

NOON: journal of the short poem

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HOMELESS THOUGHT

A last truck parked on standing water,
surface run-off, gusted leaves
drowned in overflowing drain pools:
nothing's only good or bad,
think what you will, and nothing unalloyed

for thought here in its homelessness ...
It follows beaten paths through woods
yearning to be somewhere,
to be somewhere else.

BURIED COUNTRY

Then, daily, on these built-up pavements,
over cracked, root-buckled flags
I try to glimpse, as from a ridgeline,
the landscape's reconfigured views,
well-hidden, buried country,

country before us and beyond
this parenthesis, still open,
its minute slice of time.

THE SEAL

Sometimes I dig at memory,
because I have to keep
an ice-hole open.

Sometimes an unexpected word
slides down and through
like a harpoon.

OPENINGS

Who can say where the door is,
swinging on unseen hinges at a touch
into a room, unguessed, behind the wall?

So the sun's arc shifts out of cloud
and the near, never noticed hill
burns like a lover's breast.

FORECAST

A floater, scarcely seen
in the planktonic free-for-all –
white medusa hooked around
its drop of grit – eddies with spore,
bacterium, virus and mite through this
ocean of air. One flake, but on the wheel
my hands stiffen for skid. Already in your
blood, your generous O positive, one
sloughed cell drifts, perhaps, upon
the tide, twisted instructions
coded for ice.

searching for
the perfect word
I play
with the ink left
in the barrel of my pen

QUARTER HOURS

It's like an argument in an unmade bed. The confrontation comes out of nowhere and escalates rapidly. This morning's bird alarms bring us to the window. A clash between scrub jays and their darker cousins the Steller's jays. It's loud and raucous, a ruckus, voices embedded in the tree bark like shrapnel for these duff shakers. All this bravado for leftover peanuts put out by our neighbor. Each troupe is adamant that they are the rightful beneficiaries of this plenty. Who gets to fatten their stashes, their survival caches? Winter is measured in quarter hours. We look for assurances and lose the pillow words. Things are made and then unmade. Drawn to the jay's harangue, a flyby of warblers recalibrates the mob.

sleepless night
darkness shows me
its finest regalia

lust an abbreviation of skin

THE END IS THE BEGINNING IS THE END

We fell into something resembling love
at a tacky seaside resort. Shouldn't we fall out
of something resembling love
at a tacky seaside resort?

TINA SAYS

Before I sleep with you
I need to look through your wallet
and check your sock drawer.
You can watch – I just need to be sure
that you are who you say you are.

from THE GIRLFRIENDS

The girlfriends make bad jewelry and need rides to the dentist.
The girlfriends smell amazing and know words before they are
things.

The girlfriends exchange looks and return gifts.
The girlfriends sway in cars like dashboard saints.

They hug with their hands.
I breathe in the charcoal filter;
I breathe out the origin of clouds
like Polaroids in a stranger's estate.

The girlfriends are former.
They have become wives.
They rise from deck chairs,
precarious, precious, eternal, consigned.

ODE TO OUR FORE MOTHERS

I'm looking at this electric bill
and I don't even know what I have done
with all that supposed
light.

In a quiet moment,
she announces
in full voice
her arrival
at the precipice
of leaving
her beautiful mind

Pluck from your vocabulary the word 'journey' before I threaten
to sit still forever

Sheila E. Murphy

PROCRASTINATION

for Anton Yakovlev

I've written only one sestina,
but every word in it is 'blah',
the title being 'Intestina'.

I've written only one sestina;
I'll write another *pro crastina*,
or triolet today, uh-huh!

I've written only one sestina,
but every word in it is 'blah'.

YEAR END

Before closing up the library on the last day of the terrible year, he wrote in the work binder for the cleaning crew that night, 'Please remove the cobwebs on the brick window ledge in the stairwell between the first floor and lower level. Thank you.'

RECTIFICATION

We will not make love: we have to record the sounds the rats make while gnawing the skyscraper's heart.

THE HOE

My father had a favorite hoe. Before each planting, weeding or harvesting he would beat the edges of its blade with a hammer. He would beat it for quite some time with a vigor one could easily mistake for affection. It had a smaller and rounder blade and a shorter handle than the other hoes. For me it always felt delicate, almost fragile. If he happened to spy any of us using it he always became enraged. My father named it Erzsi. My mother's name is Erzsi.

the beat of the fontanel when we're gone

Patrick Sweeney

A STORY BY ISAAC BABEL

I read my pop a story
with a lot of russian street names
most of which I stumbled over
and I laughed.

he sat on the edge of the bed
his hands quietly folded as
he listened.
that was quite a mouthful, he said.

the cat is in the cat hospital. the wind is loud. the tree is a wild
thing and threatens the window. there's no place like home.
there's no place like home. there's no place like home.

without you I need to translate every thought to words. not
that there weren't always words between us but those were.
song. this now allows no lilt. just prose.

prose. fine. I can do that.

I'm trying to get used to this. its not like death.

THE OLD PSALM TUNE

At the office we were asked: cremation or burial? I hid my bandaged hand, burned already by an oven. I wondered, does the mind remain cognizant, do eyes look out and see the attendant mourners, and does one cross over, and then will I see Fess Parker but wish for mother?

REGRETS

All clubs and parties are renounced. We seldom leave the house. The old bricks often bear the prints of fingers that shaped them. We had a small situation this a.m. with our coffee pot but it is fine. The sound of the wind through a mask – an open mouth.

CONCERNING ANGELS

They are terrible with their unused teeth. Sharp, small like a child's. Their new skin, navel-less bellies.

Of halos I am uncertain. Perhaps they shimmer in their magnitude, but the idea of wings is ridiculous and unnecessary. They are light enough to be carried on the least of things. Merely the breath of God, emerging from His lips thin and improbable.

When we meet them in our trailers and used bookstores they bring only proof of our neglect. They make evident our unclean teeth, our petty shifting, the horrible movements of our tongues.

They are full and we are not. They give no place to enter. The force of their voice is such as to not admit another tongue in their mouths. Their lips when parted lead nowhere.

CONCERNING FIRE

There are men and there are men on fire. If they are different,
it is only accidentally so.

shaving mirror
how to slough off
what's inside

water fight to war to fight

John Hawkhead

so let's have my kalashnikov talk to your dictionary

a thousand years of fingers quietly groping the afterlife

Marcus Liljedahl

UNTITLED

Gargoyles spit rainwater
on the trumpeting angel –
stone faced.

the emergent
christ
on second lockdown

Marilyn Ashbaugh

from THE LOCKDOWN ELEGIES

All elegies are written
before the end.
A lot before the end
in some cases.

*

In the intervals between lockdowns
we sharpened our profiles
and accumulated our strap-on faces

so that now only the most careful algorithms
recognize us

only the most careful mouths.

*

I was speaking in tongues
many tongues
so many mouths in me
I was shaking
standing there with my arms upraised
aquiver with the spirit
I wanted tenderness
at the last minute
one more time

*

The air has gotten too thick
for my lungs.
It was full of syllables.

*

Oh no
she said
oh no.
Oh no
I said
too.

co(i)munity

for the disaster
they closed the domain
starling dance

abuse the barn hides in fog

Adrian Bouter

Mid-morning deluge:
the asphalt like an anvil.
Water smears traffic
lights, umbrellas, as I pull
over for shadows to pass.

giving directions –
the driver's
neck tattoo

so the passenger train
freighted with and and and
and

hands big as truck stops, the bare-knuckle branches,
summer swallowed whole, those wolves
of ice

FROM THE PEOPLE WITH ENORMOUS WINGS

The old lady struggles, leaving shuffle marks
in the snow. No shopping bag,
so maybe it's church
and maybe not. Perhaps she is
out for a walk, because she can,
and the night is spare, and she is
undiminished and harder than bone.

ONE FOOT OUT OF BED, HE SPEAKS

One foot out of bed, he speaks for the first time
in three days: 'I have to see about a boat.'

The chair moves when you sit on it.
No, it's moving by itself.

THE TABLE WHERE HE ATE

Carry the box between you;
it contains empty space.
Take your time, there's no hurry.

Staircase. A case full of stairs.

ROOM

she refuses to leave the room, any room
no, I'm all right they encouraged her
at first now it's too late a battered

fish in the toilet, sandwiches
hidden in the biscuit tin
just a bit of custard, thanks

LONG TALL SALLY

'You know the Beatles, "Long Tall Sally"
that I played in the car?' I said.
'They recorded that in a single take.'

'Is there anyone else you can tell that to?' she said.

chilly reception –
a bowl of grapes
perfumes the room

stationary clouds ... the librarian checks us in

insomnia ...
the blue fly at the heart
of everything

Sandra Simpson

dusty millers
circle the yard light
night four
of your coma

years between pages
a plane ticket to
my father's funeral

sunrise lacking an odor
the same color pill
each day

Gary Hotham

MAY MORNING

a small *kyu-kyu-sha* –
a white ambulance in full bray –

edges its tires
through silent streets

at no more
than ten kilometres

per hour –
a dry-swallowed pill

LEARNING CURVE

Twenty years now
since our purebred Siamese,
blind, and with acute diabetes,
passed. I'm remembering how

my father ministered her daily shot
by needle – how she used to purr,
having quickly learned what was good for her,
in all the ways that I have not.

despite what Sumerian summer sunsets this dream

some future me in the cicada swing band micro-measures

David Boyer

from SONIMALS (work in progress)

an ant and an antelope elope along a long slow slope

a frugal eagle ogles the guttered bagle, but is it legal?

what harm the charm of a farmer's market to a marmot whose
got karma?

a populist opossum opposes my apparent political apathy

a Saxon ox walks among rocks in its orthodox socks

Jim Kacian

The colors of those birds in no other words.

If this isn't what it could be
what it could be might be this.

TWILIGHT OF THE METAPHYSICIANS

We don't know the language we're in we don't know
the picture we're in we don't know the play we're in
we don't know the song we're in we don't even know
the poem we're in but the gray-haired locksmith
there at the rusty wrought iron gates of the cemetery
setting his watch to the splendid birdsong
coming up from the weeping willows along the banks
of the winding river below has heard it all before.

Mark Terrill

I STOOD

I stood in a river like a branch
thrown there by a storm that had
ravaged forests, a snag

around which language
beyond my comprehension flowed
except for my own

words sticking to me
like leaves, telling me
I was a tree.

WEARY

I've grown weary of poems
whose words apologize for being words,
for being static to the fox's contrapuntal yip,
mere shadow to the pebbled
colors peeling away
from the river stone to shine trout.

The fox will lie down in its den.
The trout will return to shadow
and stone will bury its own.

UNACCOUNTABLE

Some days like are like people –
the word, that is, when
you wonder
as you hadn't until just now
what that 'o' is doing there,

days you rise
and before you know
anything,

find yourself out
walking, unaccountably
alive among others who
don't look surprised.

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