Insolence

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RUSTY MORRISON

Insolence
Winner, 2008 Patricia Goedicke Prize in Poetry

1 Insolence

: living past their deaths isn’t a deed I accomplish modestly.

: the least emergence is a great oak, elemental, obsessively conceived.

: I was listening for rain. But it’s a stroking of hair, a rhythm deep in my breathing. Impossible now to say a thing, without a quieting hand falling upon it.

: my sky of going forward comes unwound, releasing its long tether of origin.

: in the story that I call memory, which won’t retrieve like a good dog running after a ball.

: I won’t be the single green stem in the silhouette.

: I won’t be bound to stillness, or to tremor, as asserting a thing’s substance. Wind is just as easily what cracks under the weight of an unforeseen branch.

: not heaviness, but the friction, makes resistance. In memory, which is only one form that motion takes.

: I say “Father,” the view roughens in reply. I say “Mother,” and the sandy shoal underfoot tosses and flows, school of startled minnows.

: not death as the word it was, but an opening where the whole history of ideas might pass through, undetected.

: down from the high mountains comes only the wind of my own contrivance, the demented nodding of branches.

: “sky,” I say, over and over, which is not “death,” until the meaning turns its back, knobbed and ribbed, showing its bones.

: I have stepped laterally from the keeping that I once thought should oaken, with all its leafy caprice.
each night, more drops of a thick and sticky sap on the tacit tiles, the stepped roof of future.

in certain dusks, trees turn the smoky white of inherited furniture.

I will mar the varnish, the vestments of elegy.

their deaths let me.

2 In-solving

not death, but testing the meaning I make of mother, father, like repeatedly drawing together the two sides of my tongue.

birth certificates, marriage license, news clippings, unfold only a little landscape.

the shape of knuckles, taper of fingers, easily recalled. Not faces.

at the least sound, every glance up, banked for a steep and empty rise.

plight of my signature, letters fall down the well and drown in the welled up.

believing nothing is message, I zealously endorse.

“livid,” says evening light. Even to suggest transcendence, lacerating.

the lark’s sequin flash, my eye is quick enough to know only that it couldn’t catch.

their deaths simply give in to whatever I ask.

even to want to touch this, I tangle.

I want to ask communion. But even to open my mouth, I individuate.

I would offer them the broken china cup that I found in their backyard shrub, but artifacts belong only to the living.

3 In-sensate

nowhere to say “daughter.” Just gentian clusters rising gaudily from a brazen forest floor.
only the shame of fixing oneself in one’s own foreground.

the blue owes me no soliloquy.

my mother’s and father’s deaths are my field-sight, but not to be stored in a leather case I keep on my shelf.

there are hours that belong to the empty panes of westward-looking windows.

there are mirrors that I might make of death, where whatever I think of this new terrain will be all that looks back at me.

any meaning in their dying will only be the one I’ve made for it, as tyrannical as the best tyrants—who practice without rage or reluctance.

obscurant, to observe. Rather than to gather the grace of an obscured background.

no more than sun playing across the sensitive skin of afternoon shadow.

each long-falling step.

4 In-structures

I’ve already made the memory that I call “Father” into the shape of a root, but isn’t it my father I ask to help me bury it?

in this leaf, there are intervals I mistake for destinations. In this branch, the question of what I could meet at eye-level.

is the visible all reproduction?

I finger my deepest wrinkles. The craft of their accruing correspondences.

by draping dark leaves on opposite sides of a cloud-scape, the great painters made a stage and placed us outside it.

less important to measure the length of time it takes to steady the eye to its watching, than to test the filament of watching’s tensile strength.
into the heroics of making meaning, sky draws down its fog. The sound is everywhere at once, but how to stand still for it.

weather is only untrustworthy, not insufficient.

each vista I walk today curves round the corner of my eye. A measureless but un-ignorable direction.

blame today is distant and northerly.

mountain range, a line of lit fires. Busy is the eye that thinks it can watch them all.

5 In-strictures

demanding from my mother’s death a first order of place within the place where I have lost myself, and there will build my house.

composing it of neither blood, nor testimony, nor memory, nor retrieval.

immigrant wisteria will obliterate the wall’s face, will obligate the questioning of form.

in through any open window will come a white unfastening of clouds.

but here, still in the open slope of valley, in the mimetic measurement of every object that her death has now become.

the inrush of evening shadow narrows the shadow-claim of my feet on soil.

5 In-significance

the dead, today, are flushed to fever with my own fending-off.

let the cloud-face be a proposition of finding no face at all.

the axial force in a tossed-away stone. From which I gain no center, yet go on encircling.

the day is a thin, blown-glass nest. Each of their deaths is an egg in it.

there is no disarray at the binding line between light and shade. No uncertainty or censure between sky and branch.

27
where has nothing gone, and everything missed before it went missing.

listening for the split twig’s tact, the someone is coming, its faux benevolence.

the suddenly red crow, glazed with evening sun’s light, as if to convince existence of its presence.

for our death party, I wear briar embellishments.

7 In-severing

"my father and mother," I say. Words are a promontory. For sounding out the voiced and voiceless.

as if I could hear each act fall all the way to the end of memory.

I will bury the two urns of ashes. But not to distinguish gods from objects, objects from gods.

the answerer, who stands behind my grief, signals archly.

a linen to morning’s linger, which I hasten to call morning light.

as the brindled grays of gravel gather to become what I can make out as more than pure distance ahead of me on the gravel road.

what disrupts even the most obstinately ordinal; fallen twigs on the earth nearly, but never re-fashion themselves into what was once an abandoned nest.
	small possum’s carcass at roadside. Too simple to call it death—a something more solid than the flesh that surrounds it.

today, the tinsel flicker of saying anyone’s name aloud cuts quick and sharp.

how long to achieve the calloused fingers that can strum the saying dexterously.

8 In-selvage

verdant today, and labial with many likenesses.
rather than demand that existing points be given co-ordinates, I let every dying organize the figurative.

I try to affix myself to it, like a rhyme.

stylize the grieving in every vowel differently, and not diminish it.

apply the least punctuation, and the moth wing collapses in my palm.

aspen leaves, liquid in wind, hurt more ways than I thought death could store.

roots of the elder oaks push up through the grass, thick with their demand to go on with their living, farther than the known of soil.

I'd wanted the thrush—a winged rush from wood's underbrush—to be causal, not construed, not accusative.

9 In-salving

then simply to say their names as dangerously as I might walk out onto a mirrored floor.

as I walk the lowland into tall grasses, wistful for the thrush's shrill tumult upward.

how to throw a glance, even once, outside my caution, my en-castled formality.

will I die as I have lived, counting?

moth pearl and morning pearl and bread pearl, and the pearl that breaks between ridges of fingernail.

how to demand of composition that its contrivance come apart, but leave the pieces intact?

how might I live death all the way to the edge of its form, not its fixity.

10 In-solace

how fragile, the dry, orphaned banks of an evaporated stream.
the flesh-cuts in a once cultivated vale. Dirt uproarious in wind.

dangerous, to make every object into a doll with a name, a meaning with a past, a met equivalent, and call this witnessing.

a witnessing that thinks it can brush away its objects, like mayflies.

if I hurry the tufts of new grasses into depiction, I feel the warning signs of indifference, as essence withdraws.

all the grasses, brutal with repetition, as though nothing ever really happens.

even haggard and chopped, every landscape will start up again where I thought to stop it. Between skies, art of unmarked crows.

here the path opens into a glade. Here is only the need to go on walking. It studies me.