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8 motionless clouds| [Poems]

Sandra Isabel Simonds

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8 motionless clouds

Poems

by

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presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

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Colorado Review: Tomorrow’s Bright Bracelets

canwehaveourballback? : dream cycle, traveler, [can no physician be found], [dawn over the next day], track and tunnel, asides (on love)

castagraf: darkens, [there is steam]

H2So4: [winter is on its way]

Lynx Eye: portrait in august

Monday Poetry Report: even the sweetgums, tomorrow’s bright bracelets

Phoebe: traveler, track and tunnel

Poetry Motel: cathedral

Shampoo: part VII of wind for prayer
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Traveler,

open your eyes
of reed-
yellow countryside, your mouth
of clouds
is loss pure

*

less here?
silence is concentric
circles around
the ear like light to eye into
the empty-

*

handed I enter this wedding

with nothing save a ring
TRACK AND TUNNEL
wind for prayer

I

out of a sky of sinkholes and skin stretched over the eyelids only clouds, love, and strange shapes at best only the syrup from the lilac tree that drips into my palms. fuse together this string of months and call them “summer” for I have mistaken wind for prayer all day rearranging my household furniture and on a clothesline of speech the hush of a cotton dress pinned like a wrist behind the curvature of waist. it’s true I have held something back

II

inside the halo around the throat through the zeros of the “it” and “all of it” —silence, pulse curving through the body. under these magenta flowers and the August moon my little lantern of saltwater called “language.” the days are naked now and belief lit only with the heartbeat and held on to and held out from.
III

can we ever know
the difference between mouth and tongue?
truth and the twist
of the wisteria vine?

mouth, tale, please I cannot
—of swift ideas counter-
current
of the switched
direction of a sad

story, echolalia and the colored tulips down the block

the elderly woman plants with her

foggy sheets of glass for eyes can we ever

“no” he says
tis only normal to feel this way when things
are moved so.

IV

dawn—air drawn between the ribs
of the words and back
through the ear
sounds asunder and then tunneled

the miner’s lamp, arteries, channels, ore, jewels, cataract

of soot
that settles
on the quiet
infinities of speech

V

in winter, for example, the heart as a kind of tundra not one
sulking flower from the frozen soil

for example, the lungs as vagrants

transitory notes

from songs caught

in the clear
cold wind

into the instrument

of chimney top

gut-ish or adolescent

howl down the bricks

of the trachea
into the fireplace
green sparks
reflecting: eyelevel

VI

hearty smell of the riverbank

have the hunters gone? have the fishermen cast their lines?

have we lost all sense of time under the feathered calls

of the crows

that circle
clockwise round our appetites and we have lost all sense of
direction when the hills come up

for air

from ripples of earth: look at the water: slight convergence of light

and lament: brighten our barren forms

VII

remember that wine poured from the mouth

of a stone

lion

that our voices were abandoned

at a bus stop

in the hottest part of the city with one

bronze

coin between our lips (gold fish-colored) to share or to give

away

and remember that summer came through the double doors of our desires

and left us also

like the bodies we were—rough outlines

responsive only

to moist skin

suggestive of an odd cycle of hope

and discouragement a prayer for winter

and the wind

(operatic, if necessary)

a prayer for someone to save us from
VIII

*first, they go through*

*fire then through*

*water*  the trees taking to flame

and the impulse of flame against the half-light of desire  the wild scent of fire and the sound of cellophane tightened around a bouquet of flowers

*look over here*  now the limbs flame

and that wild scent of flesh, sound of thrilling water against the mild bones  the night when the wind brought the sting of smoke  how many wasps took shelter in the house?  acres and acres of forest rose and fell as soft hair

IX

when dark rain softens the soil  and the birds sit on their thin blue eggs to wait out the thick storm so soft the light and the dissolve of light so soft the detachment of petals from their flowers and soft the sky of sinkholes in the squint

of light on the horizon's stretched skin

X

this is the hour of the open mouth  when we become the flood, procession of crazed liquid the pilgrimage of cells inside blood, the skin is a parchment in tatters we pass lepers, beggars and kiss their missing hands

green coins flood the forests like leaves, the city inferno, skin, water, course in strings of veins the forked paths of pure thought the passage, place
of calling, one look at—

and it doesn’t mean we will pass

without knowing something

more and it doesn’t mean we will pass

the place. no overlooking now.

no overlook

only clouds, love, and strange.
asides (on love)

sun hot through the word 'alone'
and the feeling is too much
of something much too weak, the days
pass like a lot of chatter. (no longer will I) attempt to envision your
approach, invasion
of a bland neutrality do not let this
happen invasion in every cell
not the blase demeanor of a storefront mannequin no, more
the numbness of birthstars

find myself hollow (in other words) nothing
to be reckoned with privately, there is space for you
though you would oppose (the space I set) aside
nothing, know then,
I won't let you riot inside
my flesh. something—(unsure)— hurled against the window
pane well pray then
or curse

of geese, I thought, and ice
and the winter sun of noontime
and a ten year old child taking a long nap
while snow piled outside her eyelids
and longish quilts of sleet and the points of icicles, I thought
of you too far away
to understand each other anymore
I thought of geese and ice
and chimneys full of smoke—the way you cleared
your throat before you said my middle name

nonetheless, a frigid bird I could not
bury with my own two
hands. nonetheless, the afterthoughts
of inaction placated only by stern
time. nonetheless, life went on
interrupted only by night
terrors and other rude
awakenings. nonetheless,
the moments repelled one another
or attracted (who’s
to say) nonetheless, I spoke
though words were unfriendly
and words were my only friends

or a handkerchief of ether or good instructions
on how to destroy something
precious thinking too much
maybe I’m forgetting how to live without

maybe I won’t always be so out

of my element

love lasts but an hour and rides on the wave of her own
clichés and when the tide
recedes she is
her own shoreline
did I ever say

death? did I ever say perseverance?
or mention that some days
took every ounce of strength

not to give myself
over
to life’s mis-
placed stars did I ever
tell you that when you left
the irresistible urge
to demonstrate just how frail the

body is
but what you did not know

I had been through
you didn’t know that
strength is
so strange
as if the soul were

a houseplant

you took for dead
but then you watered it
(as an afterthought)

and watched
the leaves go
green and unfold

9
Cathedral

The wind's corrupted claims
blows cracked
leaves across the quartz
plaza into the pointed
corners of the interior
life. If the situation is dire,
I’m hanging onto some exquisite
pleasure and if
the situation is not dire I’m hanging
on. Perhaps,
desire is filling
the cheek cells with blood or
perhaps desire is the precision
of skin soaking up
the liquid, the light
laughter of the afternoon
city. I measure the wing-
span of my exile, tighten
the leather straps of my worn
sandals, enter the cool
exhale of the moist hymn.
[then the burning]

then the burning
water, the water on
fire through the forest’s soft glands
fire tucked in the dark tissues of the season
it’s the drench
of words in a mouth of gasoline and then waving the melted
letters in the brute
wind of a blue
speech so as to quicken the flame what’s extinguishable? not fire

rid the word of the word
and the tongue-
colored stain becomes

this fury
of equations, this infernal math—cellular,
chaotic, skinned, faithless
as an apparition of carbon paper
follow

the fire with your ear and then you will see—
the city’s open
air market of makeshift booths where passages of red silk
unroll towards the fragmented stars that bear
the pressure of human use

utensils, heir-
looms broken off from their silver
ancestry burning

the patina of language— the smokes thick and from all
directions— impermanence,
a longing as erotic as a provisional
truth on the tip
of the tongue and still the casual agonies gather like sand
in your shoes after a long day by the seashore
when you’ve forgotten yourself in the saltwater,
the lapping waves.
track and tunnel

for it is a wildness and it is so far North there is no stopping non-stop long-winded train ride through miles of tundra miles of chapped lips blizzards, bald-eagles, bucks

ok, it’s a landscape of revenge and despite all measurements it’s always far by which I mean so close the metallic tang of window sill to the tongue

young lad (y?) you call this a poem? you call this ten, twenty

thirty times the beautiful girl numbers and miles blur pixel for pixel like track and tunnel is a beautiful gaze the pupil calls out I call it

eyesight....logger of trees

and I don’t mind the man in the sleeper car who hollers I beg you from his pierced dream

and the little girl in the velvet seat doesn’t budge or that her life should fit into her growing hands she turns the pages of her picture book and the pages are turned outside the window the whites of her eyes become the whites around the words becomes the snow flipping inside the page and no one’s going to hold your heartbeat here heartbeat here
Even the Sweetgums

She slept through the storm and everything was muddy and slick when she woke.

Even the train tracks sparkled. 
Even the sweetgums on their branches.

A white sky replaced a black sky replaced the clear. 
You can’t trust anything, can you?

That’s what the small birds think when they find their nests ransacked by bigger birds.

When the train roared into town the sparrows panicked from their trees. When she arrived home

Jack, her neighbor’s goat was chewing on leaves. 
His wet fur smelled like dishrags.
Ode on Joy's Erratic Pulse

in an instant: High Jinks! my own future: AWOL I knew its
goodness: Spree
made me sad walking
back home from (where?
was it now?) the store? class?
before me it: Lark!: left before I could ask
questions and for so long expecting
what was before my eyes to worsen
and eventually slip
into the black/ white static of thought so it made sense
but (counterintuitively) that (Shake Your Tinfoil) interior

and now I have made new enemies Cut Loose from old friends
Pipe Dreams
because my understanding of touch
was based solely on a strong
sense of False
Hope
so if the territory of joy is lined with [“I’ve suffered, but”]
then
listen, love,
to these tides taking this day out into an eternity
of
these
Eye
for
an
Eye
questions encrusted in green salt as (one
moment becomes the squawk
of the gull (the sand
on skin
the purest (thought
giving you,

but what I mean to say (here is our
our place. here. this niche of earth these sycamores that sway
to the warm sounds of autumn
DARKENS
dear so and so,

today I write the word “nothing” at a noontime café
over a square piece of cake and the word floats off
my stationary, hovers (eye-level)
like a small ghost
unable to blend in with the bubbles
of soap, the clanking
sounds of the sleepy dishwasher, the touch of flour
on the baker’s nose

dear “I think very much of you” hanging in the background (the unassuming shadow) of a cold fruit ready to be picked and though I extend my hand I cannot... see past (the gesture) becomes so complicated as though trying to figure out an extraordinary machine and I give up or into my eyes

follow the whine
of the snow colored dog pacing outside the café anxious for his owner to emerge with a bone-shaped treat

dear me,
admit the trouble:
that my mouth around any word is like the hand curved around an ounce of sand, that “things” are much more troublesome than we allow that if the poem should fall to the wayside like a polyester slip it will only uncover the body’s fearful hollows
there are lovers at the next

table that cannot stop looking (at
each other)  
what do they mean?  
do they say “you, you are not a thing” or do they say
“you, you are my thing”  
they are  
gorgeous, ready for “anything”

and I look at myself  
as though I were an eighteenth century museum  
portrait that winks at you  
as you walk by  

but ignores you completely  
when you stare at it

dear today I write you “nothing much” to say  
but the “much” is frozen solid  
perhaps (I) should tell you  
the story of my mother  
stranding me between  
two languages  
without  
so much as a word  
of advice

but that story, you know it already? would not explain: in january I will be in france again and things will fall back into that language of errors my mother’s language (my) wondering

if I will “get by” (that’s not true) wondering how I will get wanting so badly these words to coalesce and if we come across expression’s utter inability to…  
yet observations can be made: the man opens

17
the glass door of the café, kneels, stretches his arm outward with the bone-shaped treat, a girl with yellow hair and yellow clogs and another girl with yellow hair and green clogs: they must be twins? both of them holding crumbling oatmeal cookies they look so— dear— the city we left

that left us

so empty it’s true there are observations even the ones that are cut up, pushed too far back into the mind’s shadows: the delicatessen full of ghosts the 23rd floor of the hotel that overlooked the steel ocean and the ferris wheel at the end of the pier churning the dirty clouds the insane woman with a vaguely clinical scent that hung around our neighborhood one day she asked me to buy her razors and when I said ‘no’ she never talked to me again yes, there are observations and there are

errands that keep us above the surface of dark days so that we do not sink too low (as in) my potato leek soup—(I need to buy heavy cream I need to buy a handheld blender) and I don’t want to leave you mid-letter the way we were left mid-sentence when you said I like the assonance of this phrase “sandra’s abandoned plants”
[For it is the North Country]

For it is the North Country
and it is always falling
back on the snow-
drift or a shift
of will and even the halls
of the boarded homes are branching
behind the boards
like switch-
backs that are veins.

When she breathes it's hard
against the lowlight of his chest
and if she believes the heartbeat
is just another type of sleep
as seen from the other
side of the urging
on of dim days then of course
it's hard not to feel
tacked to the end of your own

life but it's also a seaside town
of reeds on air
and at the end of the avenue
an ocean of paper
lanterns, the hysterics
of moment gathering up
the light with wet palms raised
above the head.
The Goldsmith Says

Desire and her disheveled
life and her constant
demands. She got so drunk
he had to carry her over
his shoulder under the cold
shower of snow. Each day
she dipped her gloom
in amber and held it up
to the sun. The goldsmith says
everyone needs
a beautiful pendant
with a bee trapped inside.
That night they could hear the waves
crash from their second
story apartment complex
though they lived a quarter
mile from the sea. She collected
herself enough to say desire
and he replied everyone
needs a beautiful amber
pendant to hang
your life from your neck.
noon and

1.

noon and my cheeks are stained with sunlight & bloodlight
i’ve been trying to keep up with the tractor
collecting red-meat collecting
coins in the cups of my eyelids

so strum my loosest ribs
and this song will lodge in your tense throat
as your tonsils sway and
start the descent
into your stained mouth

and i kept batting my
lashes and i kept spitting marbles
and rust across a pond of longbones
until i fell face first through a twitching muscular you

2.

must recall i was inside
and what of the fangs plunged in the thighs of darkness?
and what of my lover pulling limbs out of a hat?

and a flock of stone birds shatter the sky
betrayer betrayer fucking betrayer
as the better man took my wife from behind
i watched from a bent tree limb bending
her i don’t know what it is about her
don’t know what it is about her that
shook song
shook that song like a tablecloth of crumbs

for the year that we slept on the floorboards by the furnace, light collecting
where our bodies met

dark life dark life dark
clothesline: dripping bra
and what of this flashflood
of blood-ripe flowers

chest of water chest of slosh
of the leopard at your hips
as you swagger
    off desire ripping
the legs off
desire ripping
    this path down your throat
notes for a passing season

(for Josephine Simonds and in memory of Jerome Simonds)

my purse contains six rolls of undeveloped film: ghost towns, blue rails, main streets, junk sales, the mighty columbia, a fox.

this morning as an airplane’s tranquil shadow descends slowly through the sky’s soft irises

the lawnmower doesn’t disturb my (sense of calm) because I’m thinking about where I’ve been as opposed to where I’m going

movement of mind

*

like warm water
the shadows of my grandmother’s hammock criss-cross pattern all over the mowed lawn

eleven years old and needed four crimson stitches on my calloused heel—

the Chesapeake’s black mud

hiding broken pieces of pottery, empty crab claws, the jagged lips of tin cans and smaller stories: backwoods and dumb and drunk every year a truck would drive

straight into the water
two by two

the men drowned

underneath the calm

bodies of jellyfishes

movement like warm shadows we were taught to throw salt

over our shoulders

and wear orange life jackets when we took

the canoe out on the water

and the life jackets

were old and smelled

like opening a sea chest of mothballs
watch my grandmother
as she tends to her garden, wondering why
beets grow down and tomatoes
grow up.
eleven years old and asked my grandmother
if she was afraid
to die. no, Sandra, she said, I am not
afraid to die.

* 

this afternoon an airplane’s rippled shadow passes
slowly across the sky’s only cloud
(the rolls are finally developed) and there is a picture
of me with my arms around a mule
and there is a picture of a little red fox.
I look a little younger (already) looking
back on that small forceful space
the size of a shutter or pupil
filling with so many images
the only word is ‘life’ but even
that small word would
burst the eye
the way a pregnancy
is painful with color

* 

evening fell
suddenly on the Chesapeake
like anguish.
the way anguish falls from the throat
to the belly. the humid stars chimed
like copper bells.
there was something that I knew—
something simultaneously heavy and light
like the smell of rotting wood.
did my grandmother lie to me
in the garden between the translucent lettuce and drooping eggplants
or was she unusually brave
    or was I unusually weak? and it felt something like the pain of the bones
as they widen and lengthen under young skin.

*  
evening—
    the hour of the jackrabbits
bouncing around the mossy headstones. there were stones I had to read (again and again) intrigued by them— the girls that died young

of cholera of scarlet fever of yellow fever of a simple flu one cough and you were, you really were I could only hypothesize the causes kindled the imagination, darkened the soil, the sky, forked the thoughts speculation as a kind of answer or wish:

if we were going somewhere
then there would be ghosts and stars if they were going somewhere.
Young Girl Seated in Graveyard, 1932

The stone was held high, like a head
and the white weeds—
stubborn knots contorting the square
frame of the shed towards diamond-shaped. The trees took
to the flame, midway between dry
lightning (the sound of mashing gravel)
and dry clouds. Out of nowhere, a gothic
heat whistled through the fields
of soybeans. The lesson was plain

and simple: that grief could rust the pedals
of your new bicycle, that it proceeds like a red
throb through the lungs, the pulmonary
hours, the star-shaped valves
marbleizing the days so you couldn’t tell

which one was which
and it was awful because soil
gathered in unknown tissues and wouldn’t
leave wouldn’t ever
leave like the sun tarnishing
under heavy clouds.
darkens

and what could I do there
within /without the faint world will lighten will
shed its lightened world and then the grass
will not be grass will be not
grass again these hours slipping cells
weird cells slipping

hours I tell you this place
is where I learned

*

about time
or at least unlocked the arc
of thought the cement poured

on the rhetoric hardened
ideas flexed,

*

fixed like backbone
you say “nothing in particular” and it’s
true that it’s nothing
in particular that makes me think
of those who were missing
the letters of their names

*

like teeth
and as I walked
out into the steel
dawn—snow light,
dark, packed tightly into
the vacancy of the coiled
winter sidewalks no bridge
flickered home it was my first day
of freedom
so I watched the trail
of the jet's tail end fall seated opposite
the ocean and desire came slowly
and steadily down
like a drizzle
on the lyrics
then veering off
you say "nothing"

* you say happens
or happens to be about anything
because you use your intelligence
of language as a trap-door out
of your own" and I say "that's true
but I can never find
the stone to push so that the door

* will open
out of my mouth"
that long sentence soaking
up the sounds of the birds
pulling away this bridge, this sky with their sharp flights
November Grass and Snow

First, you wonder why there are no people in the streets and then you resign yourself to watching an empty birdfeeder sway in the evening light,

you resign yourself to listening. You say I never wanted to write anything down but then you wrote something down and the rest of the story gathers like little clumps of November grass and snow.

And there were winters as black and dangerous as patches of ice over asphalt. But all that is gone now:

Three deer are in the neighbor’s yard. One has knocked over the barbecue grill with her auburn body. They are eating from the bare tree. They must be content.
Saint Michael's, Maryland

The season has already gone to frost.
She's jugged gallons of broth. She's jarred jam. Shadows cramped then
pumped to the other side
seem to say, *The heart is not heart-shaped.* The ice around what has been preserved
sits tight in the ice box, in the shed.

I go out to get a leg of lamb and open
the faint scent of rusted shovels.
The ice-warped, wood dock juts out to the Chesapeake.
The hammock froze in the up—
swing. Well
water. Grandmother,
there's a place where I've ripped out everything.
It tastes awful. It tastes like rotten eggs.
notes for the insomniac

& even that dried-up shamrock in my sock drawer
is not enough to hold
back that backward thinking—luck, bad luck—
but never really saying

it was all pretense
it was all a way to tighten the threads

of this world I stay awake staring
down the blizzard-blue junipers, recounting
past lives— their long lists of desires
that seem like margins thrown
together & what

of these humble sparrows now?
I’ve spent all night trying to scotch tape their feathers
back to their bodies but it isn’t working isn’t working &
to think that people will do anything to have a piece
of flesh stuck inside them but
that doesn’t change the anything that people will do to have

love, I am in cahoots with my pretense
lately, though she hasn’t held up to her end

of the bargain

her little cache of terms (eggs) hidden inside a dream (nest)
I can’t open for the life of me (chest) never can guess what she’s thinking
& so it is that I am a mere secretary jotting
down her long-winded deposition: strings of grammar & oh her charms
& when I say “disabuse me of” she rolls her eyes
& to tell you she shall not sleep is to say she shall not wake
Dark Song

I went into night empty-handed
without dawn or day
to watch the sea
roll in its blue salt

I was urgent but unafraid

I went into day without light—the pupil’s
day—of mad weather
and low shell sounds, of boats

built to split
in two there was nowhere
but depth
so I kept on
kept downward
a beacon

flashed like a fragment
of a broken star
I did not see it. I do not see
anything

but liquid
in the eye
but confusion
in those inward hands
I used to swim
back to myself

sea-black as limbs
and tangled as the eye
tangled with colored light

captured like this I went into the chest
without so much as a word
of advice

where jewels might once have been found:
errors in my ears
errors for ears

the sense of sound: ornate, spiraled, descending: why

should the heart
drown in its own
water? and the skin of that water
peeling back
as night peels back
as we peel back

everything, every
thing.
[To Push the Sailboats As Far Away]

To push the sailboats as far away along the horizontal limit of lip
as a kind of sympathetic gesture to breath. If, if, to, toward. As a piece of seashore
sequestered by the pupil

and given the color of all traps beneath

the brow. Given the color of a mouth emerging from warm, summery
waves, to come as close to the veins of these autumn leaves and cell,

by rethinking cell

piece the tree from soil to branch, finch, city flown—
over like telephone wires cris, cris

when you say might________might
me through the pupil, the days dialing others, then shove out another
side, reshaping into an emergency

vehicle zero zero zero

over the surface of snow, skin, ripplebalance
to the edge, like this small town shoved against the mountain—

was the tumbling thick, through the yellow speckled iris

at last, or the out of season picnic basket

woven by the clouds
you exhale as if taking in
the world and just to let,

let out, through the surface, through
skin—gloom of two weeks
deprived of sun. As if you could put your ear to soil and hear a heartbeat,

but it’s all saddened now— as in migration, flown—
as in feathers or snow.

Now the skyscraper. Now the puny flower. Now the river

of headlights. A spring snow goes like milk into night.
DREAM CYCLE
caught off
guard by the seashore
of your eyes and they were saying
*I didn’t mean it* but they meant it all the same

pulled from the covers
of black dreams
or the cover
of dreams that blacken who I think I am

lone scream at an acquaintance wanted to hurt her
feelings wanted to cut
the break lines clean on the vehicle
*I know not what*

sinks me
downward through
the cold climate of my sleep
*I in this place I do things differently*

my eyes detonate
the organized life
my mouth
is a jackpot
of crimes
I commit
for free
requiem,
drown me
in the greenery of the afterlife,

the un-bashful
interludes of cruel sex

went through lengthy passages of
arched stone to find you on the stomach
of your emergency the delicate
soul detaching itself from your body like prying apart white light
into color

dream, send word
that I’ve called
for it is springtime and I am wary of new air
your body is a delicacy waved
in front of my needy mouth
you exist only insofar as you've been carved
from the strange
announcements
that roll
off my tongue

Lone
Wolf, I feed you on the nothing of my warped language, and still
you grow
hungry

mine is the refinement of a winter snow
mine is the afterglow of earth after rain
most unnatural
patterns of light:
pentacles upon pentacles of sun
god-given right
to your silence right to position yourself
beside me and breath down my night-
shirt right to show
signs I cannot
understand undertaking your gross neglect
couldn’t bare to be in the same room as—
couldn’t bare to lay my eyes upon your—

beholden to the sky’s foul mouth, the hours pass
in the pure
threshold
of your unease I enter sleep anonymous
and exit with an air of fame
was an amateur of the darkness thrust
upon me
was not terribly afraid curious, I didn’t think much
in the forward direction

was comparable
to the carcasses of months piling onto one another

of your claw-foot-tub
of your hardwood floors

dissuasion lodges itself
into my throat

now my own heartbeat
confuses me
dire need of the confectioner’s talents
dire need of confession

but you are not any sort of faith
somewhere between daylight
and drifting, there were underwater songs
there was a mirror placed before your profile
and you didn’t find
what you needed as if coming to a house after a long weekend
and sensing objects slightly
altered the dreams escalate
into the heightened
waves
of higher pitch the genius
of the ego is that it can be put through
any test
and still retain the most notable aspects of its personality
but the genius of sleep
is in its stripping
the sex embedded
in its moist skin
the things you didn’t even know
you didn’t want
disordered expression of desire cornered
by the scarlet frame of experience

I recount my life as it proceeds and in doing so
alter the present clearly, there is more to it than we know—
the wind humiliates the air
where will I be when you discover my torn tongue?
who will become the beneficiary of this morning?

from this vantage, solitude is before a bureau mirror
cressing herself telling herself everything will be ok
but as far as we know this morning will persuade her
to catch the earliest bus out of town
to extract the things she needs the most
and leave the rest behind
cannot live life in the present
tense conjugate experience
dream cycle, translate your meaning (into french)

watched the moon arouse the fields
watched the trees handwrite the roads into unspoken
truths:
alouette, alouette,
what is amounting
is nothing
less than a disaster between thrilling flesh

watched the underbellies of stars
the sense of words:
a backbone pressing through warm skin

watched the lilacs lose everything they had
and still not give up
BUT MORNING COMES INTERMITTENTLY
[with nothing save a ring]

with nothing save a ring

*

of light and the crisp
moon, movement of tongue, stretch
of letters all the way towards the softening

*

sun gives me glimpse of the emptying
out: and it's spring again, a spring of tender
shoots from the rust-red earth
through this landscape
that flickers (a little)
when the sun catches

*

leaves
your open mouth
shakes like candlelight
with wax, wick, breath, smoke, the gold

*

is gone the gold
horizon melts hills, soil and everything beneath

*

distilled skin these long

waterways we slipped with the hours of light left
and there were boats there that beat the waves like wooden hearts
[Winter is on its way]

Winter is on its way. There is a troubling. Like leaves in wind. Like leaves anywhere. The heart slams shut. Against weight. I thought you would drive me home forever. I thought you would drive me. I’ve packed my bags forever. The dumbest dreams panic before they die. Troubling leaves in wind. The sky absolutely white. To prove I love you would drive me home forever. The heart slams open. Weight against the sky absolutely white. Troubling leaves wind. Against this weight the dumb dreams panic. This weight against the heart slams shut. I’m going to make you a cake. I’m going to make you a.

Winter is on to prove I love you like leaves anywhere. I’m going to make you a cake. I’m going to make the open heart slam open. I’ve packed my bags. Winter is on its way. There is a troubling like.
Portrait in August

Summer came like a genius, unexpected, and without rain. Her painting was shorthand for a life gone south, a life folding back on itself, oscillating like corkscrews of heat between tall buildings. Days, she worked up her operatic answers in a solitude, posing in front of the antique phonograph. Evenings, the sky opened like a picnic basket revealing the checkered stars. The late hours were reserved for the gathering of friends with wine and lamb on her balcony underneath the smoke rising like spiral stairs from the charred bell peppers. She told me you needn’t feel obligated to carry any idea to its logical conclusion or give form to the fragile emotion of the hours cooling off. When everyone left she said I’ll paint your face to preserve yourself from yourself and she painted my face and I knew it was me.
Pacific Yew

Some think of graves but I don’t. I think of Oregon showers and papery scales.

Some think that they are going to live through every storm but I don’t, I know that there are whitish bands beneath the needles. Lift one up.

(Only the red juicy cups around the seeds are edible).

Look at the moist soil around the stream you once crossed but will not cross again. If I ask you to do me a favor in the fall, surely you will take care of it by spring?

Some think of graves but I don’t. I think of the debt in my torso that won’t let me sleep through the night.
[There is steam]

There is steam. There is fire.
Some shout, All
aboard but I call it
the push through
days. Not the forest. Not
the speed. Yes, the way to recall
forest and speed like silver and gold
coins. The chug
a lug. We buy and sell
and buy. We
bury. And in between—the trap of hold
my hand, the trap of must
breathe of no choice only to
clutch, but I do not want to but I do
anyway. No real
reason. None unreal either.
The tunnel’s weird
and stunning. At times
the beautiful shoved right through
your pupil. Only
nothing seems to
catch. Only leaves.
Leaves sped up or left
behind like green pennies.
On the way to the eye is an accident
on the way to the mind. Here
we go, the flowers burn
and bloom.
Tomorrow’s Bright Bracelets

Winter lungs are white trees.
Winter lungs are bare white trees.
There are no ornaments because this isn’t Christmas.

Put a silver ribbon in your hair.
Put on all of your bright bracelets and walk out into the feathered snow.
My eyes are pale like a crust of ice over a long river.

What would the gift-givers say if they saw us now?
What will they tell the world?
[a comfort]

a comfort—like a small crack in the earth. I know I am
the slip. I know I am lost
time. Meanwhile, a familiar
face. Meanwhile, the taste of sage on air, the taste of early
hour fog as it rolls. If I am at the edge
of the ocean, my tennis shoes squeak as they
fill, and I have been attentive to this tide. Like the last
moment that went further, further toward the ships until
the horizon wouldn’t let her go
back. Not the lungs filled with salt. Nor the earliest days
searching for sand dollars. The days
collapse toward this moment caught in sun,
the star I held up to the sky with my chilled
hands. Just to look. Or, just to take it home. No, just to hang
on to those things that move you—because you’ve moved
them. This is not a story. This is no poem.

This is the ocean at low
tide rolling-up like a scroll toward the chipped horizon.
aubade

into this body I become becomes every
     note, throat-tight darkness the moist scent of red
clay when the sun has taken the world back through
     exit, entrance and has left little blue globes
     of wet on leaves
     blessed are these mouths
     of this world —out from
     the body, the bed, move with the golden tree light into
dawn and the world is the color of a flushed cheek.
ends & beginnings

terminus— precondition to all thought
precondition to the alternatives we do not know how
to look
at these chalk cliffs pressing their hands into their faces
and if we could peel them off would there be a story
to end
all stories underneath?
your rose colored bathing suit
sags as you kneel down before ocean water
as though water were unbound

mouth—private space of speech
hold tight these words
that opt
not to remain
still like the seasons
imagine me opening
my own poem to let you
in like a mouth—the swollen fruit
weighing down the rough
branch of the tree
mouth—the right to remain
silent, the right
to counsel, to question

terminus—
end point

of loss or point of no
and yes

tear the apple
from the eye
do not separate desire from desire’s
[rough intent] we are immortal or we are nothing?
speak again (now within /
the flesh) do not lie to me terminus
— heroine of history
shed your exteriors
tell me what
you think of me tell me why

53
we were stranded here, in the form of limb, eye, lip
terminus— I want
to see
you naked before me do not tighten
your adam’s apple eve
eve of the eye
eve of undressing

went forth in the foul
weather
into the lone
descriptors
left without a plot
to touch or hang on to
the stranded hero
make do
contrive a knot
that will hold the sky
and sea together
your ship is a collection
of splintered anecdotes
that lasts from the tip
of the lung
to the shore of tongue
into atoms of air
sing me a song
sing me a song that goes

like this
terminus—point of no
return yet
returning anyway
into the dingy apartment where our child was born
the water that came
from the faucet
always like gray milk
always the same lime colored dust collecting
on the plastic curtains and the question was how
would we keep
our bodies
warm through the winter?
when the creaking of the floor furnace kept me awake
was it midnight? I left your side to watch
the slow trains haul their heavy cargo over the prairie’s gold

horizon
from the mouth—secrets
encrypting
or codes
mouth of machines
[no family]
mouth of heaven
would you take me
even if I did not want
to go?
—of the poem wild
with blue fire (went forth)
—of all that we wish for (went forth)
—of love
losing its
way and finding itself
in the face of another o
unravel this puzzle and tell
me what strange
country I have stumbled
upon what strange
terminus—we rise into mere-ness
underneath the “all of it”
a blindfold falling from
unknown sky
watch you sip green tea from the cracked porcelain cup
fingers curved around the painted violets the blindfold
thick and checkered [interrogate me]
and we have fallen too early living on the outskirts
of our aubade
true, there was lightning and true there was thunder and there is still lighting and
thunder merely making earth—a cracked
porcelain cup of flowers
steam rising from the knot of the blindfold why should I go
back to you when you
have forsaken me?
you will speak of me
why entrust me with such secrets?
you will speak for me
how do I know that you are not false?
the ear will answer
thunder closing in
(begin again)
(thunder close)
(went forth)
thunder undressing thunder

55
face to face
with the terminus
—final song

o sing out
of the mouth
unarmed
spare me the day
that only makes me long for more days
they say some do not sleep for fear they will not wake
and I am one of those

song,
guide me through all the days
of my life and never leave my side
and you, love, you also said that you were terrified
a spirit
cramped inside such small
quarters
fearful of the largeness
and I said yes, yes, we are all
orphaned who need pity
hold up earth’s drooped
wings with you fortress of words
and never stop holding
and when I have left you know
that there was love enough
but merely not time enough for
swiftly goes the center of all things
swiftly goes
our little world

its center breaking like a wave onto the shore

of voice and swiftly goes that voice
Can no physician be found
amongst the charred hearts
and lungs, the cobblestones,
peddlers clothed in thin sackcloth,
bowls of soured wine,
tarnished cups, the numerous
sands of the seas
that thrill and quiver?
And as she read to the people
that dwelt by the great salt
waters, he said cut
out their names with the scribe’s
knife. And the only source
of light was from the wounds
of the carved letters that looked
like the branches of the olive
trees that threaded through
their towns. We shall follow
the path of our oaths that curl
like the lips of our land.
Whose name means all is well
when all is not well? Then,
there was the moon—
that silver breastplate
smelted to their hearts.
[dawn over the next day]

dawn over the next
day in a short-of-breath cell
tower. dawn on plasma, dawn
on steel, o radiance.
dawn the poor
meadow of collapsed
flight and the body in waves
of wildflowers and the body
on the edge of the leafy
forest creeping up to
the seaside pouring
through the forest.
she says gravity can pull
and taketh
away. all this from my tower
swaying back
and forth like a pendulum
of homesickness from whence
I came but recall no
crime in the dawn
filled cracks of cement
the shape of lightning.
nothing but salt
left on the insect’s
black shell and inside its
shell a futuristic
architecture of pure
feel that we needed thousands
of buckets to remove the world
from the world
and paint the walls
with the milk of the stars.
but morning comes intermittently and I’ve noticed
the grass yellow
over the course of three months—so they had to install a sprinkler
system and I’ve noticed that you laugh more
than you used to or maybe homesickness
is a more shallow place in the body than we originally
thought maybe the shadows
recede over time thereby
eclipsing our previous notions of place
caught in a terrain

*

where you couldn’t distinguish
your face from the expression on it
the colors so unusual here
harsher I use the word ‘imprisonment’
yet, less mysterious blush on rock, of rock, thoughts of
our cities dwindling

*

lost in the sadness
of the song’s necessity
I caught a glimpse of someone I knew
and the lesson was I knew nothing
was for sure
but the word is framed
by other words this feeling that what little center there was is now
urgency

or an ailment
how the lips
accept their fate begin to relax around the unknown
(a) that my errors

*

were cumulative like thickening clouds
the pressure of the seasons piling up towards
autumn creating this place inside my body
that couldn’t be filled by these words:

"how disgraceful"

cannot face myself for fear that I will turn into
what I’ve become

and you knew that it would be a long time before

you could write these things down but morning
comes intermittently and we cannot hold one another without
thinking

*

conclusions— all different colors,
all brilliant, all well-
thought-out like the center
that kept moving away
from our disoriented voices

and you felt that what was happening wouldn’t last long
because nothing in your life ever lasted too long

but we were mistaken about

everything like poor predictions of bad weather

and it’s all the better if we don’t exactly know one another

*

so I must say un-
voice me. peel
the song away from heart
and my lungs. there is nothing I can do
to hold
myself back. now
more than ever.

o un-voice me.

do not say a thing.
Is this knowing,
or is this knowledge?

knowing, and its wingspan is vast because it is
the only place the body wants
to go, because you are
the only home. the only body between
what I know, wish for, and what I have found.