

VIREO'S NIGHT

BY

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AMONG FORESTS AND FIELDS

I look and look to the page, then turn, see
myself reflected in the window of the studio.

Dusk and the dark firs waving at me.
Night and the dark firs waving at me.

All kinds of pictures and poems on the walls.
Nest of necessity, curling around the room.

To search and search for this beauty,
then discover the girl alone. O firs, O black night,

the tug of the wire attached to the skull,
it hauls light up ever higher, emanates

heat from its core; firs, black night and
reflecting pool of window, forgive me.

One

TRADUCCIÓN

Map lines: their cross hatchings, intersections, throughways,
dead ends. Images of movement, they imply space and time

in one instant. Ours was the happening in between,
a diffusion of streets into history, an environment

defined by you, unrolling, alleys not drawn but born.
Light switches flipped in dark rooms. In the fissure

of a wall, a garden—water fell from a leaking drainpipe
to the broken concrete below. Ferns, moss, a bundle

of delicate roots inched themselves into the built,
through the lens. The lights of occasional cars

trailed through air as long-exposure photographs.
Behind street lamp, vacant building—

each story an intangible interior, we are
more than the sum of what we can record.

CALLES DE MÉRIDA A LAS TRES DE LA MAÑANA

This is a time of grace: we remember the weaving,
occasional lights of sepia cars during our hours

of night translation. The yellow streetlamps'
glimmer falls deeply, purifies each wandering man,

every drunk with arms full around basket or love,
and settles between us like an animal curling for rest;

circle, circle, drop into somewhere the spirit knows
to be full. A fine dust on all; construction of the new city,

splinters, stones and machinery of the dark, amassing
every hour. It rebuilds itself to glow like the sun,

roomy, contains two names for each one. A raven web
of telephone wire connects us. Every word

increases until it shines like copper, attentive—
it permeates the surface of all things until they flame.

We reach eager for what centre we contain.

A LAS TRES DE LA MAÑANA

By yielding to the language, we understand the other.
At three in the morning the city cools to accept us;

we stumble through like dogs, hunch, touch one another
wherever we can. Clarity is a chapel of these stars,

low above amber buildings, rusting iron doors.
Articulation, transmutation of phrase, the scrape

of a boot on gravel. I wake from where I have folded
on my own arm, the listening a whole, corporeal, longing.

These are bicycle hours, the streets empty,
a pedal clutched in the quiet; each wheel languid,

backward, inviting meaning into sentence
as a train makes a landscape go by.

Another set of words drives its way home,
meshes after the mind surrenders.

Not of the light, we let ourselves be placated,
to uphold the names, to keep the steps aloft.

HABANA

Around us, the remains, spilling, ending
at the Malecón, a semi-circle of swaying architecture

straining against the moving sea—moonlit surface,
music close and clear as its depths. It pounds into concrete,

crumbles an island entrenched, forgotten,
the black, unknowable depth of a well.

Water: the other, the music. We enter this city
in the night as dogs, garbage hunters,

rickshaws and gleaming cars traveling the block.
The music, not far, hangs undisturbed;

objects in the storefront, chaste,
motionless in their candour: things as they are.

*

Cup, bicycle wheel, pitcher, suit: clear refrain—
things as they are. Centre of what is lived,

lived again. Doors slam, the house windows
offer food, the streets mute into calm. A dog fight

in the grey light, sea sucking mortar and lime
from walls that hold it back. Waves warp

ground floors of buildings abandoned
for years. Restaurants empty but for dust, the street

that divides sea from city holds
one world from another, turns

phosphorescence into a singing remainder:
electric in its failure, it does not shine.

*

Fortune for those who stay, those
we join quietly in the night; becoming the past,

becoming the last hour, we walk a path under arches
of the last apartment before our street.

Recognition in the empty cafe, neon dismantled,
stools upturned. We cross the empty street

toward music before it separated from voice,
dance, night, and became its own entity.

Streetcar velocity of life in a large car,
the birth stalled in the air like a moon,

its drying, sea-pull waning, waiting
in darkness by the Malecón, listening

for a semi-circle of falling buildings,
their curve a mile long, a long ago dying,

clean, down through the arches,
the long grace, the crumbling.

HAPPENSTANCE

A month before, first snow in my north. A skin of ice
grew over the lake, delicate; green geese skimmed through.

Geometry of winter, black twig-strokes, nothingness
settling into a long-night dream of abundance.

Meanwhile, the first migrant thrushes whistled at your window.
Their song an awkward gesture, their mechanical wings

over water and mountain sliding the land into relation.
The hurricane over Mérida evaporated. Ruined roads

sloshed into the mangrove, bird shadows fell in patterns
from uprooted trees. Dusk tilted into a calm sea,

its memory of wind a net not mended. There were no walls
of water, no fishes in the air—only our shadows,

auratic, lofted over water, at ease, yielding to air.

SMALL FAILURES

From these fragmented conversations where you are absent

I offer, this morning, the Yucatán:
we are captured inside the bus's shell,
hurtling through heat of day.

The pulse of broken centre line,
bright reflection of window tracing the grasses and garbage,
again, words you may understand: *Mérida, Santa Clara,*
Valladolid, where we go in to the Virgin of Candelaria's home.
The altar's perpetual dusk—
small flames we light and gravitate toward,
our approach

shoulder to shoulder with miracle.
We *are* longing, and unfurl it into the arches of each ponderous dome,
a space of silence beyond our own bodies,
cobwebs, birds. A church at noon, spectacular

understatement of desire.

How best to address you
from a threshold of glass and metal,
parting the air as the ascending walls of a church
part sun from shadow, heat

fused into stone.
Thirty kilometres north of Valladolid last month,
the hurricane found its true mark

and plundered
the coastline from San Crisanto to Uaymitún, rearranging roads, urging
cars through cornfields, provoking
a final migration of birds

inland to the scrub bush of mangrove,
their wings caught in upturned roots like angels', rummaged
from underground. Near the river and altered coastline, we stop briefly: a hotel
with ground windows blown out by the sea, tide line tracing

the foot of each bed, panes of patio glass strewn over the sand.

We know
we will end someday
with this same force which created us, turning
and turning again, until it builds beyond our failures, until
someone presses the light switch

in an abandoned room, a month later, and the whole town
relaxes, with snap and pulse,
into darkness.

Take my hand. The concrete

where it has fallen into the sea
is not steady, and we may need
to help one another.

Perhaps what we fear is not force
but a quiet leaving,
that nothing

 inside wind;
a far summer storm at night, lightning visible,
but the air so quiet
the flash seems inconsequential,
blind.

Before we knew each other, I traveled across this country,
sensed, without wanting,
the brush of dry grasses in a field a man walked through. His hands
outspread, palms down, the bus speeding by.

His breathing,
these moments we fall
through the window to
 someone's beginning, their skin,
permeable, receiving another.

The bus stops at a lake. In the midst
of jungle, a monkey chained to a tree
by the hut where men charge to see the lake.

 We go in
to the concrete shelter to change clothes,
into the green hollow where grasses and lilies
line the edge of the water;
arc of birdsong, calls we have not heard before,
swallowed air and fish rising
to the surface

 then falling to darkness below.
Tenderness, their movements
in water warm as your skin in the sun,
invisible when I go out to meet them.

Indivisible, our story
from happenstance; having
never entered church or lake together, having

HAMMAM: MOROCCO

When I am clean I will find you. They will have soaped me down
in the grottoed rooms of water and tile. Three portals

in the ceiling will flood sun, and our immense souls will stretch
with steam in high regard, tilting, cascading through weighted air

that warms us. In echo chambers, heart-washing nests
and sinks full of temperate water. When I am clean I will find you.

They will have stood over me with their heavy breasts. They will
have lowered me to the ground and flipped me this way and that

like a fish, scaled, tended with regarding hands. Throat, finger,
foot, breast. When I am clean—water falling from the walls,

their voices emerging from corners, considered bodies,
shadowed skin, light a heavy brocade in their arms.

I will find you because I give up my body, my weighted breasts
to their waterfalls. Time will retreat, and in my head, nothing

but the wash of my breath as they take me down—
I will sit for them, lie, turn, give anything; I will show them

my lack, they will soap me down. When I am clean I will
find you, light amassing slowly, portal to portal,

heavy, mossed knowledge, an elsewhere fluent and calm.

Two

KALEIDOSCOPE, HOW IT DISCLOSES

The spinning wheel of the kaleidoscope
turned on the table's surface

lifts very little into view.

When it ceases, the eye follows movement hidden
in its shapes, begins to learn backward.

The ever-moving, interlocking pieces drift
and fuse, the turning

most apparent when it is not,

the mechanism most itself
when it is still.

Water runs out the fountains here into dark stone basins and onto the streets,
persuaded by hand.

I drink straight from its gushing source.

What appears barren at a distance
proves fragrant herb, flower and vine.

The olive trees, a calligraphy of black trunk on the copper earth,
a precise language, terraced fields

never finishing a sentence

and heat rising,
amidst crickets and cicadas,
blurred, from the surface of it all.

Having come from a silent, north
of familiar thrush, fireweed and pine, the week of pollen
release foreseeable,

potent enough to turn the pond yellow for days;
having found inside myself
books, teapot, pen and magazine
which stretch themselves over the table, saying

here we form the picture of a woman

misrepresentations

of some other elegant
character, laughable, unfamiliar as the call of Swainson's Thrush,
as the taste of stone
clear water, as lack of will or voice.

Slowly, the light shifts
and crawls across the valley
and I shift carefully, the cat still pressed into me,
to remain in shade.

Sun pierces the haze
and stills everything except the birds,
their casual stalling

in uncharted, unowned space
above the ancient houses.

I want to pull them from the air.

Below, the steeple,
leisurely bell and bolero chimneys,
their dark interiors, white washed stone,
and the tumbling of this
and the lower village onto cliffs,

REGARD

As guests at the party we came with nothing
but our own smouldering bodies, tired

from rusted pulley and rope, their well
plunging through rock to inner surface

where all things are maintained. The room
made itself over into white shell, and whirled

at its topmost part into the black skylight,
an upper portal for candle flame, steam and star.

The women stood with glasses in hand,
and took the shining and placed it in the air

as praise, grainy, lark-like. Then each,
already stepping into careful age, appeared to us

again, thirty years or more hence.
There was no saving them, and their burning,

an arc of grace, poured like crystal through the space
where we danced, their heads held high, benign,

floating. They let themselves be regarded
in the ways designed and were not afraid.

IF THERE IS SOMETHING

If there is something, tell me, music.

Music: where in the grass of the delicate?

This light is golden and the wheat so small,

I don't see how it can believe.

My ears tell me it must not, and when I close my eyes I see

oak trees unfurling the spring and my heart pounds

though I am not climbing the hill. To be away from home.

A car passed this evening, sunk low,

farm family driving the dirt roads, aspen ditches, the dust

rising two days after rain. The husband waved his hand.

I heard a hermit thrush, then I walked further and all sound was gone.

Tick of the bush, colt's ears pushing apart the swamp: music,

teenagers in the next quarter section, pretending to scream

before a fuck in the grass. We head into ourselves.

Where else to go?

I find tobacco tins,

newborn foxes in a culvert. I rub my hands together and

they come, the mother at night far into the fields of her own sharp crooning.

I find the beating organs of a fish, their recall

of spring lines, tied fore and aft, flexing in a late night westerly. They groan,

they are the words *science* and *wing*, the words *utter terror*. Yes?

But to turn the knot outward, to break it out through the shoulder blades

is like wolf willow, in bloom, in late June, not yet summer, the days

too cold, nothing as it should be, nothing graceful, music

the banging of grasses, wood frogs, tree swallows, the blue flash

of their wing feathers as they draw

something through the air.

SUMMER NIGHT

To be back in the field where the deer was.
Somnolent cricket rub, sparking the clear July night.

The wild grass field above the sea, cricket rush,
a bell's width of intimacy;
back home,
 lawns shimmered to the lot's edge.
Only years later, we became old.

To be outside, with the insects. It is February,
and I kill the honeybee that enters, its clotted panic, disintegrating
as the sun falls and cold falls again.
 Night, open-eyed, not watching.

Intricate pine, bluff's insistence, the sea's comb of stone,
kelp bed offshore.

 Cricket hush, wind touch,
her cloven hoof smoothed the field.
Cricket, mere cricket, gold-skeined
under encircling stars; nothing but to waste the nights of summer.
She grazed around me, for the small wildflowers
 dying in the season's heat,
 her hoof erasing the field.
I was one creature huddled in the grass
trying to memorize another. There was no time.
I know it now in a different way.

GRADUATES: ST. PETER'S

White candled air,
spring-crisp, the boys in tuxes,
girls' braids pulled from their foreheads in long, golden rows.
First warm night,
sun on the dust of high windows,
 spilling over. The graduates are one quick thought—
they flock, sit down a spell, dropping corsages and coats.

Wind brushes their fingers, scent of Wolf Willow, Anemone,
Pale Clamendra, recently found—a last field trip to the unbroken
 islands of prairie—native and so common and at home.
Laughing, they think of the big cities.

Please love, be there when they step from the train. A dress hem
catches the light and flames; they are bursting,
they dance shy sidesteps—
 monks pass like holes in the light.

Sweet, sweet, oh so sweet; yellow warbler in the Caragana,
sugary amber blossoms someone
told them once to taste and so they did.

NIGHT WALK

Stopped on the track in the field
in front of the hermitage. Breath clouding out,
lit by my lamp.

Moon falling quarter note into the furrows.
Stars overhead. End of June, chance of a frost.

Lonely, but so kindred it eases
a moment.

Half a mile from the abbey

dew falling and in a little wind
it floats past me,

maybe mist,
slipping past my face, maybe stars—

and horizontal to the black earth when it comes, and how.

I go in, and leave the next morning.

SKY AND THE VARIED THRUSH

Slender-ribbed, halting, one by one you lay them down before me.

In the shortened trees around us, your nest, my wishes for this shallow season.

My most beautiful bird, grey-brown plumage, song like the water-dripping song
only smaller, less solid.

Lately, silence. I fold things, I pace. And when you come you are mute
and I dislike you.

Can you explain this awakening to the carved-out hills?

Where am I?—you would know. Below us, these ridges of dust and green,
a world remaking itself, a dozen needles at a time, and the fawn's tongue
moving in its mouth as it died.

I held the knife to her throat but couldn't.

Burnished, blemished, her coat, stretched on the path.

Your brown plumage, your delicate wordlessness, most beautiful of all.

WEB

Small hill, spring, season
pulling us through its slow movement,
trackless, still.

Stopped here, caught in the strands of last year's
hexagon: mud, grey grass, twig.
The connections are dusty, they break.
Overrun with what winter has caught,
what it is capable of,
the release notes, the space
before sound, the breathing,
the knot.

MEASURE

Grace note, come in, come in! All around the cabin: sky,
through the windows,
 in the grass, the animals: sky.
And because we cannot live in lyric
the bitter-sweet taste of notation
strings against the ear. The violet fireweed along the hill's edge,
the heavy tongue of the fawn.

In the night, silver fish of northern lights and silence.
Gulls in the day from the lake, mussed feathers.
Quick glide of summer's spread across the black pines.
 They are black here, and cold—quick!

But it's not fine,
it's the vestige of winter, held stubborn
through two months of trick days, troubled, everything
bloom and die, bloom and die.

Black rock, lichen, crisp wind, faster night.
 Fine, then.
In the branches of the pines I see a grace note,
a dry fist of pleasure in long days;
see it ball itself smaller, strike the edge of the ridge until rocks
bell and tumble, home again, thinking home, again,
 again.

I am in the rest, between measures,
where the stream twists
amid sandstone and moss, wanting down, wanting low.
The end note nowhere loving or constant:
 a fracas; a leap of every animal
off the cliff to a place the wind can't blow.

WINTER: ARIA DA CAPO

I.

Clarity: Glenn Gould fingers over the snow:
a landscape that melts as we imagine it real.
The afternoon scene, another melancholy of knowledge—
step into it, grow!

The drains clatter.
Understanding no more, we nod at the system
of notes, methodical, placed,
tracks of one hand spreading to chord.

Shafts of bracken and black earth open
between keys.

II.

Refrain. His sleeve grazes the wood's grained heart.

It is not clean or free, and in the 1954 recording
with weighted piano, its underwater resonance
is raw, a muffled, pendulumed banter.

Rest. Then
the small waterfall,
twice, his fingers following one another over the snow.
There, and

there, it goes on forever,
perfect, useless,
from bright to dark and behind him
no trace of where he's been.

LIES IN THE FIELD LIKE THE SKY

Just before the Anerley valley in Saskatchewan,
where dust feeds a hollow that once was a town,

he stops the car and parks for the night, sleeps
in one of the wheat fields his mother left him when she died.

A late-august, night cools his body as he waits the dark out,
half a mile above the train tracks, small house and wild horses

part of him could consider home. The sky, as he watches
its stars circle, reminds him of the sky over the village of Kagbeni

in the Kali Gandaki valley, the girl there who slept in her skirt
and shoes, holding her two younger sisters.

She worked behind swirling steam in the kitchen,
boiling tea in pots with milk and sugar until all collided

into a sweetness that mingled with the dung fire
in the stove, and her body, her red cheeks,

the dry riverbed skin on the backs of her hands.
The river that carved the valley carved through her life,

taking more every year, though horses grazed
along its edges through the night and it was tamed

into clear pathways leading to the fields. With her,
he walked there, along the cut channels, stones in his pocket,

stones forming his heart's cage, the girl beside him, and kissed her
until she lay down in the field, her eyes on the stars.

He remembers it this way, though it may have been she only let him
braid her hair, touching in passing the nape of her neck,

its warmth twisting against him the way the river of air
in Saskatchewan flows over him the night before he descends

to what's left of his family, the aunt with animals,
a prospering farm, a cancerous husband

waiting in newly contemplative silence for the lift
of an organ from his body; a home by the remains of a station

the train no longer slows for. He is returning to help
the aunt with whatever it is she needs him for;

the daily chores of hay and feed for llamas, sheep and cows,
cleaning, mending, or simply, matching her dip for dip

from the bottomless bottle of scotch which would occupy a shelf
above the table, but never returns there for long.

The returning is the most difficult, knowing the last time
he walked from valley up coulee to prairie he found,

by the small granite block which signifies the place,
something which might have been bone from his mother's remains;

from the hip, or the shoulder, place to hold
imaginary wings drawn by a child one evening years ago,

bursting from the sides of a girl, a muscled
horse, field and sky crayon bright behind.

His mother's family kept horses in the valley once,
but they have been wild now for two generations

and ran from him as he scrambled up the ravine, bolting
in the sun from one grass rivulet to another,

their manes tangled with vetch and ladies tresses.
His heart beat fast then, startled to see

their dark heads nodding, as it beat
when he was with the girl in Nepal, felt her skin against his.

Day and night, the sound of bells echoed up and down
that larger valley, yak and mule trains carrying salt, kerosene,

rice and plastic up the trail from one country
to another, bells strung on a cord that wore away pelt

until the hide shone black with callous and dry blood.
She would watch them from the doorway of the kitchen,

negotiating the small paths of the village,
stone buildings caving in on either side.

If he was not walking in the hills, he would stand beside her,
watch her eyes follow the train, each bell's ringing

vibrating the flagstones, as if sound could shrink a space
already too small, their arms brushing, breath falling together.

Hers was breathing at ten thousand feet, and never followed
the valley lower; he fell into its rhythm the way, lying

at the edge of Anerley a year later, he knows he will fall
back into his aunt's life and they will both feel

one is taking care of the other. When he walks each evening
down the tracks, she will not come with him.

The ties will be covered with dust and seed and printed
with the unshod hooves of horses, coulees curling on each side,

prairie fed into valley in an endless current. Her figure will recede,
waiting with the dogs on the road, and if he turned to look

she would be woman, then stick, then crow, then point.
He lies in the field through the night, car beside him.

The crickets trill, stars perambulate, valley falls into itself,
dust more than water shaping it. He thinks again of the girl

whose nape he knows from memory more completely
than the valley he lies above, her watching the train of mules

lurch away, steam hanging in the air. The hearts
of the animals bang against their chests, the way hers

and his and his aunt's do; a recognition they turn from,
eyes on the next descent, waiting to fall them.

Three

THEORY

When I imagine a field
I see the field above me. A bowl of green,
base at the crown of the head, unfurling, a tug up and out.
When I imagine again,
a wishbone splits in two, like frog song, like grasses
in my summer's selfish drought; a sliding scale (a dry soul)
of notation. In design, a key signature: *A* is the balanced page,
harmonized, Bach's *Aria da Capo*, steady rain, Fibonacci's shell
spiraling over the grain.

Ethics is not beautiful,
but it is the green bowl rising,
and falling
open,
away from itself.

STARS: CHILDHOOD

Consider the first moment
we were told stars
still shone in the day,
their light lost in blue.

Everything in that
instant exploding.
Trees twisting, in bursts,
to leaf; the milk surface of the pond,

birds and shadows
on the spattering ground, the rain—
each combustion of *goodbye*,
goodbye.

STATION

We keep the things that heal and hurt us most.
From an old lover, a poem once my favorite

sang every note at once. My father's brief letter,
carried as talisman against danger for years

on the dash. Still, I hit the deer.
Other things, the asbestos that killed your father,

a sample snug in a drawer in your sister's cottage, a lyric:
gifted, durable, calm; a caterpillar losing its skin

for another, burrowed in a lung,
quietly breathing. Tonight, we conceive no one.

We make love and the pain of losing
smears across my skin—such pleasure this losing.

The vial was tightly stopped but it took
only one false step in the mine to halt things,

to loose the top. Brought back at fourteen by village police
for smashing yet another window, what could you say

of grieving? That it is contained
in a small, glass vial. That it is easily mixed

with paper clips, toothpicks, pencils, the charm
from a Christmas cracker. Your parents,

a photo of their 1957 wedding car ride,
her absolute resolve, his luck.

I don't know when or if our child will appear.
These would be the stories.

Don't you dare loose the stopper, I will cry
to anyone who tries. We should leave the things

that harm us in the ground, but we don't.
You leapt across country, time-line, climate—

we found one another. But I do not throw the letter away,
nor the poem. They slide in drawers when we reach,

and the mine is just down the road.
Someday my father will die; the place it happens

will be the one I return to my whole life, to not
forget the sorrow, to swim in its dry husk,

to know the beating of its heart until the last.

LETTER TO LUKE, WHO IS HERE WITH ME IN BUBIÓN

Our rented house is surrounded by garden.
Close by, a river and all around
the village, taps from which we drink.
Outside the window,
avocado tree, potato patch, night-blooming jasmine,
three climbing roses and a grape vine;
you sense them coming through the window in little thrills.
The steeple is west, along the sun's path before it falls
behind the mountain. Paintbrush, cypress,
white-washed stone of the neighbour's house,
his dog calm, his child gathering water,
her hair loose and feet bare
at eleven in the evening.
She carries it perfectly
and does not spill a drop.

To the south we can see one hundred miles,
the hills verdant with herbs.

Love, I cannot stop anything anymore and
it may all be different next time—
cricket, mole or rat claim
more than the corners of these stone rooms, ours
for some reason
for now. As we move,
the losses inside us keep pace, dependable
as darkness at this latitude—
there will always be less
of the one we want.

RETURN OF THE NUTHATCHES

Oh so that's how it is. Flocks,
or nothing.
The sky breaks open, out comes summer,
kept until now in the glassy pond,
the water bugs black, glossy shells, the wind.

Push it to the other side.
The current out of a forest is a knot of birds
that swells upside down in the branches.
Almost too late, just in time,
tempo, temper, flutter of their cheep, crack and plummet. Rise.
Something in the mid-level now, right where
the trees become preposterous, divine.

Or continuation.
They spill from the branches, foiling grubs
and predictions against all odds;
the pond expands and we are submerged.

Into fall: warm wind in the night of a city.
Rain, in calligraphy on the slate surface.
But the roads don't deepen as they should,
don't demonstrate our ruts and repetitions, again, again.
Over our childhood cottages, the storms follow,
swelling streams, cut-banks and gutters,
eaves and knolls. I search the ground for seeds,
I search the concrete for the right hue. Here is the heart at one stage,
then another; here is the heart at another.

CONSIDERING MY FATHER

He dips his oars into the bay. Ripples trail beside the tender
as they circle through air toward the next stroke. Late summer,

late night, and the circling ripples are not only of water
but a gauzy thickness of phosphorescence—they chart his progress

like meteors, paralleling his path through the dark. The bay,
a bay of pasture and shallows, anchored hull.

He knows it better than he knows his daughters, close
as four fingers pulling an oar. The sweep or plunge of their eyes.

The youngest of four, far away, immerses her hands in long grasses
as if they were a tangle of kelp by the shore; field shifts to water,

snow drifts to sand at the sea's edge. She comes in from the garden,
fills a glass, waters the plants on the sill—the water clings

to the glass and doesn't pour, running along the side
the way, would she care to remember, water runs the length

of an oar with each stroke. He will not stop. The bay, Annet,
the empty hollow he anchors in, a green mirror

of endless blur. The field at the head is isthmus
of wild grass, sand, clover. He has never been there,

never landed. Past the small spit of land, pasture, rock
and a barge dragged onto shore, the other side, water again.

THIS PERFORMANCE OF ROWING THROUGH THE DARK AND STARS

Notes like penciled lines when they first begin, then shapes
and the shapes concentrate, become more,

and they are birds, and bells, and tongues, and they congregate.
There are acres of silence like bays or fields between them.

The bay, Annet, with phosphorescence in summer. July,
August. Time to row through darkness, enclosed,

the seamed shell of stars, without worry, wonder
or urgency for his love. Striking the bell at the bay's head,

flight of the sound over water. Here are the violins. And here,
the cellos. This is a heart; his heart, mine, unwinding

like a watch counting the hours. Before the music began
we would take them off together. A world timed by walking

distances from a boat. Pasture of cowslip, salt; trail to the house
that sold pies, coffee; road to the ferry dock with red railings.

Low tide hollows the clams sat in. Deep-set, waiting
in sand. Rake striking shell in the moonlight,

the teeth-on-edge sound of grains against the tines. Everything
with its tether attached: anchor line, bow line, painter line,

mooring line, their concentric circles drawn
in invisible ink—no ripple to say we were there. Underwater,

rocks disturbed, and a midden of shells, swinging down,
ringing against the heaviness of saltwater,

each long since fallen from its pair.

AS WATER IS TO INLANDS

-for my father

We circled the islands and it was our knot. Bowline,
two half hitches, hold it fast. To know

what you knew of charted shorelines, wing-on-wing,
rounding an architecture of sandstone, dragging the well

of tide pool for life. Intricate inlet, passage,
hidden shoal and flashing mark. Music in the hold,

food in the keel's damp recess and dark, these
simple stores and lockers, all in accordance with current.

If I remove myself to be always inside, to see dry vines
colour a courtyard, know their brilliance not as my own,

does this resolve somnolent hours in tender, sculling
without sound as seal or otter attended,

the hump of the dinghy's bow a held breath
against the bay? To hear Clementi's Concerto in D, to desire water.

You would not take us inland, I knew nothing of roads—
a car's stern will not swing out when its course is changed—

cried when my mother cycled us over the flattest island.
The sheer energy required to move such a small body.

Wind on the sea made light break into a thousand spells
you cast again with jib and pole. Qualicum, Southerly,

Saanich, West; the Gandaki wind gusts up valleys
from India to China. To pour down the dust-dark

necks of mountains to their well centre, water
sparse and clear, its depths unsounded.

WHEN ALL IS SAID OR DONE

I prefer the orchestra's moment of tuning
to the performance. Then, unscored octaves,

thirds, and melodic fourths fill us with the music
a forest of birds make without meaning. Oboes

lead violins into synchrony, wind instruments
back to the birds they once were. Then my father

sits again beside me, moving pen and papers
from one breast pocket to the other. In falling

to sleep near the end of the second movement,
I will have heart, rib and generous muscle

to lean on. It is the same presence musicians find
before playing and plunge toward, a perfection

of notes caught on the page. Give me that moment,
or the other, when my father's movements wake me,

and I lift from his chest to the waterfall
of applause around us. The orchestra joins, stands

for the conductor before he disappears offstage.
They are exhausted, emptied of what they strained toward,

and, because no longer straining, full.
I want nothing more. Bring my father back to me

in octaves, in the cacophony of tune and scale, the music
of their intelligent hands coming together in praise.

THE REFLECTING POOL

Illuminated by early evening sun, we walked to where the pool lies,
into the yielding forest, which shrugged when we tried to praise.

Inside its amalgamation of shadow and cessation, the glassy pond
aimed its whole self down to the centre of the earth.

There was another world inside. Taut against the stick
and moss disorder, the water inscribed edge without movement.

It loved so thoroughly the small branches of the overhanging fir,
the dead, spindled tumbles of emptied pine cones, the luminescence

of twinflower, wolf moss, fairy cup, mud. Its reaching became
an imitating eye, and the mirror elegy to what it loved.

Because it chose, we could see all things twice, and so had the chance
of glimpsing, the second time, what we always first ignore.

And as the water fell away, it took the image of the forest
and stretched it to the greenest shadows, taking our eyes

further and further down, and in. Its lofted breadth
raveled the tapestry, learned every movement, armed gravity,

arraying knowledge in its rightness and its pull.

Four

LATE AUGUST: YIELDING

Its entrance is train song,
late at night, in the distance,
and the roar of the wheels
passing in the dark.

It could be wind, more
than metal on metal
thundering its river
through the valley.

Three times,
the whistle blows, long,
longer, then
pure sorrow.

RIVER, BUT NO EDGE

Robin's three call perpetua springs out
two streets from the sea, and still, the clamour,
the clang and pearl of thought.
Bells sound from the strait, brass plums
cradling darkness, enclosed by fog, breath,
an hour of breathing at three a.m., awake; it comes in surges,
it finds the thing to grasp, it holds.

And the beat
of my bulldozer heart.
This forest of clearest hope.
These meshings of pine
and spindled fir, the *water pipes*,
the *blacktop* carve of road.
Manzanita—

daughter of arbutus and salal,
little apple, wreathed,
an entrance to the forest pool—

cleared brush. The yielding forest,
which shrugged,
and the reflection
returns to the deep green point of reference.
Something hovers—
while the pool blinks—freezes,
flees from its assessed value.

The pond and its clear eye *can go*.
And so it goes. And so it goes.

Summer's Variations

TRILL

To neglect the imagination. Just as dangerous a path
as the incessant beauty you craved as a child.
Weil to know the inner limits;
to know the outer, an unnamable bird in the willow,
its rising-falling trill.

Keep the idea: she lands on you, and together you sleep
the afternoon heat and wind back into night.
She can land, she well may.

Her other, possible names: winter wren, chipping sparrow,
calliope's hummingbird—song may come
not from the throat but the wing.
Out in the strait, church peal of the current bell,
marking not highest or lowest but fastest flow—
the midpoint of flight,
the centre of thought—mind's smooth river
rushing through other, stationary water. The cliffs

of its sinkholes, smoothness of its sheer walls
and perch shadows of expansion, plunge and pull.

Porlier Pass: water travels out during flood, not in.
Calliope's hummingbird arcs into a territorial, ferocious climb,
sears through the peak,

begins to dive.
The air tunes her feathers to the key
of small forest stream played *fuerte*
in an echo chamber; let loose it is all insensate,
it refuses as it sings.

STILLNESS

The stillness in every season is extreme for a moment,
then soon, gone,
replaced, indistinctly, by continuation.

When the cicadas begin,
the junco is a fugitive rustle in the leaves, now moving,
now waiting, never with song or call.
We find things altering; a mirage of warmth or cold
marks the midpoint, a small centre of spinning, a slow freeze—
like the sea scene in *The Four Hundred Blows*, when Antoine arrives
at the expanse of the wave
and is drawn in.

Now then, I said, I go to meet that which I liken to.

Always, the entry

and then the dreaming in. Then.
We do not remember what exactly follows:
dailiness goes on unmarked
as the edges of a doorway or a mirror.
It is the centre that interests, so this we recall.
The cicadas stop, begin again, then end.

I wish I could promise a concern
that would remain. That I might promise an attention
which gave its word not to wander, not to lull. There,
the rustle of the wing, the molted feathers dislodging,
the flight across the terrace; there,
the song stitching the portal through which all of it comes;
there, the entry, watery, dark, flowing,
and we are in and it has flown.

SILENCE

In *Vivre sa vie*, Parain tells Nana
there is a small death which must occur in the self
before it can surface to its second life;
out of silence—a pass through darkness—we emerge
into speech chosen out of necessity,
a lack of other means.

And so, in the centre of Paris, during its lightest days,
she is living through a death within herself.
Planned, executed by herself
in collusion with many forces, its outcome unknown.
Outside, the regular, bunch-leaved trees
line the Champs Elysees. Their structured waving,
their safe harbours. She sits in the booth, smoking;
she looks like any other woman.
People think her happy.

The philosopher leans back in his seat
and his face is a photograph. The trees race
into the distance until a building prevents
their going any further, and unexpectedly,
they veer off the screen.
We never see them again.

RUMMAGE

One by one the valves open, seal shut behind.
Trapped: white poplar; dust from the streets
of Mérida; the words *green up* and the word *quiero*;
a dry pine with peeling bark recalling the arbutus, its sister,
the green skin shining deep in the ruddy limbs;
hermit thrushes, by the hundreds,
song that keeps moving;
an oarlock with yellow varnished oar—
its mate wanting the other—lost?
Three deer that looked up, met my gaze—one at Notikewin,
one in the field above the sea, the third, my
circling companion, reason to swim summer's night,
reason grief takes so long to find, so long to take leave.
A blue, hooded coat; limpets; a piece of unforged silver;
my father's foot scribing the air, conductor of the evening's
thunderstorm; rain on the sea, pushed before the storm;
rain on the sea as the canoe rounded Coal Island shallows
last spring, shell shallows, oyster and sea star; full—
no, it's empty, the poplars are stretching through my throat,
empty—no, it's full, and there will be, there must be
more.

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