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Isla Negra

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ISLA NEGRA

BRENDAN JORDAN

*“porque estoy triste y viejo,
y conozco la tierra, y estoy triste.”*
— Pablo Neruda

*“Moses stripped Aaron of his vestments, and put them on his son
Eleazar; and Aaron died there on top of the mountain.”*
— Numbers 20:28

I would not return, could not
even find the dot on the map.
I keep rescuing caterpillars
with dry sticks—from the roadway,
the lawn where I stumble,
kicking my grief between feet like a
child kicks his blue, shattered yoyo.
I come back specifically for revelations, for kites
tossing orange to the wind, for Paul
writing to cottonwoods already killed, for melancholy
dogs walking with slack
leashes, for fishing lines,
for headphones
cutting contact; I come knowing cloudbursts
over northern mountains call, like spitting waves

& the colossal fall calling to a man on the edge
of earth; I come knowing
the clouds of daymoths, tennis shoes
draped like a tanning hide over the wire; this bridge
my own Isle of Elba lost within petals
that fall away, twice.

It is not only granite hills that form teeth
to puncture the electric dusk, not only trout
that gaze curses at the hands clasped
to rod & never the nettles that strike
first: It is also Aaron stripped bare,
not the last failed prophet banished to nightfall:
it is the same violet light
tapping the window with seedpods that missed
the mark: it is roadtrips leaking
guilt out behind them, five hundred miles
left: & it is the same collapsing bedroom
I wake alone from, alone to.

I go like Neruda to black shorelines
to pretend the last dying star of morning shuts
off like a lighthouse in sunlight, that tidepools
I've never returned to still harbor
the same magenta urchins, the starfish
stealing turquoise from salt, I go
to any shore once,
knowing how barnacles erode their mooring,
how some sea turtles get lost,
returning to alien coasts.

On top of everything, sequoias wrung chimes
from my younger hands; the monk's palm shook

with more dawn than any wafer; and still
I cannot imagine the meadowlark sings
for me, or the sunken kayak lifts ever
from the greedy river, of that all caterpillars
do not die in brown coffins they weave
for themselves. I cannot imagine Aaron
did not cry, muttering the old tales of red
fruits dripping juice like venom. I cannot
imagine the bristlecone (bound to its windswept
mountain) does not some days wish to burn
in the hearth, & curse the young lupines
still climbing the dizzy air.