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Before the Wind

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BEFORE THE WIND

By

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Bachelor of Arts, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK, 2013

Thesis

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for the degree of

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Creation Myth

Born to trees
on a low sky,
on an afternoon
of sepia,
by chain came
a quasar

from a gash in ice,
from cracked prisms,
from a depth enclosing.

So now
the mind, and what to make
of the constant organ,
so like a broken kiln—

one is fostered
by its dark scrim,

begins speech
from a cairn

where the initial
brightness came

but darkened
to mica.

The Self

I am the emperor of hands
who, wordless as shale,

bores through the escarpment,
filling urns.

A part of my eye is quieted
so the other can live

in a notch on the opposite side
of the tunnel.

A universe
of moraines instructed me

through a thin lit entry

with the miniscule assertion:

I am the emperor of hands.

In this involuntary (yet voluntary)
struggle,

I am given to gesture:

There is a miraculous
spirited aloneness

I gather.

Surreal Poem

I recall the universe of small betrayal,
the love we'd find anywhere might we escape—
we are attractive and semi-good in conversation—
into that world of vagueness beyond our lives,
of potentially unfathomable kindness
that causes us trepidation. Once,
when I questioned the pathos
of your father's speech, at your sister's wedding,
by interrogating its closeness to you,
its sincere detention on your brain—
as you sat in the fold-out chair on the lawn, crying—

people looked, I imagine, when I took your hand
from mine, and lifted my body
off the plastic chair to walk down the aisle
in a reversal of ritual, to the bathroom
as procession and intimacy hung in the cloth
covering my shoulders. Between the two modes
of thinking—unconscionable sentiment,
and a kind of insincerity that makes
the village laugh but ruins your selfhood—
I thought of how lonely I would be if we
were not able to dislike each other, in person.

Migraine

i.

Again the red plinth
in a film of sinter

descends

from the foothills

for decorations
at the center of a stone.

ii.

Night breaks in heavy clouds of oleander,
through which one tongue,

a silver belt buckle in a frozen
wheat field,
sustains communion,

by way of its prong,
in dialogue
with merciful craters
upon the moon.

iii.

The earth is occurring—,
palsied,
 like the twitch
of resilience
in a porcupine's indelicate defense.

Here is the onset of pain.

Modern Life

As the ease of communication persists,
there arrives more pain
at the silence
 of an unreturned voice.

In the past the time it took
to receive the grave dispatch

hardened the spirit—everyone
became a clairvoyant—

so by the time prophesy
was fact,
 the mind

had already indicated the front
of mourning.

 Then there was simply
the opening and closing of mail

by which, across the region,
opposite words at the fingertips of another hand,

said, in same-different ink,
this is the conformation of the living.

Communication with Others

When you walk to the life beyond the one bare tree that extends out of the field, its height expressing the marvel of frozen brown expanse, I remind myself I am alone again, that only the thin vein behind your ear felt my vagueness—and I am comforted by this.

If we were to discover the commerce beneath the ice, perhaps we would comprehend the enormity each imprecision leaves. And then, for the rest of our lives, only in stillness would there be fault.

A Letter

I'd like to say that I am not enjoying you, but I am. The sun is here. Weather guides basic organizations of life. Each morning I bring my legs up the stone steps to the doorbell, circle the brass, and poke the nest. On its journey to the porch, your voice seems to spin from the sprinkler head shaped like submarine in the surface of the flowerpot. Then it sounds from the letterbox that various other bodies reach you through. Beginning again from nothing, my palm is in yours—the cool pale skin dragged over my bones

Yes, not for the traits that comprise a person, you say, but the material things, the vastness beyond the doorway. I guess in many ways you are forgiving yourself for me: the landscape of my mind hesitates much as it did when this was just another neighborhood in the city, but at the end of the day, when the hand waves from the street, it is never your hand but my own.

Dead Dog

In the morning
a palm slid under

your body,

the hand, my hand,

in its freedom
at the other side—

its vast possible
today—

encircled

your sick abdomen
in a kind of

perpendicular triumph

though no real
reward

except having
to confront

the obscene emotion
that comes when

the regular landscape
of a day—

you—

must be interred.

Instead, I wish
I could take myself

into your stomach—

I would plunge

into your skin,

that small useless beauty,
that museum
of inordinate commonness,

and when there
I might find

what made you die.

Against Disclosure

Because of your words
I inverted the sharp exterior

of a stem,
provoked the thorn

so like a thorn, I said,
so like a thorn

through the hollow shaft

to the infinite cylinder
of my throat,

whereupon,

within your vicinity
you could take confession
from my tongue.

After, I would have liked
to perform my own incision

to bore into your mind

and extract me.

Still Life

Horses neck-deep in water.

On the shore one's mane is split down the middle
in preparation
for a great surgery—

fragments of bone like grubs on the lip
of furrows.

A merchant rests a knife the color of emphysema
on its loose muscle.

His large arm swarms high—
the cutoff, the ruthless abandonment—

before the reeds bow
under the influence of wind.

Fibers of Prayer

The language of metal
crawls a thread

inside the fractured
window.

Overnight
the spider's
metal hair

pierced through casings
of fish oil,

like Baltic amber —

Now all you
could ever want

is the hollowness
of water

falling
from a stone—

the misgivings
of the world

then the silence of it
under wax.

The Garden Master

Each day you wake to: it's my life today,
you'll never discover the source,
learn reflections of the diamond.
Always on the temperature of water
is the recent past, where you were
made to continue as no weather
delivered your thoughts from stains,
found no way to the emptiness
at the fretwork of sleep,
but instead traced the dullness
of boxwood and dead bark.
So you sit with your head folded in questions
like why is the lakefront forgiven
after every erosion while my gift continues
to be my life, the cavity of day mouthing
its grey sweat stain.

Birdbaths hold pocked bits of moonlight,
and if your wet hands bowled under the dark,
you too would know the sky's summary
in an unimportant basin. This is soothing,
finally, not to wholly confuse the stars
with your nervous system,
to be guided to a thought,
and held there, not always looking
for the face it had before it was born.

The Garden Master

No fortress installs the depth of the lake.
No mind knows its small foyer without also knowing
the unending need to see behind its back.

A window opens from the center of tiredness,
when in the stark rupture of your gait
you rise and cut the rose
from the black garden, take it to the lakefront
and send it hesitating to the center.
Across the silvered-green grass,
bits of night veer back, curl the fronds
with sounds that bow to the rose, signaling.

An Early Weakness

Adolescence came into the world
when, in anger, thin arms pushed
through the window of a sunroom—
newfound wind introducing
the gash above the elbow,
to the sharp moment that brings
a wire brush to expose what
had always been sealed in interiority.
Blood amassed on the parquet floor
as if it originated among the patterns
and the mother, toward sound,
then its absence, took her white blouse
and tied a pathetic tourniquet
above the elbow—two petals of cloth
flowered out past the tight knot,
and introduced the lesson
of how change arrives painless, at first.
Beyond the empty hole in the wall,
redbuds, pruned into ovals,
outlined the property. Nothing
again felt quite so much of what
it actually is as the branches cut
in a figure the gardener had planned
not with the hope of bright pink buds
in the coming season, but because
he had nothing else to do that day.

Evening Meal

In the open violence of night
my nephew's infant thumb lies

like a bullet on the lacquered table.
We are glad to be uncles, my brothers

and I, because we have long awaited
one of our deaths— there are

so many—but we never seem to die.
Then the oldest did a miraculous thing

and had a child that he
and his wife agreed to call Simone.

Called upon the child takes note.
Its eyes are beautiful burned out jewels.

All of us eat the dark heart
of the pheasant as the child runs

a dull spoon through its palms.

A Marriage

From a well
comes wet coal,
and neat shards

of sapphire,
like broken ends
off combs.

My wife weeps.

I weave a white flower
where her tight brown braids
have loosed.

In the delicacy
of a sepal
kindness shows.

Buried in wonder
our infant walks

from the dark hollow
of the house—

lights sink
across remote ends
of fields.

A Certain Ardor

In each embrace
I consider

some of your hair,
impractical,

appearing
in one strand

on the sconce
above the bed.

After—

a palpable discontent,
no unison
that's

not the roughness
of the coverlet,

the death
of the genital wish— then

I recall
the loss of that delicate
human hair.

Fragment

All night

I thought and I thought
and thought of you

And then from the broken vein
in the glass

Our tapestry of silica

Lone-standing
Threadbare crack of terminus

You came to me

I breathed on your hair

The first dark strands moved
Like the surface of water
At an insurgence of wind

Your head between my palms:
Even now we are divided

Beyond the casualty of lust
Please, feel me
Among the folds
Of your return.

The Station Master

In its berth the sky stretches
hard like a tarp. I am alone
with my days.

Like the trains I, too,
cart the weight of my body,
though my wishes
mill past destination.

I blunder my years
with periphery—

*

With no full force
I inhale steam.

The lodgers have
no stamps of me under
their eyelids.

*

It is happy in my censure,
the station. Its ability
to perform the animate,
its great vein-run to destiny,
awoke in me a pulse
to end trembles
in it. I stopped my life.

*

In my room
the railroad ties moss.
I hate the hollow muscle
for its entropy.

Two years I stayed in a kiln,

tacked dumb by aloneness,
while sleep gave no start
and nightly
old melodies from the connection
of my hand on valises
blew wishes
across my wall.

Someone had built
a station in the distance.
On bare nights I hear travelers
pocking the valley's silence.

I pretend no more each way.

*

Stoves chimney their risen flaunts—
the ridge filets its seam to the outer.
I see lives in this.

From the mountain
rodents assume cuts in rotten ties.
I play conductor to their heartbeat.

I try the state commands from my mouth.
I paint my walls boxcar grey.
I roll cloth from a spool.
I press my tongue from its cave.
I feel the clock hands cross.
I brain the weight of the mail.
I leave steam in the glass.

Tumored by the need to have all break together,
I still cordon the ticket line.
With my palms
I clean the granite top,
no finger prints.

*

Though mood has grown dire,
I can't heat my center.
My nails come slow as logs.
My skin refuses sweat.

I can't beat awake
my hollow mansion of limbs.
All finds extract nothing.

My body's process
hears no song of the chorus.
The world does its want.

Totem

From the bay window
black above a green sea

a panorama of the one error
from which all others are born:

color and its absence.

Maker of the first mineral,

reduce the sea
to an ecosystem under our nails,

lend meaning to the angelic
calcium deposits,

and I will reach my hand
beyond the oriel

and use transparency
to inspect the troubling reality

of how the whole
seems entirely unlike its parts.

Person of love or death,
I am asking.

On Modern Medicine

If I give myself to
the patterned cabinets

the reek of linseed oil,

for a chance of my hand

on a lone vial of blood,

the blue name
awaiting word of its own

interior faults,

its pathetic
insufficiencies—

why it floats less than

it needs in the slow
stone-like expansion

of the chest—

Something always eventuates
a needle.

One might
qualify its ultimate
removal

as the first of that emptying
which underlies

all we do.

Alzheimer's

for R.G.

A Samaritan he was
in late age

using memory
of his own past

to erect a new style
of husband,

he who,
when a lesion

caused the front
of your mind to recede

and the rooms of thought
squeezed the water

from all remaining plenaries,
put his hand to your spine

and in an ant line,
tensed and regimented
as a vertebrae,

balanced
your brown leaf
and his green

out of the scrum
across the snow

through the drifts
and knolls

to the mecca-hole
where a black-box,

ensconced
within bright
gilt, waited.

The Agitated Spirit of Coasts

Among foreign cries, men find dwellings
Where drowning is the ocean's midriff:
Amber-hued fish break free from the same place.
The water opens underneath their thin escape
Then quickly closes like a gap in clouds.
They return on the advantage of inhuman breath.
At dusk their breath bothering a palm of embers,
While quaint shifts moved the white-tipped canvas
And thick smoke from the night's fire merged
With the rustle of waves against nearby shoals,
Bringing a fragrance of sound that circled
Until the soft spin went too long twisting
And the pressure from it broke the rose
From the stalk which had balanced it like a plate.
Now it is a force of undercurrent's mother,
A climate most remote that snaked a thread
Of violence into what was always refuge.
The yellow sand is now one tattered fold—
Ploughed by the heaving colorless debris—
Take no faith in the bronze in the cove or moor.
If science had the continuity of a blade,
Or could drain the thunderous lot above the sea
You might renew the blue, reenter deafness.
And of the pressure that meets no assimilation,
Cup the moment, lost ambers, in which all joy
Swarmed into the brine and left you empty.
Now a sick sea-rose has replaced the doldrums.
Now nothing can regain that previous theater.

Village Candle

In a circle of women,
a young girl receives tradition
from the matriarch
who, in a mantilla, rests
a candle between
her thighs.

Light twists yellow-heavy
around the interior
of the loggia.

Among strange prisms of gold
mouths like black jewels
on a nuptial band
isolate prayers for the pregnancy
in the middle—

a hope
to cleave around the hourglass
of a womb.

Camel

The owner wets a knife in the porcelain bowl,
for hours cuts a map of the city
in the camel's side:

on its shoulder, between the torqued,
leaning muscle
rests the top of the palace.

Between the jawline—
mountains in the distance.

Wearing the modern hieroglyphs,
an unknown, separate joy causes the eyes
to roll back in its ridiculous head.

All across the grainy yellow world
other hands modify
the occurrence.

I stare absently into the grooves in my palms
for the answer
to what makes them do it.

In the evening by the fire,
skin glowing strangely, its massiveness
turns night into a room.

Ghazal

In the groomed landscape of a botanical garden
A glove has fallen from a faceless person near the garden.

In the slow unwinding interlude between catastrophes
Leaves blow across country gardens.

A young boy in a black coat climbs the hillside
And places three small pebbles in the heart of a garden.

It is hard listening to the sick
Discuss treatment while being in the fold of a garden.

There should be a gesture that brushes away darkness
So, at night, transparence can widen over gardens.

I have seen you, sister, walking among the moraines
With your head down, searching for your own.

Habits of Breakthrough

There's a chamber between the mouth and brain.
In anatomy books it is called emptiness.

Occasionally a figure climbs a lantern among its warrens
toward a careless den in whose cavity
an oak chest dims under the odor of kerosene.

Tallow is rubbed over the reds of its hinges
until cataracts slide out into long rows
of mustard-colored porcelain that are drunk from.

In the mouth the head of a screw relaxes
into the shape of eyes, animal fat discovers
the lantern's potential and the ancient gallery
of cohesion collapses.

A cluster of feeling builds from the center—
fragments of the exact feeling in that first time
I broke even on the varnished wood.

Error

No longer
is rest the interval
of eyelids—

no sound,
like ice
against arbors,

comes to the outlines in
bright white
work shirts

who drop
axes into livestock

—tiny pivot,
rustle of
tree limb—

In Defense of the Prodigal Son

When you think of how the tongue depends on its own cut,
its own received pattern, as if called like a minecart from a mouth

where soot-faced workers picked walls
and packed it with latent jewels,

until, heaped, an unknown progress

of clinking rails
and reeking black depth came forth toward a body,

wherein, voice had to rise

from a shallow center and walk down rows
of a burnt greenhouse—

how abhorrent, then, to condemn the inchoate heart.

Use of Voice

A yellow leaf tears
from a tree.

As the shore recedes,
rain coats the aged
notches of bark,

and I run my finger
across its blurred
oceanic vaults.

Plaits of crescent
shift and sheer
in the water—

a glow accompanies
not forgiveness
but sound.

Our words go out
to the darkness
and hang there.

Nicéphore Niépce

From the many arches
bridging the handful of buildings
with their windows gone
there is a vow of cohesion,
a dark promise at last to rectify
among half-plaited valences
one daguerreotype
so lifelike it leaves grey-black bromide
in the groove of a viewer's palm.

* * *

For weeks the idea lay on a glass tray
alongside tools used to march into a body,
the grey-blue apron leaning down to nuzzle
linoleum—
a momentary imprecation
more gesture than surface, lingering
in order to survive
the homicidal tendency of loneliness—

If one is to unveil shards of the image,
open the aperture after the predicate;
If one is to extract the silver plates for the iodine,
dive a spindly bolt deeper;
If we are to produce, among the resilient,
concentration,
then among vague images,
unintended vaults and upturned angles
flowering out of a skyline
we must ask.

All I ever apprehended was a mirror
of my own fingerprint, a ruthless banality,
that summoned in long strokes with a wire-brush
iodine upon the skin.

Having not understood,
I want to organize in this kingdom.

It is the inconstant waiting of a grotto
with little joy, with little or nothing augmented,

except the momentum of pallid cloth
within rustlings of lightness and darkness—:
In all this I should have scored
the outlines roaming around the columbine,
transplanting heavy carts with the aid of heavy belts
held firmly over a forehead;

I continued to long for those initial receptors
the eyes—
the poignancy of a hand upon a back,
my unsure visions of a doorway,
balancing among half-bright sconces,
perspiring necks
tugging one way into confusion,
never crystallization—

the lonely beaded weight of work on collars,
the many eye-pairs rolling backward.

Let your feet marry the shelf between here and there,
air and atmosphere.
I made my own entryway, as if to a catacomb—
but how could I take you through the gap
small as a crack under a doorway?

And probably no one in our landscape ever woke
to an ideal order of a self
after all the surfaces were disturbed.

* * *

Early in the procedure
the quality of everywhere responded:
a clairvoyant,
I am meant to be me,
you are meant only to be you;
in me is a particular to explain,
dissimilar to your own plumb temples.

You do not have the implacable flaw—

It may be said that I am whatever hand spills weather.

It happens so often that understanding
is not longer an enticement;

Breakthrough is buried within the jewelry

in the catacombs, in the chambers
the worldly profess are unconnected.

* * *

Once, unable to fall from a yearlong stupor
I rammed the soft flesh between each rib
with the needle-like tip of an umbrella
and when I woke, and when I woke
I felt everything.

I lay my clothes on an armchair,
and pressed against the white sheets,
and with my stomach down
felt where the umbilical cord lent sensory order.

The heavy black umbrella in the bed
like a bellow stimulating the flames behind a mesh-gate
wide enough, wonderfully opened, I did, I did this,
I am saying,
I once crawled into interiority,
a handprint of interiority,
and washed the soft flesh around my organs.

* * *

The only interlocutor to whom I listen, says

Mother of the senses,
you, the most complicated of flowers,
though a charmed dark,
only blackness uncoils when I bring
my hands together, flesh upon flesh—how can I
while those mysterious creatures
ply the role of divination, live among you,
who sent their mouths inside blood to discover
concord.

* * *

Here is your texture:

cauterize lanterns among doorways,
recall vagueness, bend down in the hallway,

run your index finger in long circles in the tallow,
a code-call, maybe, like
I wish you joy of the worm.

With sense you must tenderly work it open,
a folded note:

All waiting gives off eventual triumph
or indifference—
lives off unimportant successes that include
the necessary drive for you to see
the wrinkles burrowing into the corners of a face,
fissures in the building's paint.

The ones who gathers candelabras now, with an enormous chest
on his slow journey
down the corridors, into the rooms, excited by the new building
he can expect derision, self-mutilation, cunning jokes,
the horror it is to live and breathe among the unknown.

* * *

Miles and miles, sandbag upon sandbag
of tallow.

Who when I light my match in the dark
does not flinch at the match-light;

who represent a self-pity that is viable,
whose wooden tongues produce perfect phrases,
whose resurgence shows how lawless sympathy
breeds among human relations.

* * *

If there is still a form of knowing
that draws the tactile, carves into the unknown country
that rings all to an end, the fabric of life broken,
the particles never known...—

I would drive a skewer
into a wrist bone.

The climate heavy with the first bones of evening
the closing doors of the helpful place
where the ages go, warmed by hands

soft-lifted into hands;

crises left to fend silently in the forefront
or in the iron handles, the craning doors,
moments of joy, cordoning off worry—
 at its best
releasing into the atmosphere a tablet of forgetfulness...

Each face in the windowpane sees,
in a kind of pierglass,
the locking handles in the casement window;

the split between what can truly be felt outside catastrophe
and what is felt within.

Collecting Evidence

*...and, behold, there was a
swarm of bees and honey in the
carcass of the lion.*

—Judges 14. 6

There is something to be said for darkness
after all. At the base of a group of asters,
dry blood, in a montage with cloth,
leads by the moon in wet red,
to a dusty copse.

If it is a swarm of frost that climbs inside
the heart and paints each cellular structure
with what seems the subtlest pastel,
minerals of an apogee, I am witness.

When I am charged with wrongs,
someone else's guilt is evaded; for who
took the worm— we are calling the bees that now,
the flower, the unsealed tear—
from the burlap bag, said,
I wish you joy of the worm, then released
its wide portal inside my keeping,
shouldering from my sensorium
the first epiphany I tried to utter as word
but grasped only in gesture.

Mother of the senses,
you, the most complicated of flowers,
though a charmed dark,
only blackness uncoils when I bring
my hands together, flesh upon flesh—how can I,
while those mysterious creatures
ply the role of divination, live among you,
who sent their mouths inside blood to discover
concord.

Forms of Desire

His head lifts the sea from
its aquarium of

sandbars
and deep coral.

You need a pram for
the strange trees at
the bank,

lamplight for
the empty carport

where,
in an infrequent halogen,

a man guides from
the shoreline

to filaments sparking on
the pathway;

therewith come
tendencies,

and if not
darkness, nothing.

Search Party

I move toward a bright bell tower
beyond miles of dark.

Suddenly nettles, on the snow,
suggest, where everything suggests,
as it breaks

that you are listening
for the precise combination of sound
to peel back the boundless white,
layer after layer of indistinguishable pattern
for you to arrive from under a plume

through a kind of second birth
the sap in a hidden ponderosa at the snowline
kept tight

so that, climbing from the spaces
between feathers,
your lost mouth could open to say

this is to mean
that I am coming back
that the economy of your wish ended my missing
that the answered prayer born under my tongue

smoothed the imperfect discourse of our past
so that I could meet your voice with my own.