Cautery | Poems

Addie K. Palin

The University of Montana

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The Cautery

by
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presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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Towards Desertion

The only person alive drinks coffee laced with cardamom, afraid to let the stereo go silent—though in the train yard locomotives continue to idle, snow falls against the switch booth irradiant the last illuminated person draws a bath, teeth grown voluptuous scour chaff from the granary floor—chatterer tin-lipped in the stirred water tries to coax them in a calling voice but the mountains ground trains beneath their pitch, switch lights flicker over the uncertain last person—still there is a vague sense of it, rotting in the empty mines—the heart takes off through the night’s backwards mathematics as the body, memorized tries not to disappear.
one
The Town

was slow to rise up
in my throat but one night I woke

and there was a thickness there,
The days became a matter of finding

objects through stale air and dull
I kept picking up the wrong

knife or pen, I set the loudest
discs into my stereo for breakfast

kept losing the cat.
No one kept tabs

on me though I lost entire doors
to other rooms and spent

afternoons surveying with my palms
against the wall. The newscasters

said it was fire and one night I did see
the distance enkindled but thought

the town might be shamed
or fugitive in calling itself

a city when it heard me
unbolting the door against a stranger.
Isolate

So you—shy, away—with delicacy
call out the shaking in your eardrums.

A loud city you will not leave it.

I have in my absence witnessed bodies
unbathed, a man walking toward

no relief to be seen, particles
in a loose roil, faster ones—

A tongue left rusted and dry
does dissipate. If I promise you

a gallon container
and the fluids of the body

will you set out on foot.

Across the continent to the tavern
of rectification. Unto

my bright wheat body in its arc
against a sky of saturate ash.

I, too, have seen pigeons dying.
Women watching at the window

with their mouths painted shut.

If I am lying when I write
the city is my desire it is not

a city but a circumference
of misplaced lovers blinded
by smoke, circling 
unfamiliar houses in their panic.

It is asphyxiation and the women 
will not put their mouths on me.

I wait in bed for a bus 
to send my fingers screeching.

You sleep with the subway 
shuddering beneath your pillow 
under your arm. It could be the thing 
which takes us both, but goes no where.
Somnambula

Though no one can say if his eyes
are closed or open, glass or
grain, or if what he sees stretched out

before him are the buildings
or a dream of buildings, or a map
unfolding away from him like a leash.

If an insect breaks under his heel or night fish
skim his legs, if he follows the blurry constellation
of a sleepless man’s eyes toward the incomplete

architecture of horizon—the morning
improbable—the navigation circling him
gently, blindly, from block to block, if the way

out of town is also the way to the view of
the town, or is the way to the next
town and the highways are silent so he

frightens the deer grazing there,
he will recall these things only through
the haze that makes even lifelike dreams

indistinct. A taste of ashes in his mouth,
though at least he is in his own bed.
Sediment sifting from his clothes

—though at least his clothes are dry.
Was I kidnapped, fireman-carried
through the valley, was anyone

up at that hour? Can the cattle in the fields
verify? Only the insomniacs know.
But the insomniacs will testify.
Repeal

But through which
door unclear: bedroom, backporch, the front
with its trick knob—
what—on your
staggered face, all that apartment—white
on your darker lashes—one missing—how close to be
counting—rapidly drying
white—how
are you going to apply thinner
without going blind? sign on for one—ride—just one
local district map smacked, beneath the hand,
before the harbor—want—
another strap, don’t
go kindly, bother with the redder, collar,
wine, inside of my
inside—come up in the headlights—tomatoes
pulped against a wall, what, safety red
line red—alewife porter charles/M G H, a young
woman screams out each stop as he
smacks it—
adumbrate your ears, return to, ride
into the city, railroad the city, you can turnstile, diesel
as busses—come to a stop twice as
hard, twice as anonymous—having—abandoned quarantine
vigilant though un-
sick, this will, full displacement of wool
things where the sky was once convincing.
Strikes Past

A man sharpens knives under an awning
out of the rain. I count the sound of two teeth

    in his head and one dollar
    for a kitchen knife, two for a

scissor. Basinal press
of thunder but no umbrellas popping,

    newspapers. The hands
    have fallen away

and through the windshields
of the slow cars beginning to turn

    on their wipers I am seen
    and serenely steered around when

someone rolls down his window and
offers me an umbrella, someone

    approaches across the oily macadam
    and expectantly wipes my face.
Cicatrix

Not held by the chin. Not blessed. Who wouldn't want a duress of tongues, dermis of asphalt—lips gone fervent circumscribing bruises—skin, the lack of skin—were we mistaken, where did I leave that half-smoked, broken wing? If somnolence raised, flooding the cells beneath the cells, beneath the body—beneath beneath a sheet—metal—hammered thin, beneath a tailgate, across any palm—

t-sized claim we make for what gashes, mends, there would be no map—no circuitry absolutely—not even the memory of damage by the bluing of morning—suddenly aware of the room suddenly face first against aversion—
cup my palm over my mouth,
catch abrasion—and convalescence, what of raveling or the speed at which you brought me here as a small flood—the cells—teeth intact, teeth pulling up from the shoulder, chin, buzzed by dark insects, a grist of stingers in our lips.

We were set upon by these repetitions.
Currency

The phone did not ring last night,  
was not its receiver.  
Nothing covered my ear, unless—  
your mouth. It was silent and I was not  
waiting. There are no telephone poles to  
the motorist. Copper wire,  
land-line—coil—current—all solder  
and surgery. The sound which wants to return  
returns rimmed mercurial, returns hospital.  
Tap—the wires—  
Cut—before the voice—but the voice  
has come and gone.
Currency

I have to answer

to something—possible for this to duplicate: strobe of siren-lights
uncountable particles of glass—the direction of each
already photographed. I hear
light becoming its negative and think
there is no reversal, unless—the wire cutters have left
their place, tool box among the metal utility—

satellites demise. All along—have been expecting. Unbeknownst
the phone to ring—all night—dreams of answering
those are long threads—unspooled—which gather birds—
Currency

—birds—lightning—all impulses
dial them. I want to reach
everyone at once—when I—and don’t care about the falter
of static—treesfall—an open line sounds the same as
a hand cupped, the dish of ear—or what teeth receive
in their fillings—magnification of hum, the making out of words, echo
of desperate acceleration—someone rushing toward me—vehicle—
someone, hands clamped up, running away.
Vestige

Detained by the bitter, engines
cue and await their dismissal. As we
all do. As we are all eager to depart and drift
through the augers of exhaust, vagrant
monoxide of the living world. To that
end we alternate: drag, sip—drag, sip—
what harm it can do is done
quickly, before the record skips on its
predictable note, before the neighbors
return to intervene. In our haste
we abandon decorum, leave sheets
torn into patterns, even the vinyl
scratched in a radial star.

*

The box elder was brought down
by ice last night. The pipes froze,
even the whiskey. We all want
in on this, even those of us with nothing
to wash at the end of day. Those still
scrubbing marks away stop scrubbing.
Let the wound be louder than a branch
falling on a tin roof, let, in the a.m. hours,
lovers arrive shivering at their lovers’ doors.
Packed nothing but the stereo. Packed
nothing but the bar of soap that couldn’t
save them. The spice cupboard
entire, the Tenniel print.
Here to stay or not but in need
of a little mend. As if they were a cuff
or a fence, as if they came into fray
when leaving or when left.

*

How do we notify the house of its
death? Easier to unplug the phone, call
on the body and its safety. In time the bed
remembers us, eventually we all stay, unable to repair, for fear of what we will find there: Birds converged on the lawn at twilight. Starched clothes off the line. Arms brittle and the intimate folds.
Quarantine

Applied starch and iron equal. A predicate
to a body never gummed a bridle. Tablesponing
calomel, lost teeth in the first apple—
quarrenden of canines. Cold gums, sharpened
gums, the silver soon bent. All porcelain turned
quartz. Mouthful toxemia of taste buds and tonsil, belly
amalgam in blood and bleach. Seen contagia on the slope
through a thin red shirt: Ruddy grasses scorched
loud. One carmine flower spiked. Wasps
in no leaves only the intricate burrows of
cuffs on your processional. All will fall pale by
separation. Clot and serum. The shirt removed—
entire contours of wheat, dun, darkening blue
smooth as river stones.
Your knees, river stones.

Across the valley
there are foothills identical

only absent
of anything small.
Proof

Lovers, gratified in each other, I am asking you
about us. You hold each other. Where is your proof? ~Rilke

Strung up in the aspens where
the sheep divides its gaze between us.

Beneath the goosedown, beneath flannel and corduroy
soaked honeysuckle.

Proof in requital. In the ear,
in the station of the collar,
on the lid of the cup. Survived
through a summer of scorch

as a pine needle caught in a gutter.
Rough proof.

Proof on the north-south axis: our proof falls in the hour
of assembly. Proof

in my lean toward the east.
With our backs in the air, thunder cradled

across us. We rode our proof through a parking lot
in a long white skid and swerved

the wheel. Disappearance of the metal circle
proved by: circumferences capable of

hands we came to in absence of God, attrition,
proof's constellate of disapproving

viewers at the curtain's open choke. Proof in wasps—
shy proof, coy proof. Simmered in a pot

with hot peppers, clove, proof
will be salt by summer. Hurried by proof
through husks of cicada, seedpod, day-moon,
we have lost sight of the question—

a crimson sound—some gathered,
some on their knees—
Bath-Charm

Watering not my eyes
for a boil, redden—to do
distress, to open open,
weigh more.

Thirsty as I was for
eucalyptus, took
one glass red wine three
 tumblers rye—
      sweet and sour I—
      rolling over, onto
or down a long slosh

heels first, knees
thrust, lashing—
came to rest
    in the porcelain gully
      of the belly.
Where should I have stayed

my anniversary month—
    would have rucked
and puckered
before I unnoticeably iced
aged apparent.
    But came up instead
sputtering, un-
    intelligible,
guttural in my
microscopic detritus:

All kill
    I seemed to say fell call—
which was taken for
Palms here.
    Under which the ribs—waterlogged—
thought to collapse.

Nothing
   with which to mimic the cock
but hands—two: Ten
   fingers and the bar
   of lye
   under which to burn
and extinguish repeatedly.
I was expecting to be slippery—
   that much is true— though not
   to also disappear,

as the fingernails have to.
Water gone opaque as milk
   and twice as thick,
rising my lesser
   particulate—
   floating me
through plug and drain and pipe
   to a greater, darker basin—Send up
something easy now, that I will know
where it should go—before—my whole
sodden
   sleight-of-hand grows sore.
two
Proof

Prepared departure—journey—my sentient
west for have always been unfaithful
in the manner of leaving—not shy-
sly innocent (sheets caterwaul
the city’s devout long howl)
& drew my laces together, my stays, muff
tightest—all the locks and keys
that I could relinquish—sticky turn and pull
now foundered between mountain-
mountain sets of ugly bridges—where
headphones—wear—alacrity
last year’s man for sung the song
red scarf hung—pink
in age of avalanche—about to commit
seasonal atrocity, instead
pulled the truck to safety—to wet sounds
retired: undercurrents of love in the
bed dog on its bone.
Egressor

Sent walking but walked in
place. Trains unable to cross at intersections
guard-arms frozen erect. Even
hard birds, carrion birds could not

lift into the trees. Let alone the sky, which doesn’t
want your face upturned, your tongue
arched nor is it sending anything down. Still
so much accumulating

underfoot and dirrying. Snow making its way
into my mouth by the fistful
never melting. Packed—
until inside a perilous distance

to travel. Nothing before my eyes for
so long made witness to a plate
breaking inside your chest. Struck
with the axe kept bedside for hewing through

the thicker screens: it might not be
me after all—a man on a cot
in a warmer climate raising his fingers—your
tires unsalvageable—leave the sap-riddled truck

up on blocks and begin your backward
pace. Eye on eye, single
knot in the door, distant chrome gleam,
ready to turn for my having

discovered which hand holds what
in the corridors,
raised in unison forefingers, beginnings
of hymn, speech

a muted ellipsis of alarm unattended—still—water
damage on the wall, chapped cheeks
flaying, thaw. Soon the ground
enough for burial.
Fumigatory

And no one is permitted to start, roomfuls of noxious air, allover nobody's empty hands. Carpet stains arrested in spread from the door. Likewise all furniture, no furniture. Stripped of mattresses, their ticking of coils and polyfibers incinerated, iron bedframes interred, replacement linoleum brushed stainless steel that never heats though not underfoot, laboratory appliances sterilized, walls repainted with lead and phosphor, the hospital seemed always sick at night with the color of itself. Less so the concrete fixtures built in the planners' optimism: parking garage and self-storage uniformly grey, at ease with other objects unclaimed among them: lusterless cars, disintegrate boxes collapsed around their absent contents stirring no dust, padlocks secure but rusted unfit while their keys grow corrosive in the new air.
Hyperopia

It's not the intensity of light, slick absence of particles. Or increments numbered by \( x \), the possibility of peering inside the thing to view the backside of its exogamy from that perspective.

It is the maneuvering. Imagine your tiny knees drawn up, the clicking of the scopic dial. With lengthy silver tweezers the thin curved ends of which will barely touch you, I must administer a gentle rearrangement. You are a small thing surrounded by precipice. Should my lashes screen across the lens I might mistake \( th\_\_\_r\_\_\_r \) for \( th\_\_\_e\_\_\_r \) and posit limb for organ. Not in the ocean, but possibly you could still abide underground, one flexing frantically in the other's place.
Compressor

On its metal swivel a magnifying lens through which thickly and
doubled from this angle your menace of bristled pores, red
language in each white of the eye. Trays gleam around you but I am
drawn to the tiny eyedropper imbued by light and frangible
shine, its want of shatter. Blown glass and rubber stilled on black velvet
inside the shallow precarious drawer. With prospect I come
pressed to this and when I stare down at the cement floor with its scorch
marks I am clear on the labor between forefinger and thumb, the pinch-
work we must do by the hesitant bodies in the ward, the rough scrapings,
tourniquets endured, and am I polished as you are not, cylindrical and
silver enough to enter—something—to fist and cool in its place?
New Circulatory

To trick you it begins to imitate
you, want of lungs and the complex
network of tubes within. Put your thumb to it
to keep it quiet, crook your index finger

around the back of its pewter skull
and rub. Its head is no
smooth thing. It is not silk
or a flower petal, not

a polished fingernail. It is less
like the sound of hissing than those things,
it is more like the sound of bones
compacting, tiny breakages, teeth

crowding. The tail—
wants to be an S, wants to please—
a vicious hook, not smoothed
in a surgical way but hewn sore.

The mouth—sends its tongue out
to circle the hook—has been
cauterized. Against the tension
of expansive jaws, its head flares

and tapers. In the hollow of the human
throat the cold metal settles at
points on the skin of the neck, slowly
warming, the leather tight enough to make

contact all the way around, the smell
slightly—warm salt, porous
rot—insistent,
it modulates

the breathing throat:
shallower—so as not to put tension
on the grip, rapid—the clasp pricks
the larynx. Then the small muscles adjust.
Cautery

What it felt like when you went in: solar.
My inner wall thin filmstrip made to rupture

and bleach before the bulb. Skin—retract from
and reform, blister over organs, sear

off endings of nerves, render me ocular.
Iris and pupil. Corneal speech.

I saw splinters spray from a sleight of hand.
The ceiling a low ghost of smoke.

Almost reached for a glass of water.
To put you out. Scrawl

of urine in the snow, your night-
arm arcing over. It is too late to admit the scar

raveling, the cardiac map of tissue and char
issuing above my ribs. I will only diminish

silent with the heat of you
welding myself to myself.
Portrayal with Critical Objects

Not of an arson but an extinguishing,
In which the torso flails apart, in which
her stomach and breasts are exposed by the blast.
The eye has one second to remember
the lash of hose across her neck from which
her head is thrown back.

What we make
of her face we make in tight scribbles, we dig
troughs in the paper. The troughs fill with water.
From below the unready splay of her thighs
something approaches for its nightly drink.
At which the aspen turn sap-wise in the eddying smoke, an eagle rescinds the asylum of glare.

What is feeding? When the gone animals arrive to make their immersions, all may see me watery, green arm grown a long stem of bruise and teeth scattered down, small white seeds disappearing—having already jumped into the lake, having cost all—even fever licked into ash. Gills will swell from their necks and the incisors of the fallen will sustain us.
Always grinding leather, aluminum granulated openly. Eat careful up, sole encoder of my mouth—licked, ignorant allegiant. Beware the cloy and thick—tonic, lozenge—whole steal of swallow. What secures then clears: supple planks, sinewy wilt.

It broke over my bone-pile, I fell off my chair. For could not double then in leer toward the rum-cake, custard, wanted but the lard-spoon clean and in my fist distortion’s fitful reprimand. In brief seconds without you my palate grew effete. Lulling me to sleep with your tender mastication.
She put pins in my fists and sang
she put the familiar spool in my mouth, I pushed
my thimbled thumb against my eye
where there was a small fever
in my vision I saw three of her—or four—
there was a temptation to name each image, instead
I made more noise. Was I also
multiplied? Could I have kept
all of us together without my needle and trammel?
We surfaced with shattered knees.
I placed the snorkel over my eye
so my eye could breathe.
When the first organism was left
in the sand after the first wave pulled back
with the first tide you were there.
I didn't need a microscope to see you.
You grew a spine and leapt into my waiting
mouth, the mouth left unsnorkled which filled
with water that could keep you.

When I spat you out, you had wings. You flew
into my hands. With my many hands I held you.
Joy

In the webs between my fingers,
nothing, beneath my arm—various small stops.

You thought it was my tongue
that held it, but you could not tell its difference from a rough rock.

Woke me for my hard kisses and harsh suck.

The real tongue—my joy—swatted flies from my
philosopher. The joy tongue never fasting, the frenulum never lifted

in prayer. The tongue in its joy tasting red meat, pickles,
licorice on the sly. Interpreter of other mouths: nipped, fastidious

infidel. Over long months with you my jaw grew
heavy, then strong. Longed
for the river bottom and would not cease submerging.

Because you were hungry you wanted to put
everything in: copper pennies, a spoon, your corduroy
erection, while my eager tongue took to the rails as if
pushed by a body on its knees. Then the joy

of freezing there, thaw, return
to the philosopher’s armpit, acrid joy
lifted. You do not know, you cannot

know—how a rough hair fastened at the back of my
tongue can make me balk with joy.
Railyard

I thought the world went easy—easier—without the daily scrape and grunt I drank like a girl buckled my buckles the fence froze shut and asked nobody to fix it it was February when my body scented licorice woke the trains walked with them in lack put my lips together silently on my smooth thumb-nail painted silver for the occasion of vibration and led myself unnoticed in prayer

Junked cars mattresses stripped to their ticking reamed-out engine blocks all of these piled against a corrugated blue this is not a landscape for its own sake this is where I need you to take me endure the freight cars’ crash let the wind carry the sound the sprung seats shake—our bodies uncompelled to move in their usual ways choose to be flung together coupled by another kind of disaster which is necessary to keep the mined cargoes heaving east where you cradle and rail—

When will I be rutted from behind? where will I be led by my impatience for the alizarin distance the machine of the multiplied body then the crows hatched the last ice cracked the house you were living dish—chicken—desk— all split grew up in you like weeds without discipline come summer ponderosa husked my body with their smell thick and hungry I put my hands on the ground first—then at my throat.
Remission

In unfiltered light, bodies are their shadows traveling brief beneath them. Sage, mesa—nothing shifts into foreground though the bleached road is pocked with mile-marks indicating progress. Perhaps a small lift in the angle of vision’s sweep from top to bottom, a less-distant smell of shade. Over bone and ochre the low-lying scuttle, twining across the desert toward a place to stay for the night, radio loud but no amount of volume scaring birds into the birdless sky, no increment of movement but the grasses leaning in to the shade of the truck’s bigger belly, we watch all dissipate before formation. Shallow and deceptive, the air eats vision. Red boulders scattered through the sand may multiply or inhabit the eye’s blind spot, may appear as tall as a truck and twice as quick in their skitter alongside the road.

When the rocks hold fast, then hold to one another loosely, the weighty balanced on the fragile in stacks of twos and threes, we know we have come to a rupture strewn with geologic anomaly. There is one signpost but no one filling their lungs on the hot thick air, traveling nervous beneath these massive monuments, no lizards, no hollow insects as we scuttle, back and forth across the desert floor, palming the smooth cool undersides of giant rocks, brushing the orange particles, pushing our noses into the dark hidden crannies where there
might be sweet air, a draught, a current and taste like icy water, burrowing and scraping into something

always in shadow in a place where nothing escapes the sun, where clothes come off a body

on their own accord and sweat is already salt on the lick of the skin—made of two lungs

scorched and stretched by the molecules’ frantic trajectories—where you could disappear

in a gasp, the puncture of insidious venoms, the air simply closing up around you, erasing

and replacing you with the image of what was there before or what we want to see when we

look: gushing fountain, ocean, chill relief of stone with a permanence less tenuous than our own.
Rearrangement

With what I walk into the room balancing out as an offering, not for any one of you, this bone-shape with sockets askance. You still think me of the west but I have sworn to stop crutching, nothing to privilege now but this and you want to tap the slat and make it chatter, though I no longer need the sound as I no more need charcoal in the linens or the gas-line leading up to the house. When one thing is fixed, we call it fixed because we cannot call it erased, and for this I am always in mend, more in need of stitch and bandage than this skull nailed to board, which is by outward signs in deteriorate sift behind us, by inward hinge all oleum and plainspeak.
Restoration

Would that there were nothing left to write, for I have
given you my cities—and still unfinished of you—pigeon,
swallow, postcard—you always in black ink, and for you only I am adept
at foreground, coming onto the page with my delicate
corrosives, lifting each layer of recession until sistinal,
and though you realize
this is a beckoning, a come to carve you out of exiguous landscape
for purposes of my own resistance to—confinement,
quiet, these more gradual verticals—it is not without trouble
in rubbing too long with the soft rag, exposing what was reasonably
concealed until in danger of most complete annulment, under which
the gaze creates its own might not—be human, or of
a scape or even—any articulation—this then, is utterance
undeniable, lest you forget I, I—

blank—nothingness—called white.
three
Itinerant

Suspended over the city, bird-thick cables
thrumming, imperceptible—
a unisoned lift—another’s housed machines

litten up. Settle, lift,
settle, bird-

* call, static in the cornfields.
At the hand pump, steady gush
of dial tone, behind the barn—the man needed
to build a burn pit for the unspoken,
unwritten documents, but there was nothing to ignite.
He should have spent the night in silence
but could not resist the tinny radio at the foot
of the davenport where he listened to traffic-weather-
traffic in a city she was not once

* of, sitting on her itchy fingers next to the few
powerful engines that would not
require electricity. The wire-cutters
with their vibrant yellow handle seemed to jump
across the table in blinks until all
at once at dusk she was intoxicated
by their sour rubber smell.
Even in the complete dark she could
not lose sight of them, for to fit
them in the thumb knuckle
and crease between the palm and four
fingers she would not have to wonder nor imitate
the thousand others awake in rooms lined
with indistinguishable quiet

*
objects.

An eruption of starlings in the late evening sky, how he imagines traffic. He switches off the station before it leaves the air and seizes the light-switch. Great swallows of darkness

*

down the throat. There is nothing he would not if he had the chance.

*

Shapes drifting past their windows, windows lit at night for the watching, walkers circling blocks hands occupied with cigarettes, small candies while their eyes scan for other stories—velvet curtain, cerulean wash of television, faint argument, or a man smoking on a stationary bike, streamer half-clung across a cracked ceiling—

Sometimes she is among them and her exhaled smoke threads across the sills, or she watches herself being watched, their peered-eyes moving past her own darkened diorama

—nothing to see, no souvenir—

all the room’s silence pressed up against her back and in winter the muted street unable

*

to connect through glass to her—

though in a field a plow turns dark earth over to the sun, unexpected gleams in the soil draw crows— there is heat, there are the rough clicks of turnstiles, the grating ticks and catches

*
unwilling to pull through, complete
their greater turn without the body’s exhausted

momentum. Late at night the trains cannot come and the crowd’s
accumulated restlessness gathers up around her. The nervy toe the platform edge, some

set their shopping bags and briefcases, bouquets and bottles around them
like fortresses, or turn
up the volume on their headphones

and the inbound trains repeat until dawn across the empty track.

*

Exhalations, long and frequent—
and some women darted their tongues behind their lips.
It seemed too much built up
around her, though she did not know she could

*

be without. Was enough—

brick sides of buildings and shaken

ground, pigeons

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in the alleys beside the bars, all nights
a gingery sweat on her—

enough: to identify
one bus from another and know which muscles
keep the knees neat,
or how many steps are in a given flight
of stairs to a given entrance if she

is closing a circuit so the city can light and reflect

*

out onto the edges of its waters, the elevators can carry

43
the late workers down to the street where they become the night’s revelers or else deflect her glance, when he is landlocked

and the August storms strip the hum from the power lines so he loses sight

* 

of his hands entirely,

enough that she pockets small instruments that might double as letter-openers, map-readers, leaves the apartment in electric light unable to predict an arc of sparrows seeking refuge

* 

will die against the glass, while the man pushes sweat back off his forehead, eases off the couch and holds his bladder until the morning’s smoke is rolled neat, wants to see—without missing—but can’t walk out on the nursing elder sapling on the southeast corner, the dust gathering on the bureau, on an open jewelry box filled with penny nails and lug nuts, metrically sized and rusting things—enough

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time spent passing over the northeast corridor every time in red, in January snow, stalled cars and cars rushing by, headlit, sirens so loud she broke through them, wails of blue-yellow obstruction she paced a month away over and over the bridge a hallway, ice, exhaust, ice—enough—breathing clean river air through byproducts of combustion, because there were boaters on the river, thin cylinders slipping beneath the stone and slick asphalt, cars drifting toward the medians—
while underneath her, silently slipping for the river never froze
the boaters' breath—in what was entrance
and exit she was first and last to go, crossing a corridor
anchored under a ceiling of low sky

*  

with the lights of where she came from and
    further—though barely made it that far before

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they lowered the last bridge beneath
    the river and the peanut man stopped singing
    in the square, mannequins turned their faces away, no one
    was looking for her, no thing
    intimate—tiles on the station walls,

*  

twin silos, bank calendar up in the garage,

*  

holiday crowds congesting the esplanade, even the brass
    bar rail couldn't recall—
    there was a dropped brown coat on the street in April, someone
    did take it, someone dreamed aloud
so that the traffic lights changed, a third rail sparked.
four
Absenter

Having gone about it all wrong, this tending toward you. Was a brittle elder leaf blown up on the patio. Or less, cement, nothing of the natural world. Would endure my own absence in gifts to, which you received in your passage out of the yard. Without leaving trace of myself on your breath, was the laboratory's advance against erosion. Meanwhile the mineral-green lake. Meanwhile bone compacting on its rocky littoral, mottled wrist and elbow, even aspirin not entirely chemical—thought myself a clever metallurgist, amounts of pewter and steel though you retched,

though you were tested, entirely negligible. While you grew sharp in your smell—penny nails, pine under duress, stale lamina of tobacco on the oils of your skin, themselves coriander, vinegar—was swallowing the saliva boiled up behind my molar roots, then pulling wisdoms—having always been lured by intentional extractions: leaf from the tree, tree from the yard, yard from underfoot. How do you love me unrecognized, as estranged from my own name so that when you call across the snake-laden floodland am not even the snake, not even the fiberglass bias-belt annealing in the sun.
Notes

“Bath-Charm” is modeled after Dan Beachy-Quick’s charm poems.

“Remission” attempts to imitate the trespass of landscape that occurs in Elizabeth Bishop’s “At the Fishhouses.”