

2003

# Points of disappearance

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*The University of Montana*

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*Points of Disappearance*

by

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presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

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Will you tell me my fault, frankly as to yourself, for I had rather wince, than die...My Business is Circumference—An ignorance, not of customs, but if caught with the Dawn—or the Sunset see me—Myself the only Kangaroo among the Beauty, Sir, if you please, it afflicts me, and I thought that instruction would take it away.

- Emily Dickinson

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*Threshold*

Here is the exhibition of regret,  
as though it was a gesture meant to bear  
distinctions, measurements of small voices –  
hollowed – and how should we interpret, fear  
such distances? This is the damage, turned  
against itself; a glint to serve as thread  
or pale remembrance, stretched, and moving toward  
our inner silences, hung there, and made  
irrevocable in this evening's drawn  
out semblances of form. What do we know  
of longings, these hard-spun, black-winged motions?  
All the boundaries are discernible now.  
This is the gray sound of receding breath:  
the suffering of light along some edge.

*Spell Between Life and Death*

*At the Overpass*

No discernible part  
to cover over  
with a towel and still it is  
hanging dumbly  
from a not-quite hand -  
in the non-light, a shapelessness  
to the body, as though underwater,  
and if there were earlier moments  
they may have consisted  
of an uncomfortable  
pause, trees may have seemed  
like smudges on a dark window  
through which the animal  
noises were muted,  
as though nothing had taken place  
but place, and not this severance  
with its accompanied odor  
or this man folded in  
above his loosening  
like leaves still clinging  
to a fallen limb.

This is what happens to  
light when it is cast  
out from a post -  
this is the way all  
sounds converge  
into the calling out  
which is also a coming  
back to, the way that some birds  
break formation,  
the indiscernible turning  
that is a kind of arc over  
the wet streets and all the people  
gathered there, as if  
in renunciation.

*From the Wheelchair*

I had just read a book called *How to Fall Through a Black Hole and Survive*; I was at the chapter where everything started to slow down. A leaf had taken a three-minute fall from the dried ficus in the corner. The words were getting all jumbled, as if they were printed one on top of the other, and the pages kept getting farther and farther apart. I grew another few inches every time I took one between my fingers, my limbs extending awkwardly out of my clothes. My bones hollowed and I could no longer hear the toilet running. I shouted soundlessly from the basement apartment a few times; my voice condensed into rocks in the window well that spiders and beetles crawled under with their long eyes. My arm stretched toward eternity, whose other side was a very thin glass of water. I remember drinking it down, though I never actually reached it. Just before the final paragraph, I realized that my hands and feet had curled under like knobs in a magnificent crippling.

*Weathers*

: I didn't think  
you'd come;  
you'll have to  
make use  
of yourself.  
Maybe  
you can  
rake or weed.

: something wavering

: I wasn't  
expecting you  
to come.  
We weren't  
expecting  
you.

: War makes man boy, boy man.  
You wouldn't know this, but it does.

: startled by a bee fat as a devil

: I drove a bayonet through a sack of pig's blood.

: You're quite  
the incalculable.

: Takes days to wash out the smell.

: could never figure why there were only ten devils I thought he was keeping  
with the weathers each with a door each with a hat or umbrella

: One guy rubbed his face with it.  
Why do you think crazy people like  
thunderstorms and hurricanes?  
Maybe you wouldn't know.

: I asked for a postcard of some ruins I said it didn't matter which it didn't matter  
much he never sent it

: I'll hold her.  
She's so needy.  
Come here.  
Yes, you're  
so needy.  
Aren't you?  
Aren't  
you?

: Exactly. Mirrors exactly.

: I can't have  
a moment  
to myself.  
It's constant  
attention and  
I don't see her  
growing  
out of it.

: the herons barking now chasing with outstretched necks and the yellow face  
patch in the sun you'd hardly even notice the branches

: Who are you  
trying to impress?  
I don't care  
for that kind  
of thing much.  
Not much at all.

: something not still she said my first memory a piano and I thought yes  
and mine a door and this is why we are friends and something wavered

: Why are the soldiers thirsty?  
They're bleeding to death, you  
understand.

: yes a piano

: Bleeding to death and when  
you bleed to death, you get thirsty.  
And they're slumped over.  
*Why are they slumped over?*

: once I smashed a window in the cold room thinking once I saved a piece of  
glass not worn by waves that was a splinter of window

: Because they've drowned.

: I'm so tired  
of it all. I'm just  
tired of it.  
It's *so* tiring.

: once a snow so heavy one snow heavy

: ...*so* tired.

: I made a box and then a lid now it is sealed shut I won't open it

: And the boy doesn't realize at first.

: It's quite  
exhausting.

: no no no I won't

*In a Gown of Dead Leaves and Barbs*

Three long notes tapped on the piano  
in the day room overlooking another city  
cemetery

    by Hannah with her gray hair tangled  
and thinned lips who does not get passed  
by the needle cart

The notes floating the way blood draws itself  
out, the clean settling of tube into slot  
as the nurse squeaks her shoes

In art class,  
    a jar of half-dried grout I tip  
over my hotplate, the hard press of colored  
tiles against cardboard

Dinner refusal in the dark bed while the second snow  
chooses to stick

    I see underneath her  
bandages the shape of teeth around a hole  
of missing skin

    and when I leave I am not less broken  
and stare at the old stone Buddha under heaps  
of garden snow

    while wind that is trust makes  
no movement and the chimes, hung from the corner  
of the garage, corroded and green, are decided  
against speaking



*Pantoum of the Hermit*

How the world out a window in the streaming darkness  
seems to be traveling away from its quiet gestures;  
I no longer look at the river: this one long silence.  
The cold blue frame of an argument, impassable,

seems to be traveling away from its quiet gestures.  
I have reckoned with an eye, an open mouth,  
the cold blue frame of an argument, impassable.  
It is time for the hanging of ghosts in the eaves.

I have reckoned with their eyes, their open mouths,  
a shadow without the substance of body.  
It is the time of the hanging of ghosts in the eaves:  
the grey light layered, like old bones.

A shadow without the substance of body,  
the borrowed echoes of a voice brought back, through  
the grey light layered like old bones,  
and through the wide clearing of pauses and grass,

the borrowed echoes of a voice brought back,  
as if returning in the form of the newly said.  
And through the wide clearing of pauses and grass,  
a bridge or a ship is fashioned of hands,

as though returned in the form of the newly said.  
How the world out a streaming window in the darkness  
becomes a bridge or a ship being fashioned of hands;  
I do not see the river.

*Raking*

We kick our way out of the leaves and leaves  
are hands shuffled into bags we shoulder to the end  
of the walk, leaning into themselves in black bags,  
clasping. We are tearing our way into the lawns with  
metal teeth and the grass rips out like hair and we  
know we are pushing too hard, but we cannot stop it.  
We are walking dirt into the house-warmth of our  
need and the carpets and tiles are wetted dark. We kneel  
down to wipe the tracks, our towels witness, we wash  
off the telling. Dusty bags lean over at the end of the walk,  
stories too, we punish the telling of, we punish  
the pillows at night. Sheets bunch at our feet.  
And what we leave in the morning are bruises  
the shape of our bodies, our heads.

*Coda*

Blue-black feather in the ice shore. He said,  
"Catherine, I feel faint." Old man hunched  
on a bending branch. No, a heron.  
He may have tried to sit down. River skins  
over the rapids, the crisp adjustment like swept glass.  
Scaring up the ducks. The detective  
signed the book, Dear Kyte and someone  
put it in a shelf. He may have tried to say more.  
No one's afraid of a dead bird. No one's afraid of  
the eyes still open. He said, "Catherine" and tap  
water ran or a lid clinked against a pot  
or maybe she hesitated before  
turning. No one noticed the heron fly off.  
He wasn't quite in the kitchen, but he wasn't  
quite in the hallway. White shoulders  
of the magpie like a door frame.

*Proximity*

*Lesson*

The fall did not last more than a few seconds – and though I have heard, when describing similar circumstances, others express a skewed perception of elongated time, this was not the case for me. There was a wavering horizon of lake and smog, then an underwater struggle between the descent, the ineptness of my body, and the weight of my clothes. I did not experience pause; in the full darkness, in the pressurized version of submerged sound, in the futile panic of motion, I was strangely conscious. If I had any thoughts in these moments, I do not remember them – I suspect that most encounters with the limits of awareness yield the same results – it was as though I was at a certain threshold, wherein all perception aside from my proximate senses faltered. Though my body knew itself to be falling, knew that it had been lifted and flung, knew that it was now fighting with its own inability to surface, I did not distinguish the barrier between water and air. I breathed both. Then, in a sudden reversal, I broke surface. I saw only the blur of wet rocks, randomly reflective of this or that portion of the sky. Two strains of laughter and one interrupted scream combined with my coughs and gasps, and that low, gradually building sound that rises up from the stomach with growing force and equal pain – a kind of animal call of distress. The one who had tossed me out then pulled me onto the rocks by the back of my shirt and shorts. I did not stand. My sister had stopped screaming. This was the world again. The one I did not know I had been separated from. The one where I had to walk the eight blocks back to my mother's apartment, where I could not counter the will of a babysitter and her boyfriend, where my sister and I traveled back and forth between distinct versions of ourselves and came out fractioned.

### *Proximity*

My grandmother's property is fairly flat for central Ohio, and the remnants of soybean crops – long unplanted, left to hot summers and wind – have resulted in lightly sloping terrain more like ripples in sand than farmland. That is, except for the southwest corner, where a sheet metal barn stands amid a few paddocks made from thick, wooden beams. For a farm, it isn't much. But it is the only place from my childhood where I was able to make any kind of connection to the land, living as I did, in Chicago. I had seen the agitated pace of the big cats at Lincoln Park Zoo, but my grandmother's horses were the closest I came to wildness until I moved away from home.

In late summer, a year after my grandfather drove his tractor through his second and fatal heart attack – the machine propelling onward, directionless, before it ran aground into the corner of the barn – my sister and I leaned into the rough fence and waited for my grandmother to show us the year's foals. At sixty-two she was still capable of handling the strenuousness and duration of farm work. She still rose before sunrise, draping my grandfather's overcoat on top of her long nightgown, slipping her bunioned feet into an old pair of galoshes, and made her way in the dark to the barn door – its creaks must have been a comforting familiarity – then down the cement ramp to the stables, where a single switch brought forth naked light from a few bulbs strung across the width of the structure, and the horses awaited the black buckets that would carry to them water and oats. I did this with her many times, pulling out chunks of hay to be split between the large gentle mouths, peeking into the eyes that gazed back steadily from the stalls,

hushed by the deliberate self-quieting that instinctively comes at a meeting with some mysterious and very near thing.

When my grandmother came out the far side of the stable, she had two foals on leads and was walking them around the perimeter toward the opposite end. Our small arms and legs dangled through the fence gaps, like people in those photo-ready character boards at theme parks with the faces and limbs cut out. My father stood inside the enclosure, still near us. I watched the rise and fall of the horses' spindly legs. But the parade was short-lived; the ties slipped from her hand and the foals started to trot awkwardly toward us. She rushed forward to regain her grip on the leads. After some fumbling, she pulled hard on the ropes to draw them back. It was too much for them. Already spooked by her frenzied movements, one darted back to the stalls and the other reared toward her, knocking one hoof into her right brow, the other into her left leg. She took a hard fall to the dirt, folded in that way people crumble into pain. My father crouched next to her calling, "Mom? Mom?" It was not until I heard the strained version of her voice let out a wide and quiet, "O, Lord..." that sharpened into a tighter, louder "I can't see," that I became afraid and started to cry. And because I was still young enough to follow my father's instructions without further prompting, I turned away when he told me not to look as he helped her to her feet, as he lead her to the gate, then across the driveway, into the truck; I didn't see the stunned socket, the bleeding shin, or any consequence for that matter, except the crumbling, until he brought her back from the emergency room late that night, one eye taped over with gauze.

## *Surveying*

It seems almost ridiculous now, but because of the spin and the way my body braced itself for impact, I could not turn to see if my two passengers were still alive. It was like the case of Erwin Schrödinger's cat; Peter and Jamie existed in a state between life and death until I was able to determine the one or the other. Of course, this is theoretical. But in the moments it took for the car to hit the left-hand guardrail three times, I *knew* in that part of myself where it is possible to know such things, that they were dead. It didn't help that each time we hit and I asked, anxiously, "Is everyone okay?" I did not receive an answer. Nor did it help that immediately prior to the left front wheel broaching the edge of the shoulder, it had started to snow, and, with all the windows down for a counterpoint to the smoky aftermath, we had just finished smoking a joint. When I turned the wheel to the right to move away from the shoulder, I turned it too far, sending the car into a fishtail. This misstep propelled us toward the concrete blocks. The first hit was so loud I thought another car had smashed us from behind, but then the car kept spinning; the road became a thick dark horizon, the wind-blown snow a single white streak, and each car passing a kind of fish-eye version of itself. That is what I saw. What I felt was the already piercing guilt of having done someone else harm, real harm.

In the end, no apparent damage had been done to us or even the car. The plastic bumpers were scratched and pocked in some places, but that was the sum total. And so we continued on our way to Chicago, where we spent our last night east of the Mississippi before our long move to Oregon, where we all thought we might settle. If the accident was any kind of prophesy, it went unnoticed; we watched the fields around us fill with winter and thought about the mossy, ferny green of the Northwest. In a year we would find ourselves miles from

this place, facing another kind of collision, a series of impacts that would result in wreckage impossible to assess; it is so large and deep.

*As Though Through a Corridor*

*As Though Through a Corridor*

In the absence of pain, one might assume that fields of vision are more or less the adjustments of boundaries, that one line folding over itself acts like, but is not always, the making of a knot. This is to say nothing of rebirth, which entails its own severities, if one believed in that sort of thing. Any longer, what matters is the illusion of continuance and the pale yellow signal of calm, even in the before morning hesitant bleakness or as the silhouettes of trees push through the mesh of certainty. Skin does this too, under close examination, when it is all but possible to imagine with what speed the under-surface collisions are being mended. This is the distance of negation. Where no one thing is discernible from its affect. When the aperture hovers at a single degree. Aimed toward some speck of light, as if this were the last possible outcome. Newly arrived.

### *Filtering*

The delicate frames of trees framing what stands behind with only some patches of snow for shadow, indistinct as a figure in the light. Through what specific passages of air the light finds itself balanced in the desire for form, for restoration. Not found at the edges of clothing pulled back, or in the voice matched against its own predicament. Nor in the branches like nets full from the weight of the sound of sticks breaking underfoot, while overhead the leaves bend down into the pathways of their fall.

Here all things are held – the upside down girl hanging, who calls, her small legs still wrapped around the limb, the whole street quiet, no one inside the house to listen. Here is an arm extended in the reticent fog; suspended like a term or a sentence.

The nothing moon. The moon of aspiration, as in “this here” – a perspective styled after the confines of shape. So too with immeasurable boundaries, the one body barely discernible in the presence of so many others dangling. As though, at a distance, the world is reduced to a sense of stillness, an even-colored screen the light disperses itself through, and we no longer recognize the surrendering from our unfortunate angle, looking in, as we do, through a thousand divergent branches.

*Tuesday: Domestic*

The desire to venture out of an arid landscape or the notion of wreckage; there is always a choice in the beginning. If I take the handle off the cranking window leaving it opened; if the outside temperature enters in, and we are chilled; if your hand is a tired reception of our houseplants' leavings. Somewhere between the sounds of footfalls on the floor above us, as if they were moving away from something, or into the world outside where no one is walking without a sweater or a hat. Here is last month's issuance, under the empty plate, all the faces cut out, every page dog-eared. These are the reckless clippings, another skinned carrot, the peppermill's grind – how many times must you wipe off the counter, the rim of the sink where the sounds are a downward spiral, rather a winnowing. And suppose that as all things approach their opposites there are no more vulnerabilities; that I can reach across the softener and find the loosened thread of your pant seam, wrapped around this finger, how suddenly it is severed. We do not even meet each other's gaze, and you turn back to the table. There is still this list of things. And at your back is the back of a chair, the wood like panes.

This list of things, each item requiring its appropriate action, nails to be hammered in, though only at the right time of day, so as not to disturb. You have taken the task of measuring, and if there is anything hopeful in this – as a child I was always confusing revolution with resolution. It had to do with the notion of coming back to, as in: all the dust that was raised is now returning to its places. We have broken the dishes one by one and we have left them like mines in the middle of our rooms. We have heard nothing of the people upstairs. You say *the window has cost us seven degrees* and if I could find the handle, if things could be returned to their places as easily as a settling down into them. Not to be so watchful. Not to be so intent on the calculations. To allow for approximations. You say, *look: this much we have accomplished* and I do notice, how the afternoon light is cast in, how the progression of days has gone unobserved, how all the straightened and cleaned things stand quietly. And there is the sense of the end of a feeling before the beginning of another.

*Endanger/Negotiation*

The nexus of perception, curving inward like an awkward ear, which is your breathing. It is I who am silenced, each motion made gentle in your presence, the leavings of mobility after a winter evening, the last of January. This is the line I am drawing: I draw it before you, proximate as the wavering marks of some solitary clock tower bell - our disproportionate aspirations, no matter the absence of water; no rock is merely suffering.

This is our place of distinction. Here are your fingers of opening, and the quiet desert of skin, held like an entrance beyond bearing, stitched with rivers of need. Which is not spoken for. Which is more than the spontaneous flowering gestures of hope, more than the long trilling call. What else have we left to compromise? The small equations that are the white-winged, dark-eyed junco's only separation, and what we understand of living, receding away. We build our continuance in an empty mouth, shallow as the cloud light that makes waste of its distances. We must forgive each other.

*At the Window*

The particular yellow of crested wheat grass and when in the rain, how the sweet thickness overhangs this place, and below us the long drop to the river, always green in summer, less so now. As the harrier flies, northerly, and if we identify it before the turn pulling west and out of proximity, or sometime down the road. Have we not noticed before, how some stretches of time become their own kinds of rooms, hospital-doored with those windows that are grates inside glass. We peek through; we are no longer bothered when the patients drool. It is the sound of the piano in the far room where the light sometimes cuts through, how it is a precision we would not want to hear, how knowing something as deep as the casting of some old song is evidence of what we can never accept, locked away. How they are locked away even so, even in the light-through-storm atmosphere, even in the off chance of the pitifully delicate fingers that we make out through the crosshatch - this that does not serve to hold back anything of the sound, this and some low moaning that slips out in the mixture of spit, and here is a man standing against the wall with his arms like a door and no handle; the fadedness, which is exemplary of the times, and knowing, as we do, that soon one will be leaving.

Some years are rooms and others are awkward stones drilled through and strung along the strongest wire. There is always the matter of what's to be hung and where, of the incense as it tarnishes. All of our matchbooks in a crystal bowl, because it is these small workings of paper that set off the burning, and only when we have slept soundly and after this, when we are no longer disturbed. I have seen it happen in the uncovered light of a barn and I imagine that the gears of the tractor keep spinning when it finally runs aground. We are never satisfied until the telling, and through the frame of the body comes some elongated tubular motion toward the one at the window in the house, inside the window, toward the man slumping over the steering column who may or may not realize, as we do, that the machine keeps going. There is no race to the finish line and no tying off the ends and the sound pushes off of the chest, takes with it the reluctance of will, and if you have listened to such things you cover over the place from which you break, not your ears (for it is not in the hearing - if he can live it, you can hear it) but over the mouth that would betray you, that would leave you holding out no hope and no congregation, and through this window the world like a series of sharp corners, every voice strung around, all the ways to unravel the history, all the ways to forget what you loved.

*And Wings Folded In*

I touched your shoulder lightly when I left you without  
blessing... -- Vince Lombardo

All the bees moving low to the ground, the enactment of splicing. This is the time of year, the call into distance beyond reckoning, the calling out through moments of suspension; how the little bodies hover and some already pressed down into the walk. If you asked to be given away, what would be of import? Isn't it in the giving and where to: out from, away. Rain used to be like this: we noticed the falling off, falling from and it was not an intermediary, but a series of miniature collapses against our skin, and after the long day I said *rain falling as dead bees* and we listened for scraping. The call. No one said it would be worth the reckoning, no one told us how to look at them, no one can gauge the whole of.

Things to be done with the hands, whether or not you include rakes, bats, and wires. How to be struck by the capabilities. And when we meet in the alleyway, who turns in what direction - aren't we drawn toward the center we are also propelled from. Wouldn't you like to extend yourself, aren't we seeing passed what we've held up in our eyes, seeing into, seeing beyond. Hands kept in pockets, hands wrapped in cloth, hands imperceptibly lifted and brought back down. To then say *I reach you*, as if only our best intentions are sounded off, as if the air outside some darkened apartment window is not in all its beauty, chilled, as if the way things crumble existed with pause, when something else might well up into the between, in between, what has settled between us. What is settling.

To move from here takes more than lifting off. Notice the shape of the wings, unextended, how they are already going back to the body, how they are barely seen. The visible is the space of the unspoken. *Your shoulder lightly*. And before this I am nameless as every body of water. And before this is before the feeling of strange thickness, a small body in descent that makes such slight impact, and it is mostly in the gross proximity, how the feeling of a dead thing penetrates the skin of our arms and faces, and the rest of the world a residue. No sound coming out of the evening. This is the watering and the after-effect of touching, being touched, what we carry away with us, even as the little bodies are now down and the voice laid bare, what we hoped we could not withstand.

*After Rain*

I will take nails,  
long nails,  
and hammer them into my body.                      -- Tomaž Šalamun

Because there are degrees between the perceived and the proximate. Because desperate worms lunge heavily out of the mud, one direction finally undebated, only to be condemned to the heat, hardening already in the changed world. Because whether or not we intend it, last thoughts wither and leave little else than some small testimony halfway gone back to void. We can say nothing plainly without sufficient pause. And the neighbor's dog howling is its own version of fitting enunciation, when, at the least opportune moment, the nearby sirens float meaninglessly away. We do not know anymore if it is enough to take nails to these witnessings, whether it is in the preservation or the bloodletting that the thing survives.

*Bone Church*

They said it was about fear and they were wrong. They said they came to administer. Now we have these spaces to go to - now we are able to stand under the articulate structures of parts extracted, off-white beams in the towering arches, the dark sockets hovering there, in resignation. My business, too, is circumference; all the rivers receding and the delicate lines they become through the distance, untraceable here: in the circular frame held over the body that is an impression of variation. They came in their long robes - the color of ash, some say - to stare down into the ditches. Who could imagine the unearthing, the dragging up under the uniform boundary of light. Cut short, as a voice that would otherwise serve as cure: a pile of cavernous seeds, one on top of the other. How the formed thing wants of us, we cannot say what, all quiet and dumb, turning away from the scene as though through a room of spinning doors, each leading into the next, and the pathway of our movement like a leaning out, leaning away from.

*January 13, 1978*

The last photograph from the city: we have chosen the lesser fountain to lean against, the one with a singular pulse shooting up between us. Others pose with their own spouts, out of focus to our left, as if these are the only necessity; a soft bulb at night paving the current; the two of us like a shared distance and the broad cutting between our twinned postures - you turned; I was turned. Something smooth in the rest of the landscape sheet metal thin, or like tar that isn't mixed with gravel, but slow as a finger along the back of your knee.

You only remember the threshold, how your face was frosted. How something so small and with so many appendages can't turn itself over. By the light of the garage you spot a beetle stuck on its back - the urgency. Fountains, says Jacobsen, fall back into themselves. All our days cemented in this way and he noticed the sky moving over the branches and he knew more would come of pain - clean and white as a clinic and all the missing digits left in piles somewhere. What if they had turned out the lights, and only the sound of caving in remained.

Somewhere water doesn't move, but fuels that irretrievable shade of cold, there is the feeling of possible outcomes. I meet the women in the clinic who move crusted lips into smiles and tap the tables with their stubs. You leave a ticket home on the pillow and some hot tea that is cool enough to drink when I wake. Tepid as the baths mothers draw to break fevers. On the news, workers inching along the streets, all their clothes flapping back and something fluttering around the lamppost - a purple scarf. When I was a child you say. I remember the map game she played with us and my limited sense of home. But that was a long time - this springing out and up, and so there is the fall that is a kind of returning. Do you want to make a bet; I'll show you how. I make the motion of a smile that fails. We both pause to look at my fingers, intact as the sheet between us, fresh from the icebox.

*The Recent Lives of Saints*

You live with them now. Possibly, the men of the Great Plains can think of you finally over the long commute without the triple-pronged feeling of loss - you have moved so many thousands of days and this many miles. There, in the cell you once occupied, a kind of arid pleasure resides. *All of us* entombed in those impressions, awkward gestures, weather in the press - we met here and she said - so that we are newly available to each other without the currency of mutual exchange. Here we are all Jude, patient at the table of longing, nothing but fish scales to offer up.

We are deposited here as a film slowly gathering substance along the edge of liquid left too long in a glass. No matter what we have said before, we say only what they imagine we've said, *The river is flooding*, those men of the Great Plains who dig graves in front of their houses, fill them with sand and rocks. They will not take us out except in the dark, when their wives are occasioned to sleep or bathe. Only then will they open the paper figures, the ones they dreamed we made.

In the cells we have pageants and contests, place bets on the outcome of weathers, feed on each other's hair. This is the lady who traced the creases of her palms with a knife. Here is a man who sold children. The asthmatic, the smoker, and the fat man are still standing after the long climb. We welcome them all - no one is more deserving of a ticket to the last resort. No one need ask for a cold drink. When the men of the Great Plains are asleep, we take turns whittling sticks into spears and rake their insides, three at a time.

Once for martyrdom - a pretty purple hat and some birdseed on the windowsill and a prayer written over and over, never spoken aloud. Once for sex and how the smell of it sent us excitedly into our dreams where we took turns saving each other and then washing down the parts. The last for small betrayals, not another thing between us, but a landscape full of wires like staves strung across these deserts. Though they say Jude is always pictured with a fish or a ship.

*Elegy for the Disappeared*

A friend gone missing. Gone, as they say, up in smoke – blue boundary gathered over the valley bottom. By this I do not mean ascension. I believe that many thousands of fires have worked themselves out. But I'm not talking about facility, about relinquishment. Even in the middle of a storm setting on, in the middle of all that wind and its hard way across the face, something reaches out on the clouded hillside like an epistle, not certain what it is. An arc that moves both toward and away from places beyond the line of sight. Beyond the wounded walk of a buck, on ground that erodes a little bit each year. Imperceptible, really, these slippages. If not through the storm, then maybe the loose gravel on dry slope. No one can guess what's been done. And down over the empty fork of the river, that same grey heron hunched on a thin tree branch; I'd like to think it's the same one. Cold, fatigued, the same curvature of the back, leaning down.

*An Argument of Water*

That the aquatic taxi delivers safely the unterrified white dress,  
which is oddly compelling to note, the whole and inclusive silence, as in reprieve.  
Because the water is only lightly or barely, because water subsides, rest.  
After something, not a swell, something more exhaustive, suppose a shapeless  
smoke under the surface. There is a small case of lengthy premonitions  
and the recollection of placement, the assumption that nothing moves  
out of frame, that the water has simply erased, though there is also the dress,  
in poor light, which seems unscathed and her expression is one of fatigue,  
or we might say, indifference, nothing discernable sounding off her wake.

*Exit/Reverie*

The distancing made possible by a cold air: through the nights and snows of our culpability, the narrow passageways, as though all the things that may be opened are opening. Reverberations: impenetrable fogs, this comes after the extraction, this comes after the pulling inward like a soft string and its delicate tie to some substance within that we would not name; a gentleness and a remembrance of places we've left, places marked *exit* that still harbor something of what's lost from them: breath and its incantations forced from between the lips parted: our mutual somnolence.

What will we make of our reparations? Nothing but cello branching out along the walls where dusty weeds hang, are brushed against, rain down sections of flower top, cluster of petal, of stem swept each evening, this winter evening light, metal dustpan from the porch cellar, the broom's hairs split like twine, like hairs light as attic space, the stairs as bridges, sized against these points along the familiar lines of body, as by study or experience, marked with cell flushes, this acute precipice, this accurate pain, issuing, and how the needles shiver in the slightest rushes of air while we are stretched out, as in sleep, except, punctured.

*Between Seasons*

Breath opened as blessings, as air entering through a screen - this alchemy; body, and given the world outside, the mistaking of collapse, or what we know of an otherwise statueless city; ceremony, comprised of gestures and how our turning is turning against the advance on the window, falterings of light, of precipitate longings, glass casualties, the grain of the colors of unaffected eyes that are shut harbors - given the landscape, our arches and doors, held, opened as water gives way, stretched back in a sound, shared, that is constancy, that is skin, penetrated inward pulling like a gathering up of folds, here, the single substance of rescue: as the form of a curve sustains the semblance of touch, in the function of a hand that works toward making, wants only away from itself; some singular, unremarkable transformation, the beyondness of a finger's bend like a low-moaning train carried from the far side of the mountains where snows wait patiently for their dissolution, like impressions of bodies - extended.

Notes

The epigram is taken from a letter written by Dickinson to critic T.W. Higginson and dated July 1862.

*At the Overpass* employs a line derived from Stéphane Mallarmé's "One Toss of the Dice."

The circumstance of *From the Wheelchair* was inspired by the film version of *A Brief History of Time* by Stephen Hawking.

A line in *And Wings Folded In* takes inspiration from "In Blackwater Woods" by Mary Oliver.

*January 13, 1978* references a line in Rolf Jacobson's "Night Music."

*Elegy for the Disappeared* is dedicated to J. Mattingly.

*An Argument of Water* is based on *Taxi Acuático*, the painting by Remedios Varo.

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