened, blocked by bent
metal, as lover's eyelashes bound together, then
the slump in the seat, where I left you, after we collided,
our headlights now yellow streaks in the water, shining on
the white scars, the salt-pocks on our bodies,
the ocean we sweat into each other.

Sonora

You cough shipwreck,
you say listen to water
and the white stone of my eye
turns its pupil on the desert-char—
like an eyelid closing
the night blacks the sand
in the canyon of your ribs, where I cannot go.
But now the water is coughing
from the faucet, its veer-less journey
up a pipe, where it spurts on my hands
to the beat of my pulse
when I am not with you. Those grains
of stone are red in my sleep, canyons
open like the baring of teeth, and there
a rowboat longs for streams
but flakes into sandstone over centuries
of stillness, rocked by nothing.
There are ways to reach for someone,
that if we do not rush, at least leak,
like the last drop of the Colorado
could, pushing through sand,
be part of the sea. Will I never see
the pinking of the sand in the morning's heat,
the expanse of desert as the sky pulses
its yellow pupil on sheets
of pumiced stone? Now, under your gaze
all of my flesh dilates,
a pounding against wool clothing
as if you could enter through one pore.

Blodgett Canyon Gray

Rush now, out of the snow falling in chains
across Blodgett canyon, across my palms cupped
to be filled with flakes of ice. Where
you took me, and the shadow beneath us was a gray
where nothing grows between each canyon wall. So walls
the light. My eyes stilled
to ice, the white the color of the snow-print
my purse made when I lost
it down the canyon. The contents of it—a wallet,
a screw, a jangle from keys turn into dents in snow,
and the scar of your tire prints
on the roads now. Someone
will find my driver's license wrapped in ice. Someone
must find the way back to your carlight. How
can you current out of a world made of winter?
On the Higgins Bridge I took three steps and knew
something has left us when the air
cannot warm under a gray sky and the river hides its rush
in a cap of ice. My body too stone
to be stone. The blood in winter slows
until your hands heat somewhere
on a steering wheel, you grip it like you cannot let go.
You south at 75 mph, you cross to states
torn apart by no season, by no sound
but sand on windshield glass. But still
your voice quakes and echoes
in my flesh, you cut this canyon,
a stone cup that holds
only what it has lost.

What a Wing Does Here

If I am a fool
 in the moths of winter,
everywhere descending,
somewhere
you in the city of my ribcage
 snow spots the air

If I am a fool
 this time take me, not ice
not halving the river,

the muffle of water in the mouth,
 that night of tire prints
and the gloom of a hood
that covers wisps of hair
from clumping with snow

Outside now so many crows
returned
and the slush is black with tires
and I am tired
 of their calls
of their hunger-wings
 flapping against air
against everything we must breathe
 you are three miles north
returning
and the moths of winter
 are stuck
 behind the gray lid of the sky
with an ache to fall.

Song of Black Honey

Chanting away time I drink you
memory my mouth along the wine-scar
on my bedroom wall where you
spilled a glass into the night
Song of black honey the moss of your eyelids
the dull clink of sand in your voice
the blonde mole on your stomach
the white hills cursive with trees You are
just as far as the maple from the night
its leaves blacken every four o'clock
only from what is gone

I drink you
and your old stare, pools of clear water
honeyed your eyes when I moved in your gaze
Now the smashing of leaves behind me
is not you this park rivers me out of itself
and the tar on the riverbank nights the earth
as it clings to sage roots plastic bags the tips
of my hair heavied with black Tell me
if the word-world sings out of itself,
the maples shivered believed The aircraft overhead
sifts black smoke in black skies

Songs of black honey
the lungs pulse cursive your name carbon your air
somewhere a desk lamp lights your sage-pale hair
Song of black honey I will pray only at daytime at leaf-fall
where the river tar curls in the current I pray
these lung-letters connect as cursive.

Turn

the frozen-high where white and ice cannot leave.
I am elevations. Here, when the trail
turns from the river, it's the tearing
of paper in half. I try to leave the bank, I turn my face
before the river rushes away. Somewhere your steps
through steam on the pavement are now
someone else's pulse beat. I am elevations,
pale ice encasing shrubs remind me of your white
pubic hair. I will never see
when you are old. Somewhere you are collecting
linen in the rain. Here I see the oak.
Your old man's hand pushing out of the earth,
gnarls the sky. To be far from you
is to be close
to the blank above, the elevations
where I open my palm and see no more lines.
The elevations, every white mountain head
is just the sky trapped in ice.

Mnemonic

Missoula blocks the light,
a gold rain in somebody's window,
under a streetlight I can't see.
Errands are hard shoes
on pavement. Pavement
under us, pavement. Even this home
stays dim with trinkets you need
to color walls you cannot own. Somebody
reads by carlight passing
by, reads on Higgins bridge
because they need me. Or I want
them to.

I remember your eyes, ice-colored
on me, willing the door to stop
closing, to not leave you
in the night-lot. I will forget the groan of a car
that cannot start.

To you, dark windows
means no one lives
here anymore. To me, somebody braids
the sage grass to remember
the color of sun, the texture
of a wool coat unthreading in your fingers.
To forget the city's human-shaped silhouettes
against the snow.

The river is a cradle
where there is no rest. The water purrs under ice
as it moves away from its home. Your feet
crunch the sidewalks to ash and dust
and in the morning the white sky will blanket
these windows in its own reflection. I am ghosting
December, with sock-muffled footfalls

as I walk through the apartment,
every light switch
hangs limp, cold, afraid of being no use.

Out of Water

I search our room
for someone. There is a fish,
or a map of a fish, on the wall. I cannot
stop blinking, stop you from tracing
the soft fins of my eyelids
as they run along the water-shadowed walls,
swim through the pocked light
from rain on the windows.

We sink in shade,
I am chanting you home,
avenues scraped by the dead
leaves wind takes on its way.
On its way tonight
where smog blunts the streetlights,
where after shutting the eyes too long
white spots float on the surface
of what I see—a seam splitting a radish
or a radish printed on a sheet.
We sink in shade, come

where the city has never been painted.
Where streetsigns are blank
and letters addressed unnamed. But my world
is your fingertip,
your streetways wind round and round,
creases folded like a wave
and every time I turn back
toward you, I wish
for fins. We sink
with our fingers interlocked
under the faucet, my wrist tailfins
this fish to water,
like the shadow-time
between the open eye. You must take my air.

Haul

Soak every headless fish in the market
in ocean again. In ocean again
this flesh-town as if a thousand years ago
walks away from all it used to be
for harvests of hair, flesh-down, voice,
your voice you muffle in your beard.
Gray the oaks, I don't need them anymore.
Stop the water down every drain,
there is nowhere for it to go. Or hear me
again, when the only body you know
is made of sandstone, and it crumbles
in your grip. I hope

that will not happen. My gloves
are tied in a knot so I long for your breath,
for warmth. Missoula has no streetlamps
but your orange voice in my ear,
your memory-hounds along the river. You are
more gone than the sea on fire. Every salmon
pinked past its body's capacity
for heat. Gray the oaks, shrivel my body, run
your fingers around its wrinkles, where
I used to flesh, I haul the ribcage
bleached-out, except for the pounding organ
now made of bone. I do not need water
down every drain, unless
I can see where it goes.

Underair

I sketch your thoughts as they wrinkle
your rippled-water eyes, you are
every wave now in the ocean now gone
the water folds like an eyelid blinking
for the rest of your life, retracing your sight.
I know a ground where waves once printed
their folding bodies—
tell me, I am honest, sandstone skin, tell me,
where junk strew itself along waterless banks,
red cans rust the dead grasses,
plastic bags follow wind like clouds.
And I am home watching my hair in the tub
slow-reach for the surface of water – but underair
with you every strand points down.
I would well your ribs with water doming,
I am honest, the black crow's singed wing
pounds our story like an organ in its cage.

Walk with me,
to the town of gray tree bodies
opening their bark fingers to the coldest night—
the white breath pulsing out of your mouth,
disappearing every second
to reappear when you tell me
you don't know what you want,
only the unzipping of my coat, closing your hands
around me like a boat's oar,
water rushes under my skin and pours
into your eyes, this is breath blended with night, this is
every wave passing away in the ocean.

Sanctuary in Seven Parts

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There, a thousand doors express doubling the ...
The, the thousand doors deep following ...
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Nightwake

The bricks go limp in the wall
as you call out to me
from the white-light-rain outside.

This is a dream about stones drifting through the sky
This is a dream about flies orbiting an empty lake
about you

in the second I wake
walking by my house, orange in streetlight
and I blink up from the couch
where you once slept on top of me. But now you wave and turn away,
into the casino next door.

This is waking up to my own eye-flesh
blank now as the night-street,
the personlessness of passing highbeams, but still
you footprint the pages of books
I try to read,
you bang on pots in my head,
blue-gray memories lodge in my breast tissue
--a day where only wind touched me
black stones on the beach gurgled in the tide pools receding—
this is a place you have never been.
But you have populated the wind. You have never been
anywhere mine
except my body

—not my morning-apartment when I turn on the lights
not the field that floods every spring ankle deep with grass-dyed water,
not the cement wall holding back the ocean from a port town—

I used to wonder if two hands can rub till they burn.
I know the singe of peach fuzz
under your body as it rubs against me
but now it is a word somewhere like surrender
that I wish we could believe in.

Exhume

You hauled my grand piano into a field.
The yellow grasses lap
at its black shine.

I open the hatch
and fill its belly
with water,
poured from a watering can
as if rain wasn't up to the task.
Tadpoles and goldfish swim through
limping strings
and a hammer keeps trying to knock
as water stifles the violent jolt
before sound.

Sometimes I wonder if you can hear
wherever you are now
the paint stripping
as the rain runs down
its planks,
if you can hear my voice falter
when I ask if anyone
can carry it back inside.

What do you think you are protecting me from? I ask
but the piano is stirred
only by swaying fins, and I am
really just asking
the water
how long till it eats the rest
of us. No longer
shoe-shine black, but the dull ache of your pupils
when I ask you
how you could
come back.
The paint slides from sight.
When I try to play
it is the same sound
as the gurgle of your stomach

when you sleep.

Song is a voice
in the lost wilderness, and when the piano-pond freezes
I will pound the keys
and shatter the still life inside
from its wrong-home.

Sanctuary

Close your eyes. I hear god-noise
in your night breath. The tearing of air from the bedroom
to your lungs is the sound of you
speaking in your sleep. You say *inside*
and handprint my body the way evening
lines an alley in its shadow. After you
I had to call out—to speak over
the streetlight-sing of your voice
when you said *I can see you*
in the dark. I had to call out—*don't inhale*, or slither
like the unclasping of buttons, but cuff the wind
like the pale moths in the eucalyptus trees. Call out
like the yellow creekbed of my childhood
where I first wanted words
to say—crawdad dead on the banks,
eye-peering in pine notches,
coyote jaw, and *this is oak-shadow, no, go home,*
it is night. The creek dried up
one summer. The murmur then
was leaves printing their bodies on my hands
where I lay hoping a drop of water would trickle
into me and I could end this day now,
with a soundless second before your eyes
slip open. I could turn from white bark,
blank tree stumps, nipples I call sandstone,
a zipper's slow metal tear toward the floor—
And when your eyes open I could turn from you
as planets turn their faces from stars
and rest awhile, say *sanctuary*
as if we could still say
out of sight.

Sounds Cast Against Seely Lake

In the glade, clean my teeth with blue ice
and exhale, just to hear a sound drop from the mouth
like gravel falling into a quarry again.

I think I heard your mouth,
although I am sure someone else is here, a crunch in brush, an airplane-streaked sky.
Tremor as a trout so long out of water.
And so much of your life spent
here, curling the vowels of tree branches,
the "oh"-leaves shaken from windsleet.
This clearing pulled taut by limestone, dolomite and chert,
your step pounding the shell of my earth.

I've wished for some sort of trans-action, at sliver-dusk
where I will give part of my red liver for a dead lake, for you to keep on in this
living.
But this living traffic casts wind, muffles your words,
a song sung into a bedsheet.

If you should fill yourself with lake water,
where the blood is, then I will swim as fish
or walk as saviors, to reach across to you,

like blowing air into water, resuscitate the silt.
If I should never drive away,
then you must not fill up to where
I can no longer stand.

And all our seas now,
a bowl of ceviche, their slimy creatures
curled in brine, in lemon scent sticking
to the edge of the mouth,
and you stuffed into the word.

So much silver-shivering life out of your water, what I give
and take, a bark beetle gripping
the surface, then receding,
a freckle,
in the neon sky. Here
eyelashes clump, a net for your face
as it fades to night.

This ice road begins where you will have it,
the edge of your mouth begins your skin,
and mine. Lake-clear, Loss makes
its ways down from the highway,
and swallows a wind-worn landscape,
and everywhere signs say
leave no trace,
as if you could not be taken.

Revolve

I lived before you
in a marble temple
where it was always night—
marble columns framed
occasional, gray stars.
Statues shed pebbles
from their limbless torsos
but I never said ruin—
I said *unmade, overturn,*
re-become
pebble, corral and sand.

And there you were
raking moths
from the doorways.
They died without moon, lamp
or firelight as punctuation
of their travels. As guide
to where they must go.
Limp wings sliding from air—
fell like the marble goddesses's faces,
a collapse without wind
to break or stir moth or cheek
from where it belongs.

But you stirred the stiff night-air
with a broom's handle clutched
in your palms. I felt the cotton knit
of my dress loosen
as new dust passed
through. I think you sang
Hallelujah to my feet
and mispronounced
a name for god. Twigs began

to tap at the walls, and whistle
as the wind struck.

Believe that day is caused
by a kind of wind, and that
I do not need
to see moths flying east
to know this world turns
again, pulled by the force
of all the places in an axis
of space, where it belongs.
I do not need
to see you, shirt sleeves
slapping your wrists—to know
our bed is unmade, our clock
taps at the air, a sound for the places
we must soon go
or return to. That I am going somewhere
where light is a verse
in a song of longing.
Where loss is as desired
as these sculptors longed for god.

Imprints

So we wade toward each other
in a valley blanketed in loose change,
each step a rattling— as coins fill the landscape, spilled from the pocket
of the sky—what voices we will not hear in the chatter of coins
spilling into each other.
The town pump is shining
and I sink in the round metallic discs
where your feet have slid where
we are falling out of night
and no one has spoken of our hands.
Your grip, my only anchor, when the wind tosses coins
against our bodies, leaving us pocked with blue bruises
the shape of the presidents' faces.
Where before the wind would only bend grass, bend my hair
against your neck, you loved
my silhouette. But now sunk to the waist all I do
is press my face against yours. So at the brink
of each other I leave my outline
in face oil as in the rolling cheek
a lover leaves a scent. Remember when
you said you still smelled me on the braided metal
of your front door screen? There is no room
for me now in your rooms. In the valleys choked
with metallic rain. All the lost ground's stench
blocked. And we are drained. These
coins have been held in a million
human hands—or more and the light from the stars
desires their shine, an echoless, patient love
that blankets their silver and copper in dulled white—and you—
our hands clasped into a double fist,
we are waking when our lips slip
beneath a crowded earth.

The Blue Word

In our nights with the Pacific
our clothes wrinkle together
resting on a log washed up
in the last storm.
You ask for words
we can say together
 On earth as it is in heaven
but your song is the stones
beneath your feet,
rattling, and the slapping of water
into you as you move into
the deep. *Your will be done.*
I call to you, your name—you—
the most important word,
as I dive to see how
your body would look
from underwater.
Salt burns the eyes and sound leaves me—rises—
you—in air pockets, you.

Never meant to pass through water our voices rising
testify we don't belong
in a silent world of drifting
ship hulls, crab jaws, a water ski salted by coral—

And Newport—
city lights strung together for a hundred miles
white out where the city ends and a new one begins
where the coast ends and the inland begins
where night ends and light begins.

I measure coast by salt spray on houses.
I measure a day by how far we wade.

We wade to Anchorage,
or so far as a stone's throw,

we wade inland, a hundred miles—

Those urchins are stones.
Those stars are porch lights.

Stones testify that this property
was once underwater, though now
I am a hundred miles
from the sea. This is still sea floor,
this is still. Now

a white light on a dusty road
illuminates specks of earth
caught in the air—

--I will give you five acres of security
and a penny to put in water. You will
wish for my fence, and forget jeans
left on driftwood.

You will soak your feet in the creek,
the one leak I allow to trespass—

And the dimes are chattering
in a waistcoat
and the women grow silent
in a country store.

--Silence becomes you, you
in white you'll shine in white—

The World's Record for skipping stones
belongs to Russel Byars
who threw a stone across the surface
of the Alleghany River and it bounced
fifty-one times
before it finally sank. Byars confessed

he set the limit so low
that someone else could break it.
Someday break it, someday sink like stones
or rise too far like the white hair of ocean spray
in a storm. Like

His Kingdom come
to the surface. Silt-shining
on whale skin.
Now only body
spread out across black pebbles
on shore, where people gather

called here by the smell that reaches out
for miles. They cannot close the nose
as tight as the eyes.

The children continue
to pour buckets of sea water
on the whale's skin.

As the ritual from their memories
of other whales that had entered their world.

The man in yellow shorts—
we watched goose bumps peek out
between folds of hair on his legs
as he watched the dead.

He called the whale dead.

Of his legs in the weather, of the dead skin oranging,
the wind peals
the flesh as it would sand
if it had a dune—

--And we could watch the wind shape this dirt
as it shapes the body now.

And the salt water
only seeks to fill the spaces between stones
before it turns away again, taking with it
for a moment that black as the wet shine
turns stones the color of the sky.

It should not be so easy to pass through flesh,
a stone thrown
makes a hole through the whale's body,
crumbles as it passes.

I should have been stone.
I've lost my sea legs,

they bend and the cloth of my skirt
rustles between worlds, the kind of worlds
where we are blind.
Call me, like the sound of sonar,
to find my way
in the dark or the salt water.

What is a creature of the ocean
doing in a stone world?

What could make you rise? Is there a song
that could make you
die? Rise

--so fast from the deep
to escape the sound
of a ship's sonar seeking. Rise too fast

to an air world,
moved too fast between worlds,
the bends punctuating the whale's body.
Too fast to survive.

And into the basin—
water appears in the pipes
and fills the bowl,
bowl made to be empty
bowl made to be full.

Or a kiss from a glass bottle
drunk, named after what I've done.
Taken into the body, the liquid becomes me,
those red cheeks, that stumble. No.
Where's the zipper for the skin?

When you waded into me—
night on the Pacific.
How can I live in a world
where the ocean can catch fire?
Where a sink can catch fire.

We were children. We kept a dead whale wet.
As a prayer, a message
from the world to which it would not return—

Pray in your chamber, having shut the door.
I mean pray in your storage room.
Forgiveness
in the towel closet.

For the kind of sonar
that pulled a whale to our world.
For not trespassing,
forever and ever and ever Amen.
The ocean will never decide its borders
as we do.
As your lungs sink and expand.
Put no ash on the face.

To stay under water is a struggle.
Always rise, like the voice, rise
like the whale. Or the neighbor

her work done. She closed the store.
After sixty years in air
her heart stopped
on a pavement square,
the song of dirt stripped from earth
by the shovelful, and drizzling
on the shining coffin.
Dirt hides her from the world—

Twenty years ago and walking
round a city block
you told me all the oceans would dry up
in twenty years. I imagined still scales and barnacles
stretched out on endless beaches
where pebbles grow smaller to sand grow larger to stone
to cliff.

Suppose the seas rise tomorrow—
gone are the cliffs
gone are the driftwoods
gone is the whale body gone home.
Back to the deep submerged
and merged once more the sun
warming the water, the water coloring the sky
the water covering the land
and uncovering
the whale body.

Who was buried for a million dollars
by Landsmen Construction, in a cliff wall,
imported dirt for what the stones cannot cover.

Can I create without
dividing you from me? Suppose I am
never old. Suppose the sea was a fountain
that spilled over gray hills.
Emptying streetlights—

You by the stove. It must be winter.
You filling it with driftwood and fire.
You and I in the tool shed
mumbling forgive us for not trespassing.

Our clothes in a pile wrinkled by shadows, this time
this time, the lamplight the sea wind passing
through cracks in the wall. I will stretch the word out—
you passes out of the skin you
and into the ears,
the blue word, the shade of the sea.

And the navy ship called out to see
what hid beneath. And the navy ship was sound
that passed through water. And the sonar
was a siren that pulled him to the surface.

O do not give us bread
do not give us only words
if they call out
and divide a whale from its world.

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