Neon is Trying to Tell You Something

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NEON IS TRYING
TO TELL YOU SOMETHING

by

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The following is the manuscript of my poetry collection, “Neon is Trying to Tell You Something.” This manuscript represents my development of poetic voice and style over the course of the past two years. In these poems, images accrue and take on new meaning, while still retaining echoes of their original connotations. This is how the speaker’s mind makes sense of things: evolutionarily. As a collection, these poems do not attempt to world-build or use their foreign landscapes as the driving force of symbol, but rather they use these landscapes as the essential terminology for their logic puzzles, their syllogistic reasoning. The result is an experience of the mind parsing its anxieties, doubts, and joys in turn, all with equal, attentive curiosity.
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I don’t cry to take the moon home with me in my pocket nor do I fret to leave her behind me.

— John Keats

At Stage III the reduction in scope of WHITE and BLACK continues and a new category emerges. This may be either GREEN or YELLOW. GREEN normally includes English yellow-green, greens, blue-greens, blues, and blue-purples… At Stage V the focus of blue emerges from the GREEN area. GREEN now becomes green. At this stage, BLACK and WHITE are fully reduced to black and white, that is, to neutral values. The RED area is probably also reduced, losing purples and violets.

Basic Color Terms: Their Universality and Evolution

— Brent Berlin and Paul Kay
Green
This slow unfurling planet

I feel the shift
of every coiled quiver tentacle
underfoot
willing itself blossomward
feel the rattling mucus breath
and sliding over and between
of rubbery arms
feel the soft rhythm the coarse
music of growth
and requisite resistance
there is a heartbeat beating and I feel it
as though it is the off-on blink
of some satellite turning
my eyelids black then red
I understand a tongue
can’t always taste like honey but
record the fading anyway
and the stretching petal desire is finite
not in tensile strength but in fact
of desire and I feel it
the sighing clutching grasp
everything it will be
unformed and in slippery pacing back
and forth ask for form
or path or shape finite and final
I spell it out
in steps
and feel a shudder of something
cinched tight— trying
On wanting to break zoology

From out of what mother-of-pearl placenta
this sense breached, a school of manta rays crying
at their lack of gull-snout, wing-wind, wiry
nesting tendencies

I will be your pocket alien, flannel wriggling,
alarmed gills practicing sedation
sedation practicing authentic breath
whatever means authentic anyway, a convertible

waxed to chrome perfection, heirloom grapeseed

would I have to rein in my tentacles?

Twist of licorice, liquid nitrogen and its haze-fingers
as if nothing is sufficient in grasp or grip
all amputated, the cephalopods of notebook daydream,
scrawled next to those transparent cubes

I drew dozens and the magazines said
this alternative to looping daisies meant I adhered
to order, structure, the way

Elmer’s glue adheres, as a rule, to nothing but skin

but how, when you feel like nothing but skin,
is one to undress syllogistically?
There’s something or nothing in the air

It had to be tonight, or else
the lake would raisin. Study
the snowy moon. I don’t
believe we’ve met, although

you shouldn’t believe
everything you read.
Fingerprints in tree sap,
matching. Incandescent

moss. I tell you I’m held
together by the will
of a fern who likes something
in my posture. Been watching

all this time. You say
that sounds about right.
And honestly, green
is your color— but brittle.

I trust it. I hand over
my fretful tolling sternum.
The pitches we reach, erratic
bliss. I’ll fetch you

any number of pinecones
or unspool at your feet.
Satisfaction of twig
and scrap. Convincing

flora. The birds all
breathe— however.
Without notice: green

Neither lightbulb nor narcissist,

nothing name-tagged: Steve.
These are all nouns — there
could be trouble. Adoring

a bubble capturing
light, gnats. The process

is more triple-berry jam, and
you’re short on sugar, and
lids don’t match, and

there’s sprouting. Tufting

and timid. Mid-air laughter.

Confusion and echo sticking
to the grass. Do I even own feet?

I’m handstand-traipsing through

your closet. I’m slow-sweet
blending in a mortar.

I’m blinking. Small grit.
You’re many widespread waters.

And the atlas just melts,

falling asleep.
Molting

I had been chewing my grapes all in secret when someone dropped me in your pocket prayerbook mouth. I’m not versed in these verses, their grist and tumble. Sanding eyesight. Someone should have thought this through, I’ve never been the kind of pinecone you can twirl in peanut butter and seed for the birds to battle over. This is a whole new coat of paint I’ve been inhaling. Hedge trimmer, rabbit scuffle, burrow: I didn’t hear the prowling of it. Soil sturdier than my piano cover, and I’ve always wondered about piano covers—let dirt and dust gather, opt instead the bassoon. Harp. Someone thought about melody and discounted harmony and neglected a chorus of frogs flooding pond with arrhythmia. Spermy squirming tadpole, let me plead my case: my legs are too short to stalk water-ripple, yearning electric scales. Accumulate sun-curse blush, only. I may have run out of blood. Someone decided air was my color and breath would copper me for brief seconds. See me, penny-stitched. A shredded napkin for your thoughts. A taffy sigh you stretch for six full root beers. Its echo on a toothbrush. Someone versioned me a cloud with red cracking ribs at the mention. In someone: twelve oceans, an assortment of pickle jar lids. In someone: twelve oceans, the makings of gills.
Desire in kingdom plantae

Unsure about life cycle: blossoms
yellow and plucked promptly,
video ribbon rewinding, a fabric

safe to bleach? Would like
to believe it’s a forest
of coffee bean trees. Vascular mass

tended, thick raindrops. Red
unexpected berries. Those practiced
in small revenges are patient

with harvest. A pit, a seed,
a stone — resting sideways
on your palm: foreign kind

of peace in that patience. More
than this scorching,
the you’ll burn for it heedless

of eyelashes. Would like to know
the film will not corrode.
Want waves of it, stirring leaves.
Letter to a houseplant

I envy your bright
sterility, green but unlikely
to encounter any bee. Slumped
and stroked, I wonder how
I could become uncoveted aloe,
a nectarless ficus tucked
between air vent and lamp.
I never wanted to overflow
fields beyond eyesight—
as much a matter of chance
as choice. Reluctant wildflower.
This lamplight and hardwood:
only way to unlearn seeds.
Tell me I should
keep the sun off my back.
Reminder that this isn’t me dissolving

Phyllo and prosciutto slipped between books. Three

of clubs slid down storm drain. Oh, mathematical.

Who’s ever tried sewing a tree back together?

Cripple needle, rusty pin. Lake in orange segment,

sweet acidic depths. Plunge. Even eraser crumbs.

Allowed to burn, watch embers kiss dust motes

mid-flight. Yes, fish is not scales, but scales scraps

of setting light flicker. Dark flash beetle wing. Bug, cloud

both remember rainfall through cotton-eyelet leaves.
Can’t I be changed, utterly, without being changed, utterly?

Realistically, the plaque is painted.  
Or engraved, or whatever it is  
we’re doing with plaques nowadays. 
What I mean to say

is there’s no knife sharpener. 
Or however you get 
a hot air balloon down. You must 
have had a mosquito bite 

that never stopped itching. 
Getting taller by salt, thin grasses. 
I grew into this pocket and pick 
at the stitching. But how it holds.
Counting, dividing by twos

Ask the good china how it feels about steak knives. Birds who mate for life,

despite. What is this hot glue gun urging? I feel it in my pinky toes the way

I can still feel my pinky toes. Blessed banjo-haystack union. Green-skin, sparkle-sacrifice.

Only I’m allowed to say it, fine drizzle of doubt over popcorn. Slick fatty heat on tongue. It’s like why rain when there’s chainmail rusting over?


Keep plastic flatware under sink, for emergencies. Discard the feather residue. Crisco sizzling skyward in a pan. With it:

this need. Until now. I am sure, though, I did not realize you necessary.
For FX’s sake

Remember how before CGI

you’d actually have to go film in the Alps?
The reason I ask is I might as well be

soft-shoe-shuffling up the Matterhorn,
yodeling for a fruit plate

from craft services. In the thick of it.
If I were a shellac-haired prince, I could

go door-to-door finding a face that fit
my face, a shining glass stunt double

we could cast and recast in a mold, this time
rubber. As it is, antsy for that avalanche,

the approaching pine. Computerize
my functionality, my reaction time

on the slopes. Seamless, my powder-swishing
hip sway. Why must you be so

anti-crash pad, disdainful of green screen?
The world’s made progress enough to kiss

sitting in separate dressing rooms. No risk
of static pop from the cold. Among other things.
If I said I wanted to startle you with honesty, would that startle you?

Not everything can fascinate.
Filled with the wrong kind of powder.
Not everything survives
like the whiplashed liquor bottle
flung for show. I am here to announce
I am here by way of excessive blinking.
My throat had been a Doric column until
the thing you carry with you came to hollow.
Marble-munching termite, drill bit.
I have held my melon-baller
in a careless grip. In the face of dishwater.
But then, some motivation that barreled
in, glistering. Searing green and white.
The replacement goldfish asks

Am I swimming with all the same verve

of my forebear? What uncertain times
these are, pebbles painted blue. And everything
circle: house and trajectory. I can’t

distinguish myself in dim water, the chipping

away of my grand plastic
castle. Drifting in flake, fragment memory.
I am the ficus in the corner,

I am souvenir hermit crab and everything

craving to thrive. I am dust
that was pollen grain and remembers
nuzzling petal. And would

crawl back to blossom. Yes, and shatter shell.

With everything, I’ll angle to the light
and the light will hit and the promises
I promise— to be radiant, to have you see— will be kept.
Which ones are the better instincts?

To stay reckless as seaweed, feigning tooth or tentacle.
Often cough salt, though never tongue it like a cow.

Clinging, pointed—to grasp

is one of the first things learned, but thumbless
for cycles. Like unsteady starfish, clumsy cartwheel.

I can only be like scraping barnacles, sticky remora.
Coated, wool and breadcrumb. But then there are eyelids like pink cowries.

Magnetic waves say yes, spinning the exact pebble.
Knocking the leg of the dock.
A secret of pith under red nail.

I embed and raise hackle,

for the house may become more paint than house, in due time.
Consume the fox mouth slowly

Is there such a thing
   as too much moonlight?

It’s a process, I guess,
like learning the quick step,
   sketching with non-dominant hand.

If I were a moth, I’d be quilting
   a new pattern for my wings.

Treebark thimble—
name me one bite
   of silver among the ferns.

But fingers click against each other,
   tiny woodpeck rhythm.

Nothing to maneuver.
The dark, slowest dissolving,
   catches of it left in acorn.

And there’s a whetstone that keeps
needlepricks of light sharp
   for long-dead stars,
   so I can’t trust anything.
Hydration is the least of it

Funnel cake and tunnel vision. You are carouseling around him every second and no wonder dizzy-down, drowning.

Enveloped, impeccable bubblegum. They’d call it something like the vapors. Eyeroll. But isn’t everything fogging gray-white? There’s not a lick of justice to it: this satin hibiscus, this wobbly tripod, this trademark. Don’t count your tickets before they’re hole-punched. Slogging through mud, cartwheel. The iron in your blood,

there’s no forging it, but salt could be practical. Dredge it from his neck after a morning run. Preservation and popcorn. Melting, crunching, molding, twist.

It’s like neon is trying to tell you something. It’s like you are trying to tell you something, all thousands.
In anticipation of a precise minute

Driven by the yes
that this will all, one day,
unstarch. Meanwhile, it’s gumdrop
after gumdrop;
passing dachshunds lick
my blistered heels. White
is not a color
of patience; I have learned
nothing. Squealing
bones, robotic jumprope bound
for knots. My sandpaper fist—
why never coiled
silk slipping
through itself, fingers.
Vaseline on
tangled links. I’m
spitting out panic
in sharp ice. Enough
to slice the flannel through,
          enough for piercing
ears, enjoying it.
Prove some principle
of oil, raincoat,
hydroplaning, the vinyl
after all— but still
          hold me.
What does it mean to romanticize?

Once again, unwinding

what’s caught
between boar bristle. A toothpick
dipped in gold paint,
fleck like mouse tears. I’m attending
to gaps in teeth and knowledge. Singing,
potentially. Have to be
coaxed in the sweet way

of coaxing: stick of butter held

in prayer hands. Know

that this isn’t the same as picking

through recyclables.
Nothing malicious as glass. Instead:
cold button.

Attentive residue. I’m undecided

as to the shape and size

of storage containers. Crave
a lake of it all, gnaw out my shoreline.
Portrait in journalism and wool

Q: And where are all the rabbits in your world?

A: Knife open a letter to cure joint aches,
   plant patches of sweet mint
   below your window.

Q: Letter like rabbit like violet rubble—
   there are places in you
   where kettles recite the names of planets.

A: Hum snippets celestial. The mint
   is for dreaming more dreamily.

Q: Wonder aloud who your fingers are,
   whether you consider all ten male. Do they,
   for example, wear epaulets? Trip up spine:
   explain a comet, leopard seal,
   chair missing one or more legs.

A: Leopard like letter like rabbit’s foot.

Q/A: Very much, confession.

Q: Does this shoelace remind you
   of anything— or, not.

Q: Would you let a lemon tree tendril inside you?

A: She matters.

Q: I will use the yarn to knit the alphabets
   that flood this canvas.
What is a world without fur?

We’d never thought in terms
of fathoms before, who’s inching along
the icy dark. Cold oil spill skin.
Identify the clothespin predator by imprint
of teeth left in ankle. If a wave wants,
can it tumble and tumble the same handful
of shells? Let’s praise the vestigial
hind limbs. Ode to blubber and baleen. Nothing
snagging, loose squiggle of wool. Slide
over, under, asleep in industrial fishing net.

Love being the desire to go whale watching;
such an exact ocean, its ratio of ghost
to squid. Glossy lunar gravity, the low moon
swerves. I could float like spray of salt
in the distance— spark.
You’ll have to live with that color, you know

I was trying to decide whether you were a bookshelf or a coffee table. I was trying to determine how much I could trust you to hold the things I consider non-perusable, to relegate you to the living room. Didn’t know you were made of oak, not cardboard. That you could withstand. But I was never one for testing compressive strength. I was trying to color coordinate and only make use of monochrome shades. Who could plan, prepare, find a place for so many varied blues? Sometimes you are every sky and speck of Blu-Tack staining a dorm room wall, every Robin’s Egg and Russian Navy. Because I wanted whitewashed and blacked out, I thought to nix you altogether, another junk-store donation. I was trying for the minimalist approach, all clean lines, slick edges, sharp corners. You’ve been sanded down. Lacquered. Lacking an eye, I was trying my luck. I was trying to leave you warping on a curbside. Be this bedside table, pillow, a full-length mirror, in spite of it. Forgive me with feather down. Don’t let me rust those screws and hinges. Not trendy nor timeless, not a must-have or a steal. Have stolen me.
Carbon has two main forms and honestly what are the odds

I’m not sure we
can rely on form anyway
in a bathtub
full of soap roses.
Remind me,
what’s a spine again?
The train car
chain of it always
clicking, winding.
I’d rather not dissolve,
not so far away
from the dustpan and so
surrounded
by complete orbs
of dirt. There’s a method:
be small, contain
the vital. Just
ask the forensic procedural.
But I have twelve
looms per metacarpal
and a hankering
for cake. A tangled
kite string but never, not
ever, a kite. Tying
together like raw
pork tenderloin. Tenuous
from outward pressure
of apple, pen caps.
In my ear:
cartoon sizzle of a fuse.
If I have learned anything about love it has been from your hors d’oeuvres-platter approach, your way of serving yourself in cubed and toothpicked bits with a breezy little laugh, oh, this? this is all I had in the fridge. No I know, we didn’t meet at that kind of party, but maybe I wish that we had. Isn’t that the only way to know each other intimately, seeing the exact shade we dye ourselves in contrast to the crowd? You, my sharp turquoise, neon and body-pocked from so many paring knives, always make yourself known. If I have learned anything about love it wasn’t from that boy who was a man who was a boy, or from the faces and ceiling tiles hovering above a crib. Every pulled tendon, splintered bone you went ahead and walked on was a lesson. Remember that party? More organ meat on trays. It takes a toll. We’re not girls people picture like girls, but we did stay up until dawn like you’re meant to, and ordered pizza like you’re meant to, watched meet-cutes on that 20-inch screen. That didn’t teach me much either. How terrifying it is to live as an X-ray, how fearlessly you walk around that way, your skin like a cobweb. You’ll never make a soldier, so utterly unarmored. If I have learned anything about love it’s been by noticing your eyes have a habit of opening incredibly wide—shocked by my suggestion that you find some shield to keep your body apart from the air, from the maddeningly thin air. Why do you throw yourself so resolutely? What do I serve of myself?
Prologue with endless nail-biting

The eggs you crack open are yolkless
and I know, we’ve been here before.
You will forget again until the craving
for antlers chafes kidney and windmills
crowd your living room. There will be
a living room, and there will not be
mud-black warren with its myriad exit
strategies, no sharp-gliding figure skates.
Ice clouds like blanched almonds.
Submit nothing in writing, or else watch
your feet morph into second editions.
Crave again, thin lightbulb. You’ll never
stop sweeping hair off tile or losing hair.
Nine out of ten agree that this life requires
binoculars, telescopes, but no grappling hook.
Exhale a bridge of cotton swabs. Onstage,
it’s a matter of Peachie Keane who flickers
glitter guttural, yellow sloshing in shells.
Prologue with apparently bone-deep anxieties

Tell me, as you scrawl with a Sharpie just left of my hip, will you be sure to mind your stitches? I would hate to be left leaking, a punctured tire, cracked mason jar of sea water. Would like to keep the majority of myself. I wonder even whether this suffocated ovary should have stayed in place; it may have held my conviction about the purpose of acorns or some other heart-deep thing. And now a biohazard. Strange how we can break down and shrivel in turn. How you harvested a walnut. You’ve cut so much now, told me later, woken, that I lost barely any blood at all. And I want all the blood I can get, so I thank you. I want the plasma that makes my eyes twitch, the platelets that make me laugh when he sneezes. Careful with those forceps, they’re pressing on my pragmatism. This room has a name I am inherently suspicious of. Oh, to remain inherent. Thank you for your time, consideration of my abdomen, for my iodine-stained skin. My body, sliced and sewn. As far as I know, mine.
Prologue with someone else

Even flowers—humble bluebell, ever-unrequited mums, tulip pleading believe me.
I can hand you this pearlwort, here, will this do?
I know my voice is dog-pitched higher
than those you tend to listen to. I know
you are a dog-person masquerading as a mother.
I am a cat-person who should never nurture
anything much larger than a paper cut.
Newton would lose his mind over us,
adore our equal and opposite torsos, how
neither of us has anything to do with elasticity.
There’s just two kinds of electricity, which ought
to tell you something. A lightning storm once
frightened your niece, we wrapped her in quilts
until her breaths could again be used
to tell the time. That was a joint effort.
I will cut you off before you finish the story.
And say nothing. I think we must be train cars
clasped and hurtling down a hill, there’s enough
momentum that the dragging doesn’t feel
so burdensome, though just you wait
until we’re back on level ground. Opened flat,
we are a recto and verso, we cannot know
what the other has to say without
a craning of the neck. A tulip stem
exerts itself to prop an overlarge yellow head.
I couldn’t find you growing in the field.
Only dandelions, dissolving spore by spore,
only earthworms and indentations.
Perhaps you are not blossoming at all.
The litmus turned out red

This meant I couldn’t love you. Suffice to say
we all know the ending to Orient Express.
   Reliable realization that I was an opal, now
I am a dead opal, charred like barbecue coals—

but only through a tear in the cloth
   bisecting now and then. Curious kittens
make for these fluffy dissections.
Portuguese explorers haven’t given it a rest

since 1418 and now contour every speck
   of this bell pepper I’m eating. Not too spicy.
   Prescience for this precious tongue. To adapt
is an unsplit infinitive as well as stupid, I say

while breaking in these boots. I’m sick
   of losing Post-Its to the coffee-splatter library
   carpet. Hint: they all did it. And now
my feet are blistered. You are wriggling

in the continental divide between my shoulders
   and I can feel you wriggling. Got me chewing
   on chalk, spitting cirrus clouds. Kids ask
why the sky is blue on hotdog Wednesdays.

I would like to shred my gym uniform, weave
   strips through chain link fence. Would like
   to water my turnips but can’t until I admit
every thing changed, and you changed everything.
Blue
Two thoughts containing all my truths today

I am not oak or maple
you are not maple or birch
and we are never aspen
ask again and I swear there will be
an entirely new kind of answer.

I have in my small raised fist
an acorn, a fable,
a fountain, and your sweater
as though a small raised fist
were, in fact, not.
This unspiky thing

High-sodium obsession,
    this licking sanding raw. Don’t know
about you but I feel
    parched, immediate.
So very grit and sting. I can thread
    together molecules
to form. Edit erosion time-
    lapsed, zipping. I taste approximate
two flavors— the wonder
    of casual pain. Indulge, indulge,
inflict, it won’t be other
    than rollerblade momentum. How red
this tongue— can handle
    my antiseptic. Attend, though puffy
speech. No offered lake,
    no sieving. What else is caught
and grasped in particle? Everything
    that can be small.
Weak in the knees

Hollow bird-bones, please
    stop buckling—

    I’m trying to teach
my phone to stop capitalizing
    You.

Why do we only
    get death and taxes?

    I’d take an inhale
of your apple breath
    any day,

every day an encounter
    with your chained-up
bicycle.

    Maybe I’m too weak
to face joy

    in those exact, exacting
measures.

A steel skeleton, a bird, a plane.
    I’m always
getting sucked
    into your propeller.
Myself apart

Where to start the search
under all these blankets? In shadow,

not sharpness. My features, yours,
watercolor of themselves.

Bled slowly down
the page. Feeling framed,

plaqued. The necessary data etched
onto gold. But no, no flash photography,

we only want the moment
rendered once.

Or buy the postcard. Reproduced,
how apropos. Up to me, we’d store,

stow away, a basement full
of armless statues.

Collect reservedly these
brushstrokes, these spatters.

Not a moment we can see as orange:
segmented, separate mouthful measured

out for anyone who hungers.
My hunger, alone. My apple,

my landscape. Your hunger, myself
a part. Your blanket, your fresco.

Canvas won’t tangle smoothly,
or at all, unless forced. Unless cut

by glass—fog-sleek— and woven.
Keep away from the open door.

Keep yourself and me, under.
Blue, our hazy, only moment. I insist.
A backwards and forwards forever

I want or wanted

your erstwhile sock drawer
next August’s sweat
    and baby teeth collection

    I am wanting
    to take an ice cream spoon

to your graduation day

    stuff a sugar cone full of it
devour in one gulp
    pair it with your salt-fried crow’s feet

I will want to see you age
    cheat your chin up
    getting measured

    take the measure of you
    I have wanted to know

what you’ll whistle when you’re

    fortysomething and could want
a mug you drank from
    to crack against my tile floor

I’d want your last breath or two
    to cycle seamlessly
    into your first and I would

have wanted your first and last
    any or every would have wanted
    have wanted

    want.
Absolutely everything since 1981

Harry Hamlin, does that glass eye come
with a lifetime guarantee? If so, toss it over,

it’s dark in here. Each morning begins
the same way: kale smoothie

with peaches, fortified with a snip
of Cassandra-hair. A balanced breakfast,

a broken window. It’s dark in here. Let’s plan
on it staying dark, let’s plan on

a summer trip, somewhere Mercury advises.
Sunshine expert. Maps these days

are so damn detailed, I can count
your eyelid freckles from here, see a cricket

the dog is trying to eat, soggy tongue
of Fate. Do you ever think

about how one moldy day, you ceased to be
an oak tree because of city ordinance?

Measurements come after
eye chart, that blurry block of gray.

From there what can you see
but the cereal boxes on middle shelves,

the creases in your own palm?
If I knew then what I feel now

I’d have gone ahead and smashed more
glass, shredded more pillows.

Feathers flying — from such heights, you must
see the outline of everything.
Contortions of blacksmithing

I’ve compared it to sleeping on Neptune,
   but think now, the method. Nothing of ice,

   adaptation. Slow descent toward snow-lined
dreaming. There is so much to force.

   Sledgehammer, anvil, whoever is which,
   whoever wants to go first. Dimpled, pitted

   sheets: intention, the anti-hailstone. The future—
hypothesis— is finely wrought

   and filigree, a fence that swings shut
   with no creaking. My unease at the thought

of engraving blurred by heat. Follow evolution
   of scrap metal, how many hands

   it passes through. Will I always be scratching
   at fingerprint, tarnish? I will always be

scratching at fingerprint, tarnish, perceived
   dent and discoloration. Incomplete project, us.
Who has a good mantra I could borrow?

Tackle box brain, lures
always snagging on finless fish.
Collection of useless discovery:

chewy plastic worm. Butcher,
butterfly open like whole ducks
for stuffing and find coils

of hem tape, slippery camisoles,
yearbook photos of every ex—
cought them in metal talons, down

river drifting. Rummage through
myself looking for a rubber band
to snap against wrist— come now,

little magpie, you only need twigs.
Not this nose ring, that muddy
tube of melting lipstick. My rusty

kingdom for fishlike memory:
a shimmer, a second, slick.
And gone. Can’t recall Tuesday

breakfasts, but her every glove-
thread so clear carved in marble.
Uprooting

To think how many hairs on my head won’t be there come Monday. Farmhouse twistered, clump

of golf course dirt. I can feel hands, gloved, weeding the ragwort out of me. But watch it now, watch

for healthy shoots. How will you remember the pliant stalk of this body once it’s tethered to a climbing post? So greedy
to sunbathe. How do those fingers sieve out pyrite? We are fields of wheat and chaff and crows nipping up the earthworms

in the soil, all crows, black feathers sleeked, braying towards the highway. Ponds swallow sunset, but we don’t have the stomach

for so many burning colors. I don’t know how long my grip will hold. It’s a sliceable little body, this body, this cluster of trees.

Pluck a pear from the middle branch. No bruises to bite around. Sweated slick palm, I told you, I’m losing it. I told you to watch

how your garden grows, blossoms under and over and over again, petals sky-straining, roots gasping, stretching at the stem.
Room of rind and pith,

room of discard, the nothing things,
    half-chewed and spat.
Room of weeks-gone bread
    and rainfall, egg shell,
    forsaken seedling.
Held in this heat, place
my apple core at the altar.
Shrine to remnant.
    Have never
not been building it, devout
    in my way
to chicken bone
and straw. To endings
that had ripe, plump beginnings.
    Know how they must
have tasted. Memory of it,
soft,
    constant here. Room
of echo. Half-moon honeydew.
Sweet offering. I live here to learn
what things
can grow from dead things.
What other things
    might one day
dissolve.
Because there are thousands of ways to disappoint and before there were maybe seven

We’re getting late, these woods and I, and have only half-eaten maple helicopters left to offer in our dim shadow breathing—gnawed in nerves, can’t fault the trees for standing still. Forgive my acidity, my lack of bilingual. I can only speak my own muscular tongue. Apparently, it’s a process. So many shades of vowels. But what about a snappier solution—

e.g., what can I drink for the skills to paint your face
a meticulous tiger replica? Fingers always blobbing overbright orange. Hope you get the hint—

the hint is stick with me?
— when I serve you Scotch tape as a side dish. I need another napkin, eat it and the curtains as soon as the door shuts.

The nerves, once more.
Twice or whatever. A process.

This is a me problem as opposed to a we problem but paired things, like sets of encyclopedias, are hard to dismantle. Would like to be encyclopedia, your set of encyclopedias, but I’m a pamphlet on benefits of falconry and all you really want is an occasional steno pad.

Or possibly—haven’t checked your Christmas list. You’re busy not wanting all that much while I feel a nagging inevitable, like last-ditch newspaper birthday gift, can of paint gone sour, foil fingernail post-chocolate coin. I’m afraid you’ll start and end your days carding this wool, my vibrating tangle. And I’m afraid.
I’m always weaving ways out

My cold leg, your raincoat.

My paring knife, your lemon.

The problem is I think there is a problem, nesting doll without one shell. Where is all that music leaking from?

I need plaster and you say cotton balls. Everything destined for junk drawer, but I feel warned by gesture. Unblinking. My recipe, your bookshelf. I don’t mean it the way it sounds, and it sounds like skis on gravel. If nothing else, understand. What does it take to stitch shut doorways?

A needle like a javelin.

Your window, my ladder.

I’ll blink through the unknowing.
Recognize the temperature of skin

Taxidermal rabbit,
eternity of
raised forepaw.
Can you be sure
you have
a stomach
if you don’t
sense the knot
constricting?
Understand,
I am always
counting
by twos.
Those silk
untwitching ears.
Vacuum off the coffee filters
and I’ll take up millinery,
sew myself a stylish little hat—

Understand, this head is
black hole, appetite.
Every speck of space junk
floating by. I am skull-stuffed
with chewing gum,
skinny calves, hotel art, broken

French press. Six thousand
charcoaled heartbeats,
hyperbole a mainstay

of galactic discussion. But I’d
rather not talk about it,
not while this sludgey stew

is up there, brewing. A flimsy
dam, these orbital cavities.
—Above all, I want it

functional.
Gauze concurrent sieve
and bandage. I want

the sodden thing to slide,
fall on a passing comet.
Hurtle nothingwards.
This may not count

I’m not angry enough anymore
to write the poem I intended to write
about wanting your regret.
I was going to compare myself
to a maple helicopter spiraling
downwards in a downwards spiral
and not paying attention to how
or where I landed, something like that.
That probably would have developed
into similar imagery, insofar as
it probably would have developed
in imagery that also featured things
hovering in the air, because that
is what anger most feels like, tense
hummingbird whirring, yet defying
physics: static. I could have demanded
marionette for me, using marionette
as a verb and drawing attention both
to that subversion of syntax as well as
to my own controlling tendencies.
This is how I write a poem: I pull
black gunk from the drain, dunk it
in neon glitter. It’s a little upsetting
to be so calm now, so closed
and resolved, because I really wanted
to write that poem about wanting
your regret. It would have sparkled.
Anger sparkles, crackles in fixed point
of air. But then I remind myself how
you are not a poem nor should this
thing we’re thinging serve as fodder
for a poem, but how else would I know
how anger sparkles or that I’m not
even holding onto it anymore? Tell me?
To hold on to this ink

Lousy with pinholes: this cupped palm,
this storm door. I was telling the story
before it happened. Drenched

in something like sour water.
Hand against wall: was that you
wringing washcloths, dreaming back at me?

I can’t and I cannot and here, once more,
a pencil to gnaw at. Or else
plaster drying around the flimsier wrist.

Whatever things tell us
the nature of other things. Cause
of the soft-swelling dough. Something could

have happened any day of the week.
A lawn daisy morphing
into a clock. A lawn daisy always has been

this ticking clock. The gears and the morning
and my graphite tongue.
And by cupped palm, I mean:

something’s resting. Telling me
there are measures to be taken.
This bending body: rain. But slight breezes.

And by storm door, I mean: the bright
color of knowing. And by pinholes,
I mean: one color that can’t run.
On picking a blackberry

What if no one ever told you it was
and so you lived

never knowing but held on
like stubborn spring snow

against which this cell
this jewel this tiny planet

would stand in such stark contrast
and perhaps you would wonder about its origin

more often than your own but
it wouldn’t matter

this token this egg this ancient spider eye
might just reveal its truth at any moment and that

would be your world for the world
is a perfect fit for the palm of your hand

if you know to pluck it
from the bramble without

blood and what might be blood or juice or song
glistening small against skin

know that even if you know
or even if you never learn about

steps and stages unripe ripe and ripening
they will happen anyway.
Don’t count on it

Submitting to math, I calculate
the flattening of soda, rate
of bubble-wither.
Watch also the slow fade
of pasta water removed
from heat, headlights dissolving.

You know what I’m going to say,
that recording these things
takes a needle to my
balloon-sculpted brain, that I wince
at the thunder
of leaky faucets, that I
am exhausted. Oh just admit
you’re exhausted, tally-mark for every
dandelion spore’s escape.
There’s only so much
graphite in the world.

And I mean, it’s erasable.
The spider is made of glass

But what does this have to do with fractures
of bluebird, I mean fractions
of bluebird, I mean the way they brush
occasionally against car doors?

Or otherwise: pebble
in my boot, rocket of breath
escaping dream

in which you love sushi and darker hair.

Exact nature: on hold until
further notice, we decide
with our hands in our shoes,

and exact nature is subjective,
depending on curve of beak.

You’re not the one
who needs to hear this.

Are these twelve different cornhusks
you offer?

This head too cluttered
to tell leg from pencil. Figurines
for eventual attic.

You’re not the one who needs
to hear this. The fly-rattled curtains, the scab.
A bike brought inside from the rain.

Don’t worry — just brushstroke
the foxtail, faux rivers.
A thumbtack could shatter this web.
Loosely translated: looking at you

Pincushion moon, I fret unending your small unassailable wounds. How much iron inside you—has been, will be, current. Perpetual tattoo footprint: no wind, scurry of chipmunk. Why was I so late in arrival? Picture a plastic-wrapped glowing, salted surface, Tupperware moon. Picture an orbiting hand with a knife. I am gluing together these cottonball clouds, sticking to every table. Will command myself atmospheric: perspire, blink lightning. Stand.
Annex, overflowing

Though we added to my small collection—
mugs with broken handles, faux-suede sheaths
for reading glasses— I wanted more.
The furrows in a wheat field. Drained lakes.
A crater on the surface of the moon.
Has no one ever thought of this before?
I was not made large or curved enough, not made
of solid material — cupped hands let sand
strain through them and are left empty. The whole
of me, a porous pocket. This body, a sieve.
What didn’t I look at, seeking out a something
to expand myself? I could not feel warmth
heavy at the base of a valley the way I could
when it rested on my skin. Could not store it
in a vase. I wanted more but learned
I had only a finite number of ways to hold you.
**The spiral staircase, the fox den meet**

I’ve written the book
about fish scales,

extolled guitar-pick iridescence. Had enough

of the art of star-drenching.
Photo, torn, of a glittering cactus;
tile, torn, mosaic chicken-feed scattered.

I’m awaiting a dusty hand
in the dark, or else

mud-caked. I’m this type
of craver: socks, tree bark, and skin.

What I mean to say is I don’t
fall through the air. Anymore.

Convinced that this
is the reason watercolor runs
down a page, stains
thin curtains. Now I’ll be looking

through nothing: not
glass. Not even glass.
I built the house made of maple trees

Lashes blink against piano lid til walnut

    clunks cathartic. Crocuses are cooked
    from dirt and I

    also unfurl

    by the toolshed. Antonyms keep
jousting in colors of birthright,

    always annuals raptured
away while mums stay mud-sweet. Blister
    begins as swatting. I practice

    collecting echo and oval and spill baskets full
    all over the golf course. Velocity

    and long division.
Who built the house made

    of maple trees? Voices carry in the hall, wedged

    into fists. I could have swallowed
an atlas. Like lamb down python-throat,
    square bulging, paper edge rakes

    esophagus. Could be filled
with those winding red highways.
    Certain stars unchart
themselves, burn until wickless. But it’s mouse

    and mousetrap, happenstance.

    Let drift, crinkle leaf. I came back,
omniscient piano,

    because the truth turned out
    only true.