

***Tell Me About the Long, Dark Path
Home***

Foster Hudson

For my teachers
il miglior fabbro

“all my children”

someone hold me down, i can see a family
of mistakes everywhere i go: every memory
is an heirloom. nothing is so beautiful
as the dust it leaves behind. the story
becomes so pagan when i tell it. i apologize:
i never thought it would be like this.

a poem—

 it's enough: the compromise
of consciousness is a poisoned heart,
and it brings these words to me:
the cherry blossom and spruce,
it is a different time every year.
and scrapbooks of birthdays,
recitals,
 varsity games, prom nights and graduation
ceremonies collect dirt beneath the roots.

 what can i say
lost in the madness—
 i will never learn
to love the reflections in the glass, or the pink light
it refracts. you see, i cannot parse
 all my children
without these lines: my mind is rotting by
the ink i have been pouring
over these words.

my children have run rampant over these pages,
their collage is one spiraling journey of faded
frescoes, baking in the sun. the tears
and blood obscuring, it's my river now
 you are wading through.

i am sorry for the muddy waters.

“so many things”

catching the falling clocks in an english classroom
was my first window that bore a sunbathing glow:
white shirts, tears and green lights across the water
festooning those preliminary hours of passion.

and the beloved words fell with the frost, walking
in the January dusk. in the cruel months, when
the world around me was buckling to its knees,
i found comfort in the words of dead British men,

and the teacher who read them with me. fifteen
minutes of mandolins, beach resorts and cosmic
despair each week was all the encouragement
i needed. so i went after yoknapatawpha county;

looking up every other word and covering
the margins in pencil marks. then climbing up
the ladder of history i read the story
of sprits and slaves; sitting in a cafe,

with my rain-soaked bag between my legs,
i suddenly saw four horsemen before a shed
and a death as stark as roses in a cornfield,
like the words had the ability to conjure scenes

from the air. it was the last sign i heeded;
that moment on i hung over every letter i found.
milk cartons, street signs, shredded books
on the street, and if you're wondering

where this mad journey began,
it was so many things.
one of which was two people
in a classroom, with the world
between their fingers.

For Ileana

“the naked midwife”

and i am the naked midwife
with hands covered in blood clots.
i can still feel her sharp nerves
tingling against my stomach. she is

like a jellyfish floating in my arms,
and i am the stone catching her sparks.
i keep my fingers free, in order not to smear
the color of roses on her skin.

i ease my breath and feel her
again, covered in seafoam like a spirit.
i curl the fingers of my free hand into her balled fist
and call her Aphrodite, mermaid queen,

poet of pearls, mute until she grabs
my seaweed hair by the roots.
i catch the oyster's pearl in my tongue
while tears touch red lips, tucked under teeth.

i lie on my back, both my hands frozen
at a safe distance. she lays love
on my chest and swims across me.
my stomach feels tight as leather,

while my fingers claw into the sand.
the waves crash between
my legs, and i am like a whale
breaking the ocean.

she spits into the sink,
and i am screaming
with laughter.

“suits, flowers and beaches”

i was afraid of the design i had stepped into,:
the suits and the flowers, the photographs
neatly arranged. out on the beach,
the water rose to my ankles.

and the silence breathes new mist,
rolling from an unknown place. but in my hotel
room there is shattered glass at the side
of my bed, while i pout and hide

from the rising moon, the ceremony
having ended. i felt like i was sleep-talking,
slip-streaming in the thickness of my melancholy
and i thought i was a ghost, looking at my reflection

with the bathroom lights on. in the morning
the sun collected the steam from
the shower. i left barefoot and
when i happened on a bluebird, i took a picture.

what i was i doing there, wandering southern
Carmel like a lost puppy? loose threads unspooled
in my heart: my heels trailed purple pedals
against the jet black of the asphalt roads.

in the wedding i was my mother's best man.
coming down the brick, i was thankful
i had no words prepared, but on the beach
i felt stupid and insignificant.

maybe it was never over, that terrible fear:
magenta shirts and pattered dresses even after
the pageantry ended. with filled glasses
i had nothing to say for myself.

six-year olds hung from my shoulders, and
the gaiety angered me so much i thought
running would sew together my splitting headache.
it didn't. how un-luminous,

how un-sanctuary this beach town has proved

to be. not even a worthwhile bookstore
in sight. just bestsellers and steinbeck.
on the plane ride back, i cracked

my cannery row, but i couldn't read.
i felt guilty: my mother was married
and i was thinking
of the canyons i could fall into.

“the end”

a poplar grove of buildings as stubbornly
beautiful as their inhabitants, i did my best
to read, but the clamor
of Paris was sweeter than anything
i knew. i left my Anna Karenina
behind as i skipped across cobblestone alleys
and took photographs of neoclassical spires
against clouds that reminded me of home.

wandering through Pere Lachaise, i was
thinking of the history buried beneath me.
we found Chopin resting beneath Euterpe
as she wept for the ivory that mourned
the blood beneath his fingers.
when we came across Morisson he was surrounded
by a flimsy metal fence. his grave was graced
by beer bottles and cigarette stubs;
there was no Euterpe to weep for the American.

occupied by the forest of skeletons and stone angles, how
was i to survive in this gleaming hell, free
of polytheistic gods to protect my lonely pen?
was it Morrison's marked grave, so decidedly
different than the rest? we came across
sickly Proust, alone until
he met the reaper who guarded
his grave. another troubling sign...

i could have forgave so much then
for a sign. passing his grave,
my mother reminded me i was almost
named Yves for the actor, until my father
pointed out i wasn't even french.
so close to grace,
yet forever falling short...

“ares in brooklyn”

and in the reflective puddles of brooklyn
night has descended,

with its third rail
of darkness stretching across the roads.

the lumbering metal beast comes barreling
with its head lights blaring.

they leave streaks
in my vision.

ambulances come roaring

around corners. police

cars are flashing
their american lights as we march
in staggered lines. neon

is pouring
onto the sidewalks, making
jagged rivers

i try to sidestep in my stride.

but i feel like ares in brooklyn
goose-footed and some kind of belligerent
that plays in the force of my laughter.

the chariots come rumbling in the film grain,

and we are hanging
by our heels from every curb.
my heart is clay and hedonistic:

someday i will be able to trace the maps
we burned

to ash and stomped on.

but the streets change

their meaning in the ink.
and when i look back

where is everything i left behind?

“bare-chested in December (spirits they’re gone)”

my feet shift on a broken compass
and rustle the dead grass: the straight lines
bending, the small fires singing.

i hung from the air like an ornaments
among the bristling trees. bare-chested
in December, i was modeling

for an album cover in which
i would be nearly lost in the film grain.
the spirits vanished in the flame, and i was

laughing while my friends sprinted down
the leaf-ridden hills. at the bottom we nodded
along to animal collective and muddied

our memories.

for Cameron and Max

“smoke signals”

in the smoldering ash the night slathers
the wet gravel, and we tightrope walk
on the thinner strings of this nocturnal web.

we flicker small flames and our smoke signals
the rain that never comes.
until it does, and we are trapped
in the trees, laughing at the way tears torrent the lake
in sheets unfathomably thick. but that was
another tie, when the sun was high
and awaiting the clouds to pass.

now the moon is perched high and low.
our laughter is like a choir
of pigeons scurrying from death.
in this night-culled silence, we are its happy absence,
three hyenas dancing under moonlight,
announcing loudly their fleeting freedom.

but we are seduced, watching the ripples in the lake,
into believing it lasts forever, or better yet,
that there is no forever. only what reaches
us at the tip of the mountain
matters. with bitter, dry mouths,
the taste of the earth lies in our tongues.

the spider’s web will lead us
where it wants
us to be,
we follow unheeded

until we grow tired
and bored, our silence growing.
we now must decide
either to take up the hunt
once more, start new flames,
create new words in the air,

or to come down
the mountain, into the clear, comforting air

of the marshes, and begin
to take the long way home.

for Dominic

“you are my everlovin’ (and hell is every place)”

and hell is every place: the smolder and
beating hearts. the impromptu doctor’s visits.
unclear by habit, i practiced every unsubtle sign,
hoping i would reach her some way.

and hell is the city gardens, watching
her with the blades of grass between
her legs. i was cautious in the sun, with
my heart slamming against my bones.

we played a game of windowsills and art
films; hell is watching the holy mountain
in the dark. so the air was sparse between
us, waiting for the lightning to end.

hell is sheer chance, waiting in the rocks
in the ramble for a phone call. wondering
where the time goes to die, and hearing
afterwards of the therapy visits and brain scans.

but hell is truly the moments in between,
the grapevine gossip and circular
thoughts as she disappears. relegated
to periphery and “so it has come to this?”

i would neither see nor hear of her for weeks.
groveling with a blindfold, hell is the imaginary
places or the memories melted and warped;
my nonsense bleeds across the jagged rocks.

so hell is the unknowing. hard feet on the
asphalt. knotted telephone wires and
prescription fantasies. it is the velvet blindfold
i wore stubbornly, wandering through the grass.

“haiku from the bedroom”

I

curled up kitten with-
out care. how blissful: living
with twenty square feet

II

sunlight glistening
from the windowsill; it shows
me what i'm missing.

III

waking from a dream
in the same bed every day.
cycles without sense.

IV

varying degrees
of stillness descend. my heart
reflects what it sees.

V

the buildings shining
their rows of light: night has come
outside my window.

VI

my thoughts roam freely
swirling round the ceiling fan;
silence loves a friend.

“projector”

every day i was hanging by my lungs, i could say
with certainty that nothing was for sure, and any words
worth knowing were the ones already etched in stone.
in short, alone was easy, and the shelter was nice.

but with each broken string and puff of heat
the chains round my chest slackened, and i found
the diamonds in the nest, gleaming
like Christmas lights. the love i could never

pour i had learned to wrap in riddles.
it was the only way to write a poem, but
the songs we learned were like clear cracks
of thunder against bedrock, and eventually

i knew i wanted all that i could take.
these were the pearly gates i leaned against,
wading in the glittery waters of the lake.
the projected hearts on the screen:

this was the five of us, the fire in the basement.
coming up from the subway platform,
i said all it took was a lot of time and
a little bit of heat. so it is funny to think

that it began in the winter: a circle in
the backyard and cacophony beneath our feet.

For Gus

“metacognition”

so that i can pay no mind to the wolves
shrouded in the darkness as we come creeping
up this unpaved, asphalt road, i am thinking
about thinking. adrift in the soft hours

before sleeping; i wonder about the deer
we don't see. i consider the stillness
weaving through the barren trees.
these strings are the fragile lullaby

caught between the headlights; i
congregate the thoughts in my head
and build together a dream. the night
scrawls shadows by the ink of the brights.

so that i can pay no mind to the maze
of metacognition, while the wildlife
remains just out of sight, i slip back
into it: admitting to being so fickle.

“the keys to the theater”

i kept the keys hanging from my shaking hand.
told myself no doors need to be opened today.
told myself the ballet is missing notes,
missing actors and a reason to be.

the lights come on, and a violent moon protrudes
from the ceiling, hanging by a thread. somnolent
slippers come twirling stage right.
the light can be seen across the pond.

only the fantasy of a star; a stage light covered
by cloth lulls the audience into believing
there's hope. there is none.
these dancers must fall into the water.

and the curtains are drawn. end of act one.
whoever came is shuffling in their seats,
wondering if they can leave. “it was only a pond,”
“yay-long. why couldn't they just swim across?”

pens scrape over notepads as act two
comes barreling through, making no apologies
for structure. now we are at war, splashing
in the shallow shore.

the stars multiply, crash and spew flames.
sheets of white, orange and red
are thrown asunder. the moon grows
a face and fangs.

a knife is plunged.
tragedy befalls center stage; the stars are loose
and just as the first tears fall,
the scene ends. another intermission.

silence befalls the velvet room. “what a terrible
way to hurt me, just for watching your rotten
play,” mutters the air. the exit signs
disappear, as if in response.

act three is quiet, with echoes of a silver lake.

this ballet's windpipe closes.
the songs are mute, the dancers
bound and gagged.

in conclusion,
life loses its way, and is drowned
by the earth. the moon obscures the sun,
and the audience takes its leave.

but here i am, with the keys to the theater
in my naked palm. and i say the ballet
need not open today. nobody has to see
this nonsense, so they may call it a travesty

and continue on about their days.

“welcoming the waterfall”

naturally, my first fear is the clouds parting;
though my bones shiver in the rain, the melancholy
of this dusty pearl keeps my tongue full of ink.
it comes from the mouth of a coral-covered clam;
its color is a deep blue, like the dusk falling mercilessly
upon us. but i welcome the waterfall,

sipping coke from the can, watching the grey clouds chew
at the building-jagged skyline i knew from riding
the bus from Randalls island, trying not to cry.
feeling the buzz of the window on my forehead,
ignoring the chatter; determinations on brain damage
have remained inconclusive. the magma, the fire

has nothing to burn in the endless marsh; i planted
this wetlands in anticipation of this very thing:
all the time spent watching the East River pass...
the temptation to pull the sun closer, show a smile
feign unknowing. as i sat, innocently chewing on raisins,
a therapist came to the conclusion that i was afraid of my mother.

i chose my weapons at birth; no blinding light
can move me. even as the rain turns to snow
i carry my candles from room to room, wasting
precious midnight oil, unable to stay in one place.
bedroom pillows dampen in an aquarium of my dreams,
and when i was young i would pull the covers over my head

for safety. no one felt the need to explain the repercussions—
what i am trying to say is that each day passes
and inspiration comes by way of the crow who pecks
at my fingers when i feed her. without pin pricks like this
i could stick my head in an oven and not even notice
the change in scenery. maybe this is why i never minded

when we moved homes so much. but when we left the city
and travelled across the river, i could never get used to
the trains i always had to take. i would sit in the station,
waiting anxiously for the spotlights to come tearing
around the corner. day in and day out
it was moments like these that made me reconsider—

bleeding from from the top of the mountain, who will see
my crown glinting? who will hear my words singing?
the mud circles around my feet. the earth weeps;
evening is breaking over my head and i have no one
to plead with. the living room lights are off. the apartment
is silent. outside my window, the clouds are parting.

“turtle”

and there i was,
chiseling stanzas

under unforgiving
moonlight. i had

my anchors torn
from the sea.

i skipped stones
across the page,

waiting for a sea turtle
to graze my feet.

but none came.
in new york

all the turtles
have fled.

“mother mountain”

she waits for me as i come tumbling
down from the mountain, silent
and heartbroken. “i knew the ice
was too slippery,” she says, “but it’s good

that you fell. lay by the fire
and let the dogs lick your wounds
while i tell you a story.”
when i returned from hunting

with claw marks covering my arms,
she sighed and said, “i told you
to come back when it became too much.”
when rattlesnake venom was dripping

from my lips, she saw me
with my wild-toothed grin,
and confined me to the bed,
draining the poison from my body.

i carry these memories everywhere
i go, and when i loose my way
i think of her first. mother mountain,
she saves me from every avalanche.

for Dora

“the arctic circle”

perhaps the words frosted with the snowfall,
wandering up and down sidewalks, our shoes
stuck in the slush. it might have been

the frame of mind i was frozen in:
a heart wrapped in icicles beat the best
it could as she stomped through the snow,

clinging to my arm and complaining
about the cold. really, it was my own
tendencies that stopped me in my tracks.

so i spent a couple months in the arctic circle
with dry ice on my tongue, waiting for a song
to save me the trouble of begging.

and a couple months was all it took:
by the time the snow melted
i had missed my chance. the sun was out,

and reflecting on my choices in the barely-there
heat of spring, i wondered what it was
that brought on the flood in my heart,

now turned to frost.

“maps”

at the tip of the packing knife hangs history,
a lineage that spreads its limbs across the earth
and digs its hands into the dirt.
arbitrary? i do not understand
the meaning of the word.

i stay my line as best i can most days,
but when the road grows thinner
and the railings disappear,
who am i to occasionally tip
one way or the other, if only to hear
the rushing rapids beneath me?

my family bore no sailors, no explores.
only veterans, construction workers and silent
drinkers. with the curtains drawn a thousands dreams
were spun around dinner tables and before
mirrors. the frost settles on idle breath.

or perhaps none of this is true. foremost
about my legacy is that i know very little,
and fabricate much. so legacy turns to legend.
performing cartography on malleable surfaces,
nothing points to a bibliography or treasure map.

the sadness is dripping
from my heart into a fountain
which has been there splashing
for years. its makers are unknown.

i'll never buy an umbrella, but complain
when my maps are soiled in the rain.
this is merely the way i'm built,
figured from the dust of my ancestors.

“the midnight service”

it was the farthest into the night
i was allowed to see. the thin pages of a bible,
reading the alien language of hymns forged so long ago
they might as well have been there all along.

the bell choir: a fixture of my mother’s pride,
teenage girls shuffled in a row, wearing white,
ringing bells that filled every corner with harmony.

“your great-grandmother,” my mother told me,
“conducted the choir while she was the organist
for the church.” it was impossible
to image the strange, senile woman i knew
commanding the winding, beastly instrument
i saw in the back of the church.

and yet command was the word i heard most
when people spoke of grandma doris, and watching
the conductor and the choir, it was as if i could
still feel a presence i never knew
but immediately understood.

the room had become filled with ghosts
hanging by their wings. i felt their feathers
against my cheeks, lulling me to sleep.

in the years that followed, i slept through
the midnight service. i had seen my fill of god
and the angles he brought with him:
their legacies made well known to me through
mystery and song.

“obituary”

*David P. Brunski, passed away Thursday, Feb. 26, 2009, after a brief battle with brain cancer.
He is survived by three grandchildren, Foster Hudson, and Lily and Audrey Howard.*

how strange,
to be printed next to death, tethered to a man i barely knew.
only in stories:
bursting through the door in search of me, as a baby,
naively dreaming in my mother’s arms.
“where is my grandson!” was the booming call, the foghorn
chasing after my brown gleaming eyes.
i was transported to the land of his hairy, muscular forearms,
and left there under his watch.
he would gaze at me for hours, and when I was put to bed,
crawling in my palace of dreams, he told my mother
i was going to be an artist.

what clairvoyance
for a man who chastised me on a mini golf course:
seven-year old me, aping the golfers at the masters
my father forced me to watch. perhaps
he was angered by the presumption
that i was in competition
for that green jacket. or perhaps
it was the misunderstanding, the unused intellect
that could not see the difference between this dinky course
and the lush emerald 18-hole. perhaps he was doing me a favor,
recognizing misguided athletic tendencies and
squashing them before they could ferment,
suffocating my fragile artistic soul.

his strength,
so unlike his sensitive, poetic kin, was his pride.
number twenty-seven for the red back raiders,
he would scare away the competition with his calf-lifts,
pulling all the weight the machine would hold with just one leg.
playing until the cancer chained him to the bed, his hockey games
were a colosseum of battle cries and shoulder-bashing.
the Brunski name was nothing if it wasn’t proud, as i could see it,
even if my frail lanky body was a shadow in the legacy of
a construction-worker’s wake.

dying,
my grandfather flirted with the nurses. a lion song
refused to die in his breast unless it took him with it,
and when he passed i had nothing to compare it too:
mourning was not yet in my nature, so i had no sense
of what was lost. "obituary" was missing
from my vocabulary, and as the dust settled and the months turned
to years, my grandfather's mural filled out in my memory.

perhaps if i had known
that my name would appear
under my grandfather's
in the newspaper,
i would have paid more attention.

“stargazer”

what do you think of, stargazer, now that
we have stamped out the lights? New Milford
in a deep navy blue, polka-dotted: with your friends
all around you, what do you contemplate?

*i am contemplating the crickets in the grass
camouflaged, and chirping, scattered around this basketball court*

which constellations do you favor? they are so clear
now that the spotlights are gone. these reminders
of a dying epoch: what mythos are you born from?
which do you spill your ink across?

*have you heard the story of perseus and andromeda?
in truth i couldn't tell one star from another...*

these constellations will forever be out of reach:
never changing, only disappearing in the polluting
presence of artificial light. what is their intent,
stargazer, why do they insist on their permanence?

*history is only as sturdy as the paper it is written on
if the sky tells the story, then we are as ephemeral as a cricket's tune*

everyone knows how your heart beats,
it is felt easily in the dirt beneath us.
stargazer, what world are you imagining?
what world are you forgetting?

*imagine you are pacing the pews of constellation...
i'm sorry, my memory is forfeit*

the night swallows whatever is not immediately visible;
under the cover of stars, the balmy air stirs
of summer. the shadows waltz on the asphalt, between
rusting basketball hoops. and where are you, stargazer?

*under the shade of pegasus' wing,
i am exactly where i need to be*

“performance”

when i was young, i would trace
the orchestra’s heartbeat along the edges
of the program. my pen moved up and down
mirroring an EKG, and when the music
swelled i listened by drawing peaks and troughs
that reached from the text to the borders of the page.

i looked to release the death i carried; a girl i never knew
committed suicide at my school, and that afternoon
i went to see a film about horses. i wanted more tragedy:
more horses bound for slaughter, less heartfelt families gunning
for their rescue. i wanted to feel the lingering death in each frame.
walking home, i believed the stars were falling out of the sky.

in an open amphitheater, where moths fluttered
around the spotlights and bats hid in the lighting trees,
i watched dancers run under the moonlight. i was never sure
what it all meant, the vicious shapes and the way
the shadows played in the circles of light.

the roots of the auditorium are cacophony: so i drowned
in my school theater, playing louder than anyone
asked for. i stomped and roared, like feral
cubs unknowing of the world. but always
in the moments before, i would stand still by the river:
cold and wet, filling my body with thoughts of death.

in a black box, up the road from the open theater, it was the scene
with the angels that struck me: protesters in Laramie
for a dead man, strapped to a fence. outside,
when the play was over, i looked up at a nearby lamppost
and felt the summer air on my back. suddenly yearning
for silence, i wandered off from the crowd
and waited for the tears to come.

post-it notes confessing secrets anonymously on a subway wall:
its own sort of performance as it stops me in my tracks.
but they are harmless like butterflies, admitting to soft truths
in fake handwriting. so i am on my way again, passing
by the same buskers with weathered guitars, singing

familiar songs out of tune.

“strange creature”

out of
a feeling
that i was
missing out,

my mother and i
rescued a cat
from a shelter
uptown.

she did not seem
so fat in the cage,
nor was it clear
that she lacked
most her teeth.

so this was the
beginning of
a new kind of care
in my heart.

a strange creature
as screwed up
as me, begging
for food at every
opportunity.

“space travel”

i stand before the tape loops of personal history,
the gasoline tank in hand, the match hanging from my teeth:
everything we love is eventually lost, and
my mind is the cosmonaut dreaming
of the poems he wrote in high school.

lightning cannot strike where there is no air,
or ground to break: another phenomenon without
a name, so somebody can always ask, “didn’t it rain?”
as the rivers split and tear into craters like the moon,

survival is space travel, says the senile astronaut,
for in space all things are condemned to silence,
and you’re alive only as long as you can hold your breath.
it is the black hole of knowing there is no glowing
exit sign in the stars.

so i am quiet at the edge of the water, practicing the advice
of space animals to survive. and my blood is as dirty
as the rings of saturn, cut from the cloth of an asteroid belt,
as i try to drown every roll of tape in the river bed.

For the twin rivers

“on smashing my windows”

to let the birds in; they cannot fit
through the slim opening i have left
them. they are tired of the silent spring
and are begging for bread crumbs to feed them.

for the fragrance of flowers blooming
to no audience. even the bees, it seems,
are practicing stay-in-honeycombes.
so who, then, will praise their perfume?

for the jungle plant in my living room
with its branches reaching to the corner
of the windowpane where the sunlight lies.
it would seem even this stolid tree is lonely too.

for the slowly warming air, slipping morsels
of freedom through the open cracks.
even with the fans on, this sterile atmosphere
struggles to move.

to feel the spring showers, rather than
simply hear droplets pattering on the sill,
while i watch puddles gather in the sidewalk
only to disappear by the morning.

so that i may shout at the spare passer-
by beneath me. just a simple hello,
reconfirming that simple greetings still
have meaning, hollered from such out-of-practice lungs.

for the melancholy earth, surely missing
its spring partakers playing in the grass,
holding picnics, throwing frisbees,
racing through the air that surrounds us like a blanket.

but most of all to know
that there is something to be done
about being forcefully alone
besides sitting and waiting for it

to be over.

“suddenly sunbathing”

her sunshine brandished itself silently,
nestling itself into the corners of rooms.
i was yearning to be blanketed in gold,
kept mute like a blade of grass in a garden
and admired from a distance the vastness
of her joy, content never to see its finer details,
so long as i was never in danger of losing my sight.

this was how i kept myself
dangling from the time-worn branch
of a tree i had planted, cultivated and loved
since youth; always smelling roses
and never close enough to bite at the petals.
perhaps what threw me from my roots
was when she told me she preferred sunflowers,
and all the light confused me.

i began thrashing and twisting the rope i hung by,
until the turmoil snapped the thread upon which
i had strung the delicate fabrics i had sewn
and i came crashing into a bed of roses, head-first.
it is a miracle, reminiscing on the folly
of the entire construction, that i did not immediately
snap my neck.

or perhaps the greater miracle is that upon impact
the sunflower resting underneath the crown
of my head, which should have been crushed,
remained proud and bright as the sun
herself.

and there we were,
suddenly sunbathing
unsure of just exactly
what is was
we had fallen into.

“tatterdemalion soldier”

send me to bleed, tatterdemalion
soldier. you and i share a poisoned heart.

have no fear, son of clovers and rose crests,
there is no known cure. you will be relieved

of duty in due time. come, let us foxtrot
with our rifles slung round our shoulders.

in the between time, after all the bullets
have been fired, but before our wounds can be treated,

let us fire rounds into the black night,
let us drink and fight so that we can taste our bleeding gums.

rejoice in the shelter that was torn away from you,
celebrate the searing pain of this blade of freedom thrust

into your back. always remember the beauty
of your lover, for the photographs thrown into the fire.

always dream of the battlefield. it will embarrass you
to know how tethered you are to this torn-up place,

but nobody knows the echoing canals of your mind,
so feel safe at least in this; i am your one true lover.

your tongue will bleed and i will be there with the bucket.
when you come screaming back from a dream, it's me smothering

you with the pillow. you and i are failures together,
left behind without a morsel of a true word,

and when we die on the front line, there won't be a soul
to eulogize us in the papers. a flimsy legacy

regardless. so send me to battle first, ragged, ailing
brother of mine. our time is limited.

“mrs. robinson”

this was what complicated the darkness:
nocturnal animals shifting
in the back of the theater, as
dustin shuffled on his feet
before sex, considering the magnitude
of the disaster hanging in the air.

i had taken her to see the graduate.
like working a marionette, i began
to pull at loose strings. my body sung
quietly like a delicate flute
of glass, capable of shattering
if played too loudly.

my heart twisted in her hand.
i became rigid like a rod of iron.
i caught every breath in my throat
like catching a canary trying to turn itself loose,
and when i looked her way, her eyes
were gazing intently at the film.

though she was slow and careful,
i had the stamina of a kitten.
by the last scene, meeting
the gaze of two lovers, unsure
of the mistake they had stumbled into,
i was only considering the warmth flowing
like honey through my body.

outside, she told me
how much she enjoyed the film,
and i had to admit that i wasn't
paying very close attention;
distracted, i was thinking
only of one line:

“mrs. robinson, you're trying to seduce me.”

“lemonade”

see me mixing lemonade in the park,
my eyes full of sparks.

see me wandering in the empty fountain,
with a throat full of flames.

see me struggle to follow the cobblestone path,
as the stones trade places with the grass.

see me swing this carton back and forth,
take a drink and forget the taste.

see me with my gentle smile,
earnest for a change.

“dawn arriving”

clocks bled tears watching me
slog and stumble. with the buzzing of dobson flies
as my backdrop, i tried to crush the bones
in my fingers as summer sank into dusk.
unwilling as stone, i wore the same sweatshirt
every day for weeks because it hung all the way down
to my knuckles. screaming coward to dumb ears, i held
my veins like loose electric wires spitting up sparks,
and the sun rose like a crystal in the morning.
the dawn unnerved me as it broke over the trees,
like a weapon brandished over my head.
i flinched every time the grass grazed my ankles, and
marching down the hill i heard the clouds sharpening
their knives, so that when i came out and found gold
running rampant across the ground, i wasn't surprised.
this was the fierceness of my despair: i counted the days
by the fading of a prison tally i restarted every couple weeks.
and dawn arrived like a tidal wave some days; i was drowning
in its stupor when i saw eyes like gleaming pearls look at me
like i was dying, right there in front of them.
and i had no answer. a simple smile without confession:
i had no intention of being loved on anyone's terms.
it became a very long dream, and when i came to
i was crying over scars that were never there.
the branches turned jagged and spiteful in the dark,
and my shadows grew long in the scattered, unfaithful light.

For New Milford

“the mausoleum of all hope and desire”

“I give it to you not that you may remember time,
but that you might forget it now and then
and not spend all of your breath trying to conquer it.

Because no battle is ever won...
They are not even fought.”

- William Faulkner

I. absence

in any field, i am the absence.
in a sun-kissed patch of grass, with the
quiet clicking of cicadas; the multitude
of chattering birds; the grass whisperings;
the soft heat pervading; the gold—

what then, is absent of me?
are my steps even felt, or are they
merely there to take away?

beneath the foliage, between the dusk leaves
i can feel the tide of sunlight ebbing
from high to low; our sins are stubborn,
our emotions are fast and loose, and blinded
by the sun, i am no closer to understanding
this pool of ink.

*have you no sense
of history, of monuments, of legacy?
do you not feel
the searing pain in your gut and wonder
where they lay the dead?
it goes like this:*

*the car's on fire, and it's you at the wheel
fumbling for the brakes.
why look for what isn't there?*

i saw a pretty street this morning
i forgot the name situated
in Paris,
 entre la rue Aumot-Thiéville et
 l'avenue des Ternes

*play possum all you wish,
eventually you will face the music.*

sweet distress
i wish i could practice abstinence of you,
red cherry and honey wine.
what nectar will you offer
now? this tongue has been stripped

 of all its loving senses.
it was done in anticipation of you, pixie
spraying dust around my nose. alone,
i am but a lesser Baudelaire, only losing
sight of life's horror when i am sitting
at the typewriter.

*PER ME SI VA NE L'ETTERNO DOLORE
PER ME SI VA TRA LA PERDUTA GENTE
LASCIANTE OGNE SPERANZA, VOI CH'INTRARE.*

and so it was written:
you nocturnal owls,
sitting patiently under a sky which passionately
hates you, what is
this language of coos and twits?
(what branches grow, which roots clutch
 at your peace-loving claws?)

 petal fingers pedaling across the dirt
a root note of a pulse, of all its loving senses—

be silent and be still, lord
of the smallest dominion. the peasants

of my mind have donned their knight's armor
and require no assistance
governing nothing.

go ahead.

*solder together the iron bars you find
in junkyards and call it art. dream
of your funeral in a c sharp minor
prelude. gather your toothbrushes,
your thumping snaketime, don't think
they will protect you. don't think
i have not the means to rip them apart.*

*(my soul magnifies the lord
and my spirit rejoices in God
my savior
for he has looked with favor
on the lowliness of his servant)*

II. meaning

an undead morning.

the sun splits open
and i wave my shredded flag of peace
for the invisible priest; you, lord
have no place in this matrimony, whispering
words stripped of their meaning
just to hear their sound play in the air.
 there is no holy age.

when i look out to the city the buildings wither like
winter besetting the forest like cold breaths on the sky
i was in the snow trudging in bulky boots as i felt
your presence again goading me to catch snowflakes
while i was only saying "wait, wait," as if repetition
didn't sand away the meaning of words.

why of course reflecting all: looking glass
landscape, you would show me the words
and cure these blank pages with ink ribbons

and hate. of course a blood pact is needed:
wading through the black jade. *what language*
can instruct...
as a matter, of course your blood is sacred. i would never
touch it.

speaking in tongues, we spread
our language across our lips

another undead evening...

a sharp prelude said:
into the strenuous briefness:
life.

and hearing these words i cannot
help but question your bloody gold
shining in the moonlight i cannot
help but ask what is their meaning?

Sieh den Himmel, du unsichtbares Gedicht!
i go through all this before
you had even the sight or the sound
of pianos crashing in your heart. so

no more words from you. give me
some semblance of peace. your
jewels need a split-open sun
to stay glowing, after all.

of all the wires, it was the telephone wires
from heaven; i received the call in the dead
of a dying night. i was not looking
for sadness, but i can see the thunder
before it strikes.

it is your white-blue eyes,
your Veronica Lake bang,
the old roman coin in your pocket.
you gain your predictive power
from these unoccupied seats
at the table.

quiet now. you scare meaning-
ful thoughts back to their graves.
there is no
holy age for shelter. the priests
have left town, and the war ended in
white flags scattered around me.
they are meant to signify defeat.
how hard is it for you to take a hint?

*how hard is it for you to follow simple directions,
having never even tasted true defeat?
your heart leads you by a megaphone,
and you are stuffing cotton
in your eardrums.*

do you know nothing?

i know my eyes are brown,
and i cannot follow
what has no intention to lead.

III. fear

you have found me at the peak of this feral mountain,
planting my flag in this soft rock of nothing.
come under this empty shade, see what
dancing shadows have to say. it's hard enough
to get any traction in the rain.

*your anger is like the waves crashing
against the cliff, so far out of reach.*

(well now, hold on
maybe i won't go to sleep at all)

*the words are so close, what makes you
insist on playing Estragon
at this crucial moment, when the boat
is at the crest of the wave?*

because you ask of me an impossible task:
it's here, in front of the ailing ink ribbon.
disbelieving the altar's ornate implications,
i am forever waiting for the glow between the keys,
 frailty, thy name is dying!

i've had a dream about this place
and i'm scared like i can't tell you,
this half-night, but i get even more
 scared when i see
how frightened you are.
then i realize what it is.

because you ask of me something i could never
even hope to achieve: this golden heart you seem
to believe i possess. the story of sodom and gomorrah:
how many men have drawn their pens
from a kingdom of death?

you must understand
i want no one else to succeed.
there are times when i look at people
and i see nothing worth liking.

 but what terrifies me is not the dreams,
but the memories they leave. i am afraid
of what the sharp tip of a pen could do to me—

as if everything around it moves as if just this one time
and one time only the agony in the shredded pages
and from no part of me could i summon a voice
 from no part of me is there a prelude:
a deluge of the sound
 of every word together at once.

so what can i say, lord,
before your golden crown?
i have never been afraid of sacrifice,
and yet this blank heart frightens me
like watching a lamb bloodletting
on an altar.

*fear is a source of your despair
one of many, it seems.*

IV. despair

and this hell is new every day. so see you in the darkness
lord; when this has finally concluded and i am sitting
with a bag over my head, you can finally say to me
that you had this in mind from the start: the guns, the tarp
and the blood. you had me in mind from the start.

*and we knew beautifully, in days i cannot
recall: a country road, a tree.
in the cedar and frozen-honey thoughts i add sugar
to my wine: just the dash necessary...*

so let these bleeding hands testify:
i have been tending the crops for you lord,
raising the cattle and watching the sun rise
on my sorry home.

what's done cannot be undone, even as
our skulls fade to dust...

*an incident here and there...
but against all accounts i was feeling fine,
i woke each morning with bright eyes.
the sun was a welcome intrusion—*

*as the people who adore you stop adoring you
as they die as they move on
as the world forgets you as you learn
there is no one watching you...*

*but by the tender mercy of our God,
the dawn from on high will break upon us,
to give light to those who sit in darkness.*

*it's a feeling you will never win against
screaming i don't! i don't hate it! i don't hate it!
for your friends and family members—*

*but it's you, now, not anyone else
before the mirror with eyes as brown
as Birnam wood...*

*you are the only one to carry these memories for the dead,
no one else can make this march along London bridge.
even if every day is a bitter taste of adrenaline-induced
despair, these memories carry their weight in gold*

and when you die they die with you

*the truth is, this history is littered with failed poets,
prophets peddling polytheistic gods
before the guillotine. but you must stand proud and tall,
because i know the blood that has been spilt at your feet,
the suicides and the open hearts.*

*these words are a violence and they are a peace,
so let them ring through your body like a clanging bell
that drowns out any semblance
of silence.*

V. silence

sometimes i see
something so moving i know
im not supposed to linger:

love it. trust it. and leave.

...et il est parti
sous la pluie
sans me parler

*et moi j'ai pris
ma tete dans ma main
et j'ai pleuré*

VI. peace

how soon we come to road's end—
so we beat on, boats against the current,
and if i only could, i'd make a deal with the sun
to shine only for me. how soon we face
what we've know from the start.

it's so impossible, this life of experience
and memory. this cold ground, this dark night,
it is impossible, the insurmountable futility
of what we are asked to do born
with the flimsy tools of rememory, made only
to haunt us and keep us down, a field of energy
always so vain as to dance for ourselves.

but we rebel against this—not the dying
but because when all's said and done
death should triumph over life.

so what is peace, lord?
what is there to hope for?

*when all the people witnessed
what the thunder said, they were afraid and trembled and stood at a distance.
“do not let God speak to us, or we will die.”
yet a pink moon hangs in April,
(and none of ye stand so tall)*

*so our only answer must be child-like,
for even the eldest quiver before the light.
i can only tell you to live a thousand lives, and write
them all as if you were there. this way death is only the ink
that lines your golden pen.*

see you in the next life.