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Cicadas

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JACOB NEWBERRY

CICADAS (AWAKE AT MIDNIGHT)

They are alive in ways
that I have never been,
a fierce coursing current

of ignition and divine retreat:
all repetition through the fragile
and the fractious pattern of their lives.

They are a sheer, unblemished stream
of living, only instinct and direction.
Each instant in their hurried hours

is every instant, is the crossing of years
without distinction. A passing
without passing. The long corridor

of evening stretches out to them
as eternity does to us: indistinguishable
and unquestioned, static yet vital.

And what is there for me?
I am capable, I fear,
only of consuming, only

of taking in what they
will spend the long night
of their fevered lives producing.

In this single evening
I will absorb the whole,
the everything, the full

and spectacular galaxy
of their accumulated
and innumerable desires:

all the many and the varied
dreams they call out through
the black river of night

that still is new to them,
every first and every final
song of gratitude that they—

in the bustling torrent
of the chorus of their
sounds—are not alone.

They will die having lived
in ways that I have never known,
always hearing songs

from the others of their tribe.
Think of it: to be born into
a world while all the beings

that surround you sing
that chorus they
have always sung,

as though there'd
never been another world.
Think of it: to die,

your own cracked instrument
calling out that song,
that very harmony

that grew up from the air
itself before you.
So what is there for me?

Only this: I will know that even
at the milky, dying stretches
of this night, there are still

more stars beside me in the grass
than in the sky when twilight comes.
I know each day's restarting

brings a different host of beings
to sing its hymn.
My memory of that song

in the day is the concentration
of its echo, just as the stars
in daylight continue their

futile and exquisite burning,
their light absorbed
and quietly diffused
among our unsuspecting,
undeserving hearts.