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Without Looking Up,
Gone

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Honors Thesis
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Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Vestments	12
Before There Is Rot	13
At the Orphanage Amparo de Niños	14
If the neighboring horse doesn't escape	16
Spring Cleaning	17
I will taste the warm tomato	18
Capsized	19
Dear Albee	20
Mongolian Wild Horse	21
I can never stay in one place too long	22
Because you suffocate me	23
Ladder	24
Holes	25
Like strung pearls	26
Letters	27
I've missed this	28
Summer Work	29
On a back street in Paris	30
I heard you get up to leave this morning	31
Undone	32
I must rest (we suspect it's mono)	34
Ragweed Season	35
I think of you when	36
Progress in June	37
Without Looking Up, Gone	38
Works Cited	39

Like the taste of a new language to lips, suddenly, one day, the mother tongue retreats, and a new one steps forth. The change was gradual, and, really, my change was a surprise. I never anticipated poetry. It was a form of writing that came to me just as a new language would—clumsy, resistant.

I had been writing before, quite steadily actually, but never poetry. It wasn't until I found myself brave enough to enroll in a poetry class that suddenly it revealed itself. Suddenly, I felt compelled by it, intrigued by the way every poem was a burst with which I could spend hours being absorbed – by whether to omit an article, alter syntax, exchange a word for another – a process that always felt rushed in fiction and nonfiction, for me. I am aware of all these details now, or, rather, I am always seeking them out just so I can find the many variations of a poem. This is a tool I've naturally fallen into using, and still I'm learning how to use it properly – it's the ability to see all possibilities and also the impact of those possibilities.

Through these details, and, really, through the act of poetry, I have become more intimate with writing. I have been able to develop a closer relationship with it. I miss the way prose had room for me to work through the story as I wrote it. Perhaps, it's the intimacy of watching the story unfold over time, over pages, that I miss. Yet, it is for this reason I've grown so fond of poetry. I am able to experience a similar progression, but in a less spread out, more compact form. This form helps me hear the musicality of words, of their assembly, and how one minor adjustment has the power to transform the rest of the poem. While in poetry I have lost the space to feel the evolution of a story, I have, however, gained the time to become more aware of what the story has to offer the poem.

To become aware of this and to, therefore, grow as a poet has required a consistent combination of writing and reading. Writing poetry gives me the practice, while reading it gives me the ideas and tools with which to practice. By studying other poets, I've paid particular

attention to the many ways a poem can expand, can surprise, can release itself, can feel inescapably human. Identifying these techniques in other poets' work has increased my ability to understand how to better use the form, how to better take advantage of it. It acts as a sort of manual of poetic devices that I can later manipulate in my own writing.

T.S. Eliot once said, "Good writers borrow, great writers steal." Through such poets as Victoria Redel, Louise Glück, Sophie Cabot Black, and Jane Kenyon, I have come to understand a style of poetry I find extremely striking. I have used their poems as patterns to embrace in order to stitch my own together.

In particular, I refer to Victoria Redel and Louise Glück often. I have returned to their poems frequently as sources full of inspiration as well as suggestion and advice. For instance, I am mindful of the wholeness in Redel's poetry and the biting terseness in Glück's. I try to embody these poetic qualities in an attempt to define myself as a writer. Both poets function as my luminaries – the closer I study their poetry, the closer I come to defining my own work.

The first time I read a poem by Victoria Redel, it was from her newest collection, *Woman without Umbrella*. As I read it, I felt the poem catapulting me into myself – the emotion was a reflection of my own. While the details were unfamiliar, they were nonetheless archetypal and applied to us all. In this way, there is a sense of urgency in Redel's work. A sense that this, too, is your story, is a story, someday, you will have. When I read her poems, I am exhilarated, my eyes suddenly more awake and open, I feel synchronized with all the different living, breathing stories of each poem. I am there.

In fact, upon reading Redel's *And Then*, I experienced the easy, propelled motion of her writing. The title itself is a launching point, it surges the reader into the belly of circumstances not yet known. The two words "And Then" drop us into a conversation already occurring. It tips us off that we are entering in medias res. The effect is a poem that feels like an opening, a sudden

widening into a world that is already moving, already going. Our job is to catch up. This gives a certain amount of comfort to the reader for it suggests the poet is confiding in her readers, disclosing something private, something sacred even. And there is a divulging quality to this piece beyond the title:

AND THEN

What if, darling, tonight we tell only the best stories
we have of other loves. Not just nights of pleasure

but the way he laughed from the back of his throat,
the truthful thing she said that made you cry.

What about that spring wind. And when there was a bicycle,
a downpour, and someone had or didn't have a poncho.

Someone said the very thing you longed to hear.
You told a secret and were safe. She had a fever. He lost a father.

There were good meals. To think of those fine shoes
we scuffed about in thinking we were royalty.

And remember that plastic tiara and the clumsy pavane.
Remember what you wished. And how he wished, too.

Look at us now as we drink coffee, talking about the day's particulars
and possibilities. Morning light folds across the dark wood table.

Could we bear to look at one another knowing
how full the heart has already been. How we come

to one another not just thankful refugees from sorrow
but wild too, with easy days of mismatched socks.

This morning we think we couldn't be happier.
That's courage. We've thought it before.

There is an unmistakable completeness to Redel's poetry. Each poem feels round and abundant with details indicating its wholeness. The array of specificity and, therefore, of insight

develops a great deal of satisfaction. Like an assorted tray of treats, there is nothing that goes untasted.

In *And Then*, she explores how love becomes bountiful and overflows as age makes two characters uncertain whether they can hold anymore. They are “thankful refugees from sorrow / but wild too, with easy days of mismatched socks.” Here we see how wonderful Redel is at containing what can’t be contained. Her description of this couple emphasizes their complexity – the distance that life has inevitably put between them. Their sorrow and wildness has made them weary, unbound travelers, yet they appear forgiving of their own weariness, of their own sorrow and wildness. Age has left them space for more love, more happiness. In all the pieces it has left behind, it has left enough for sharing.

I admire Redel’s ability to embody something in its entire form – to capture its totality. To do this is to gather only the best, most telling details. In the gathering process, bits and pieces are brought together into what contribute to Redel’s bigger picture. *And Then* flashes from one bit to the next; it’s a constant flow of revealing statements – short and abrupt, but somehow an extension of the previous and a launching point for the next, and all the while fluidity is maintained throughout the piece. Each detail is individual, distinctive, exclusive, yet each one contributes to the others. In the end, the singular moments become a single story. That single story is told through them all.

My poem *Without Looking Up, Gone* reflects this distinguishing quality of Redel. I imitate her style, hoping to portray something similar – a life opened up, then weighed heavily. I wanted that closeness with my subject, like Redel’s intimacy with the couple. It was important to me that the subject’s life become familiar, become more than just a character, but a feeling as well. That feeling grows by way of imagery and continues to grow throughout the poem. Once

the last image is given, the feeling lingers and the wholeness of the poem is revealed. In my poem, I use a father and child relationship to find this aperture and to enter it.

Without Looking Up, Gone

There is a slight flapping of the Boston Globe on Sunday afternoons,
and a hesitancy on river bottoms where the rocks are uneven.

I've noticed the softly faded collars of his work shirts,
and the one palm he must press to the wall upon slipping into

his house shoes. Once, he called the grey slats of a stale chicken coop *home* –
a buzz cut and freckled boy then, he'd lie on his stomach

his belly pressed to a dusty rug as he listened, waited
for the clap of horse hooves, for the burst of trumpets, *The Lone Ranger*.

Those years have since settled – kept someplace where
he can still recall, close enough that at times

I can watch them, too, sitting there next to him.
Every so often he glances down, measures each one,

then feels them all.
Is it age he feels?

1942 is caught in a backwards pull,
it's being dragged further,

still farther, always away,
and it takes my father with it.

Like Redel's poem, I use the couplet with longer lines to format my poem. This achieves stability. It's a sort of balance in the poem that emphasizes its fullness, its completeness of details. Yet, the constant, varied details combined with the long, stable lines add tension to what is disguised by an easeful, quiet entry. Redel captures a similar tension in her poem as well. She rolls into it with, "What if, darling, tonight we tell only the best stories," then allows that ease to become tangled with the swiftly changing images steadied by the lengthier lines – "Not just nights of pleasure / but the way he laughed from the back of his throat, / the truthful thing she

said that made you cry.” The effect of this applies pressure not only to each newly arriving image, but also to every line break.

In addition, like Redel, I use the beginning of the poem to commence the unloading of the subject’s story, which evokes a sense of immediacy and consciousness. We both use that immediacy and consciousness to contrast the presence of the past. In my poem, I tell the story of a man whose life is worn from the simple act of living. He is older, we learn, and the years appear to have frayed him recently. We see his upbringing taking form and how its shape helps define the man we see in the beginning. When Redel retreats to the past in *And Then*, she reflects on that time in order to better suggest the present and future. There is something untouchable about this – the way the past is presented. In Redel’s poem, the past becomes a form of discussion between the couple, a way to divulge and also expose what may have been previously unspoken. The poem becomes their sacred space to have that freedom and savor it.

I employ the past as a way for an aging father to become a whole history, a myriad of human experiences. These qualities project the poem into a curving, shifting state. In effect, I create a picture of a tender and sweet man, which is emphasized through the arc of imagery extending backward, from the characteristics inherent in his growing old to his childhood. By juxtaposing the current moment with the past there is a certain amount of tension implied. It’s a seesawing motion – a teeter-tottering from one point in time to the next. I do this in the third stanza and preface it with: “I’ve noticed the softly faded collars of his work shirts, / and the one palm he must press to the wall upon slipping into / his house shoes.” I then go on to say, “Once, he called the grey slats of a stale chicken coop *home* – / a buzz cut and freckled boy then, he’d lie on his stomach / his belly pressed to a dusty rug as he listened, waited / for the clap of horse hooves, for the burst of trumpets, *The Lone Ranger*.” The words “slipping into / his house shoes” contributes to the implied slipping into the past that follows in the next sentence. As we enter the

past, I catalogue the pieces of which his world then consisted and its humbleness becomes clear with the inclusion of “chicken coop” and “dusty rug.” The image of him lying with his belly pressed to the rug is indicative of the child’s less privileged life and, therefore, evokes sympathy for his character.

Without Looking Up, Gone is a poem attempting to embody that evoking nature of Redel. She constantly pursues things that appear quiet and unseen, yet, upon closer inspection, are revealed to be full and wholly human. The gentle, enduring figure of the father approaching death is emblematic of this humanness. His gestures are the kind that inevitably marks us as humans. The small detail of pressing his palm to the wall to steady himself or the image of his chicken coop house make his character three-dimensional. I value Redel’s poetry for her ability to know humanness well enough to draw on those most appropriate details that consequently give life to her poetry.

That abundance of humanness, of life, is present in Louise Glück’s poetry as well – she reaches for human definition in a tragically beautiful place. She has darker, more exposing tendencies than Redel, but they too are filled with longing. These tendencies are often biting and precise; at times, they are even cruel and glacial. Occasionally, they are humane and softly cooling. Her breed of poetry is much more stinging than Redel’s, and it is this edgy and cutting quality of Glück that I admire. There is a certain barbed intensity to it, yet it’s unquestioningly controlled.

We see this harshness married with soft, fluid descriptions in her poem *Cana*, where Glück uses second person to accentuate the bold statements. In *Cana*, Glück switches from her commanding voice to one that is less severe and more reflective. This provides a way to preserve her unyielding qualities while still maintaining her reasoning. When put side by side, a substantial amount of tension exists between judgment and understanding – pressurizing certain

moments and releasing others. The exhilarating movement of her mind is balanced by the structural formality that contains it.

For this, Glück's poetry makes courageous souls out of her readers. We are dared to endure her cold, hardness and her contemplative, thoughtfulness as well. As a result, there is something refreshingly fearless about Glück's writing and about reading it. *Cana* is similar for its fearlessness; however, Glück douses it with a tone that is grieved. The emptiness that we feel as readers is backdropped by beautifully imagistic language, which, in a way, helps soften the ache that lies beneath.

Cana

What can I tell you that you don't know
that will make you tremble again?

Forsythia
by the roadside, by
wet rocks, on the embankments
underplanted with hyacinth --

For ten years I was happy.
You were there; in a sense,
you were always with me, the house, the garden
constantly lit,
not with lights as we have in the sky
but with those emblems of light
which are more powerful, being
implicitly some earthly
thing transformed --

And all of it vanished,
reabsorbed into impassive process. Then
what will we see by,
now that the yellow torches have become
green branches?

Nature plays a significant role in Glück's poetry and we can see how in *Cana* it's purposed to reveal thematic undercurrents. The images of nature are gorgeous as we see in the

second stanza, “Forsythia / by the roadside, by / wet rocks, on the embankments / underplanted with hyacinth –”. Here the environment appears plentiful and alive. In particular, “forsythia” and “hyacinth” are as musically stimulating as they are musically striking.

The description is heavenly, which is in stark contrast to the following stanza; “For ten years I was happy. / You were there; in a sense, / you were always with me, the house, the garden / constraintly lit”. There is abrupt hollowness in Glück’s words because they imply a deep unrest and unhappiness in the present: “For ten years I was happy.” This unsettling sentence is made more troubling with her first two lines of the poem, “What can I tell you that you don’t know / that will make you tremble again?” The word “tremble” is exemplary, a classic sign of Glück’s precision. “Tremble” is bound to a distinct moment, something that evokes intimacy, physical and mental, that is known only through the couple’s closeness. Yet, we recognize their closeness as false because it is not reflective of their current state.

Her handling of the tragic demonstrates Glück’s genius. She remains bleak in her outlook, but slips in brief moments of contentment to give slight release to a poem that is taut with loss. While writing my poem *Because you suffocate me*, I kept in mind Glück’s bluntness and how she teams it with sparing points of release. My intentions for this poem were to have Glück’s controlled carelessness paired with clipped exactness. This is the result:

Because you suffocate me

I will leave you here
 toweled and bare –
 I am only with you
 until the last splice
 when we lay beneath the sheets
 breathing each other in.
 Just before the next reel,
 I will cut it all short –
 this darkness is too warm,
 and I thought, at least

you should be dry

This poem is impatient and wounding; but, unlike *Cana*, it is comical, a quality it shares with some of Glück's other work. I use a sassy, snappy, scornful voice, which pops against the use of second person. Furthermore, I emphasize its hurriedness through its enjambment and brevity. There is little breathing room, which pressurizes the line, "this darkness is too warm." This line refers to several above it, which say, "until the last splice / when we lay beneath the sheets / breathing each other in." While the moment of sentimentality is fleeting, it doesn't go unnoticed. In fact, its stillness lingers even with the abrupt transition that follows. However, it is upon meeting the lines, "I will cut it all short – / this darkness is too warm" that the emotional appeal disappears and we inhabit once again that slapdash pace.

As we see in Glück's poem, the end creates a quiet opening that, in turn, leads to the inevitable questioning after defeat. I use my final lines as a continuance of my Glück-like tone and allow its openness to not just further define the speaker's voice, but to also release it into the unknown, as Glück does with her finalizing question. When the poem comes to the last two lines and says, "and I thought, at least / you should be dry", it is clear how unclear the outcome of this situation is. There is endless uncertainty about the subject's response to this coldness, just as Glück leaves us with uncertainty in *Cana*. It's a strangely twisted way to finish a poem – to leave it just as helpless as it began. I wanted to be as comfortable with that strategy as Glück is.

A disquieted ending is as unsatisfying as it is satisfying. It's illustrative of the human experience, which is filled with suffering. Glück's poetry is most nourishing for its acknowledgment of this and addressing of it. To fully be human is to fully feel pain, just as it is to fully feel happiness. The spitefulness and unflinching bitingness in *Because you suffocate me* is an expression of part of that pain and suffering, which, in many ways, makes it satisfying. The more unabashed and raw the human experience is portrayed, the more connected we feel to it as

readers. For these reasons, Glück's exactitude and shamelessness is hinged to express that quality in her poetry.

Glück's audacity, and Redel's understanding are insightful and admirable, and I will continue studying their work in order to better access these qualities in my own writing. In the poems that follow, you will find stillness, longing, tension, juxtaposition, terseness, warmth, open endings, tautness, and releases. In these poems, I would like the beautiful surprise of what it is to be a human to be present in every line, a surprise not unlike my surprise at falling into poetry.

Vestments

The barn started to yellow
nineteen years ago
the paint decayed
drifted
into the sky
like ash
dipping
back into
flame
it slowly
disappeared

once red
a dusty
rusted
red
now
graying
yellowing
clapboards
arced like arms
to draw us in
then catch
on our sleeves
with splinters

we can still
taste
with windows
closed
bent over
the kitchen
sink
death by
dust
that wears us
like robes

Before There Is Rot

We are stripping this field (field three)
the one just beyond the apple orchard
where I wake on a Wednesday afternoon
to you gently calling my name.
I leave my indent in the grass
to strip the field of its red onions –
the sweet, acidic, almost floral red wings
that Alec dares Haley to eat whole, no water,
on Tuesday's when we pick them, you and I,
a bushel for each hand.
I will never pick as fast as you.
We stack the swelling bulbs,
layer by layer, in tipped bushels
before hauling them away
for more stripping, the undressing
of their papery skin
that peels off in sheets,
to expose the part that's delicate (most delicate)
the part that protects its polished core,
its slippery, juicy core
the part that makes my eyes water,
makes them well up,
makes them burn.

At the Orphanage Amparo de Niños

I notice first
the stone fountain,
empty and grey
with dust.
Then, sunlight
against the Colombian Oak
and its skyward trunk.
The courtyard is hushed.
But beyond stucco is the faint call
of Holsteins from milking stalls,
and a stray dog nipping at hooves.

There are no children,
no evidence of eighty little boys
and their eighty laughing voices
and hundred and sixty running feet.

A woman with corkscrew chin hair
tells me how each one was found –
every boy's story, she says,
is the same:
unknown.

The children must be waiting
she's sure, with ears pressed
to the curved wooden door.
The woman's finger points
to the southern edge
and she urges me to go
to them.

Inside, the sounds
of little boys rushing
towards me,
their soft feet padding against
cold tile. They tug at my camera
and arrange themselves
for a photo, but their faces
are vacant, they do not know
to smile.

The woman brings me to tour
their bedrooms and art studios
while the boys push their fingers
through mine feeding me

chocolate banana bread.
One boy, not yet
twelve, follows
from room to room. A single,
dimpled scar fresh between his eyes.
Perhaps it was a tire swing,
or a tennis ball served
too soon. I know
it's not that simple,

here, even to be orphaned
is quieter
than the silence of
the stray dog
beneath the overhang
of the shed roof –
still and
waiting.

If the neighboring horse doesn't escape

today then he'll
spend the afternoon
at the south
pond licking
the pollen off
the surface
and half will stick
to his nostrils
later
Gwen will polish them
clean and I'll remain
indoors sitting at
the bay
window
looking
out

Spring Cleaning

When they closed that upstairs
window all those months
ago, they painted it
with gritty, grey paint
on a humid day
late in August.
It melted down between
stile and sill
soldering the window

until the morning
she used
a carving knife
to break the seal,
to crack open
what had been dried
and idle too long.

At last, the glass panes
shuddered, and she pushed
the window up.

With stillness now gone,
the soft wind came in
like the suddenly beating
wings of a hummingbird
after its winter torpor.

I will taste the warm tomato

it will be late in August,
just before September when
I leave this place. I will find the perfect
one on the vine, overripe with a split
running down its pink and yellow
belly. I will cut through its seal with my knife
and pull out a slice smooth
and curved like the lute.
The tomato will smell like the sun
and drip down the corners
of my mouth
until pooling between my breasts.
The rest I will swallow –
for later, when I'm far
and gone, when I need
those seeds for my own
growing:
to last the dry, fruitless days
of the Atacama Desert.

Capsized

Before breakfast,
I will kiss you softly
in a kayak tipping south –
we will swallow
too much river water
for our stomachs to hold,
but upon becoming
upright, we will paddle
unflappably
downstream after your
wayfaring sunglasses, then tip
again, no kiss, in an
effort to see
behind a boulder.
On shore, I will hang
our clothes on all
our shoelaces
between two broad
oaks, and after that
stroll naked
with you
through the wood.

Dear Albee

The teahouse is quiet in the morning,
few people come anymore, but I did
and saw Ms. Morgan just as she was leaving.
She says hello.

In a sack by my feet are two loaves
of corn bread and a glass bottle of milk
from Ruth Holmes, remember her?
I went to the corner store just after
they opened, and thinking of you I bought
a carton of cigarettes, just this once, Ablee.

You'll be home soon, I know.
I washed our bed linens,
letting them air dry, the way you like,
and baked a strawberry rhubarb pie.
It's still steams inside the oven,

heating the whole house up,
even though this sweltering summer
would be enough to remind you of the blood
dried on the lapel of your uniform
from yesterday's sun.

I promise those stains will come out,
I'll soak them until they lift, even your white undershirt
with blood caked all over, it will fade in time, and that small hole
in the center, I will stitch – I borrowed bright
white thread from the woman next door.

Albee, there are these purple clouds of acid rain
brooding above me –
the way they're hovering like that,
pushing me down close to the pavement,
I think they're trying to say
what they know I will not hear.

Mongolian Wild Horse

She sits on a riverbank
watching the sun carve its way
across the water and make
mosaics out of the pebbles
on the river bottom.

Downstream a horse uses his lips
to lap up the water,
his mouth upturned like the trunk
of a Poplar.

Soon, the horse will head southward,
guided by the current
rushing down his throat.

Squatting close
to the burbled murmurs,
the woman cups her hands
to get a taste of her own:

she remembers the brick house
built on the side of a knoll
and the small black and white
dog asleep on the hearth –
a distant continent.

I can never stay in one place too long

I dreamt of menthol, then woke
to that smell I hate
and the sound of a throat lozenge
clicking across the back of his teeth
as he complained –
something about the yoke swirling
all over his plate, I flipped it
too hard, he said, made it dribble out
too much, he said. I left
to the other side of the door
that I exit only to enter
into an outside
of freezing rain with canvas shoes
that bring me only as far as
I need them to: the post office
where I mail an empty envelope addressed
to myself, the self who lives somewhere else
in a city with a name I get from the last three
letters of my middle name—NAN
and a state I've never been to—DELAWARE
I insure the envelope;
I want it to be there
waiting.

Because you suffocate me

I will leave you here
toweled and bare –
I am only with you
until the last splice
when we lay beneath the sheets
breathing each other in.
Just before the next reel,
I will cut it all short –
this darkness is too warm,
and I thought, at least
you should be dry

Ladder

I will drive two hours
to see you,
briefly press my cheek
to yours, then
ask to leave.

I will try later to cook you
a twice-baked
potato. It will take me
three hours,
and the skins will lay limp
in the oven.

We will not eat
tonight or any night
I cook.

Then, I will wash your clean dishes
in a dirty sink
and you will carry me
out of the kitchen
like a ladder.

You say,
I'm something
to climb.

Holes

Those muddy leaves at the tree's trunk
disguise the graying mulch below
and the fallen apples with their bruised holes
and crimson skin shriveled
in the biting air. Winter near,
the tree quakes, silent.
All will soon be naked or white.

Like strung pearls

When the two of us begin
making our way
around the beaver bog
in the familiar
dim light of dawn,
there is steam
rising over the water
in silky coils
and we stop to see
the way it hangs
from cattails and sedge
like strung pearls
in this calm – Ellie’s hand
slackens her hold
on the leash and Otto bounds
to the forest edge
and when we turn to look
for the black dog
we see him sniffing
eight cow hooves
cut off at the ankles
and tied in a bundle
from a peeling birch

Letters

In the future, I will send you letters even when
you're sitting here close –
one letter, written in the largest script, will be a list
of all the things you shouldn't do.

You will read it because it took me time
but you'll never remember what page seven said:
*don't creep your hand around my waist
after using that tone, brazen and with
severity.*

I will chase you through our trellised
peas and catch you at the honeydew.
We will drop to the earth
panting and kissing.

In the mornings, I will write down
the reasons to imagine you
gone, then imagine us a home
by the late afternoon – something small
and brick with daffodils growing wild.
There I will put your hammock
and let it hang low enough for me to press my nose
through its diamond shaped holes
and smell the flowers.

It will be just before summer
and it will all be new again.

I've missed this

missed the way
the two of us were bound
by something I understood only
when I held you close in my hands,
your dampness and sweet grittiness stuck
in my skin. I thought I'd never forget the way
you've always heard the birds, the meadow,
the sea, always spoken to the limbs
of trees, to the ripples of snapdragons,
to the prairie dogs. And I almost
forgot, I almost relapsed into
believing that this
this world
was only
mine.

Summer Work

That morning in the greenhouse when
we hung orange twine from the ceiling to guide the tomato plants up, up,

it took all my stretching to hook the twine around the cable beam
and I was so dizzy from the upwards looking

that I tripped in the mudded trench, wondering
when you asked for my help

why you asked for my help
with my twelve heirlooms still unstrung

and the other girls able
why you were handing *me* a ratchet

when I told you I'd never ratcheted before
and while your knuckles turned white pulling my slack

I was thinking about your thick hair,
which may have been obvious because you spoke firmly then

and I imagined your eyes agitated, waiting –
I didn't picture the soft,

forgiving blue
that they were

On a back street in Paris

A quiet *clink* and she knows it's reached the other side. She sits soldered to her spot on the sidewalk, then fumbling with her plump fingers she selects another bottle by its neck. Touching the smooth glass, stroking its belly. In the pocket of her apron, she pulls out blank slips of paper and brings one up close to her nose. She wrinkles up her face to push out the next memory. She pushes and pushes, closing her blind eyes. She fills up the blank slip with her very last memory, then puts it inside the bottle. She rolls the bottle cross the cobblestone and listens to the distance growing between her and the bottle. She holds her breath until the final *clink*.

I heard you get up to leave this morning

And before you left,
I had asked
that you lay with me
in the cool grass

and watch the sky
reclaim us both
up in its blue, blue
eaves.

And when
the cumulonimbus
emerges,

it will take with it
a bit of us,
the part
that would have
slept above Capilla de Mármol
or stayed quiet
for the milky white plumes
of the Snowy Egret.

Later, I will wake
knowing I had dreamt of us,
but only of what we could be.

Undone

I

When we grew tired of each other,
like hair hanging limp
at the end of the day,
I found myself slicing
red onions on the glassy surface
of our kitchen countertop.
It was a moment to cry
openly
at the thought
of pressing my cheek
to yours
and how
I would miss
its softness.

II

Like a cord as it slips
from the waist,
the two of us came undone –
dropping to the floor,
we undressed ourselves from
the other, as quick as silk fluttering
down, we were disrobed,
and like
the last pin pulled
from tightly wound hair
we too fell from the nape
to the bare back
in a cascading tumble –
and I wasn't surprised
to watch it all fall
as it did,
to watch the bareness
spread from our collarbones
to our bellies
to the backs of our knees
and to our heels
as it grew in us both,
or to see how we soon
saw nothing
but the other's
naked body.

III

I sliced those onions into
thin translucent rings
delicate enough
that in the dimmed light of late
evening I thought I might lose
them to the speckled counter,
I thought maybe their flesh –
frosty, yet clear,
would make them blend
right into
the background. But
the way each
glinted in its own pearly
reflection, in its own
nakedness, made them
obvious and bold against
the table. Nakedness
can never be
reversed,
it can never
be undone.

I must rest (we suspect it's mono)

It had all seemed real –
the rolling staircase
and pink peppercorn tree with
star fruit in its buds,
and the cup of tea
bleeding pomegranates
and the baby's breath wreathed
around the horse's neck.
Its coat soft, oily.
All real.

However, the grown boy
still dressed in footy pajamas
riding two ostriches,
each leg slung over an elongated neck,
had me wondering.

Eventually, the city of silk
with its steeples of tightly wound
cocoon and thirty-five prisms in every
window would confirm it –
the Zithromax had little effect on me.

Ragweed Season

The dimpling behind his ears makes a beehive
a collection of honeycombed scars
where the doctors carted away his bones

after thirty surgeries, he can't blow his nose
and his right ear is deaf
so I like to whisper things in it

like the morning we picked peppers
Red Knight, Valencia, Hungarian, Ancho
in the field with heirloom tomatoes

Prudens Purple, Striped German, Yellow Brandywine
which at that time of year smell rotten, rather foul
but I couldn't smell a thing

because ragweed was pollinating
and my nose dripped and I was rubbing
it raw when he turned to say

*You know, it means a lot to be with someone
who's willing to do this with me
I didn't look up, didn't speak*

I just couldn't say what I wanted to, I had to wait
until later lying in bed when I got close to the side
of him that wouldn't hear the words

I'll do anything with you

I think of you when

I eat from a bowl dyed deep
indigo and when my legs
are gathered close

to my chin.

It reminds me of the way
you sat at that open window

across the courtyard
and several stories
up,

you were reading from a book
with pages flaking
down into the fountain below

and your face was fragmented
from the laundry that flapped
in the space between us.

I could see only
the sparing glimpse
of your freckled nose

and square jaw
as the lemon sheets
and checkered dish towels

ballooned in the wind.
Still, I knew
with just pieces

of you
there was something
I recognized,

something familiar,
though I'd never seen you before
and wouldn't see you again.

Progress in June

The tractor came like an oaf around the corner
and made the grass beneath our bare feet tremble
until the engine cut off
ten yards away. We heard the soft thump
of your work boots touching ground.
Thirty minutes in the blueberry bushes
and we had a full bucket
each and were picking still
when you came up from behind.
In the quiet, I could hear you smiling.
But, when I turned to face you, smiling too,
you had on boss face and said “six more,”
then began picking into my bucket.
So, I put on worker face, and overdid it.
As the blueberries spilled,
there was a sting behind my ear
then your gentle grunt,
and me whipping around
to see your right hand aimed,
and that smile
I’d missed earlier.
I snatched all the ones unripe from the bush
and chucked them hard.
Your expression transitioned
three times – all shades of stunned.
I ran to the top of the row and had just a moment
before the familiar gurgle and spit
of the tractor roaring to life, the sound
of distance after.
I watched the whole way
and only when the flower shed and pine trees
nearly concealed you
did you turn from the tractor seat
to look behind.

Without Looking Up, Gone

There is a slight flapping of the Boston Globe on Sunday afternoons,
and a hesitancy on river bottoms where the rocks are uneven.

I've noticed the softly faded collars of his work shirts,
and the one palm he must press to the wall upon slipping into

his house shoes. Once, he called the grey slats of a stale chicken coop *home* –
a buzz cut and freckled boy then, he'd lie on his stomach

his belly pressed to a dusty rug as he listened, waited
for the clap of horse hooves, for the burst of trumpets, *The Lone Ranger*.

Those years have since settled – kept someplace where
he can still recall, close enough that at times

I can watch them, too, sitting there next to him.
Every so often he glances down, measures each one,

then feels them all.
Is it age he feels?

1942 is caught in a backwards pull,
it's being dragged further,

still farther, always away,
and it takes my father with it.

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