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I have been studying the migration
of the years, the dull heat of their passage
a strange fire. And because they are holy,
gravity slips through them, these cycles
of sleeping and waking as quiet
as the space between heartbeats,
the stillness of January fields,
the men by the fence at the roadside
in their orange jumpsuits,
the winter crows oaring out of the trees.
I have to deepen my know ledge because it’s shallow like a tarn in late August, because I don’t have a grasp on the rate of melting, on the sponge-like Greenland firn which had been keeping the oceans from rising. My trifling know ledge, unexcavated, undredged, forbidding me from having down pat the warming of oceans, the movement north of commas and pikas, little egrets, the strengthening of tropical storms with names like Matthew and Gaston. My ledge, lacking gravitas, brims with gaseous laughter, with buoyant conclusion and calamity. I will find me a walk-behind trencher, a skid-steel loader, and I will dig this sad excuse for a reef into a mantle. With my significant foxhole, I will gorge and moat, trough and dig till I’ve hit bedrock, will make this ledge of mine a mountain—more sloped, more shored, more earthworked; I will scoop and scrape till I surface the contents of the whale that washed up on a Spanish coast, fifty-nine plastic items in its gut—two flower pots, spray canister, thirty-seven pounds of trash bags. With this trailing pipe, I track the moth, the mole-like Pyrenean desman elevating
eight inches an hour. With my modish knowledge, I will no longer possum but posit

not a wall but a walrus’s need for ice—its floating preschool, its staging ground

for lunch. On my berm they’ll glide and glissade, congregate, give birth.
One time—I was just off the 42 bus, backpack-heavy in my youth—there was a pigeon, and it had gummed its feet with tar. Talons like dark dough. Already in a circle was the whole gang of people who’d never seen each other, but still they had their roles. One guy lived in that row house right there and so he had a towel, like a thick dish towel, and there was one woman who knew about birds because she had cats. Somebody held the pigeon and someone else got rubbing alcohol while I bent over the scene and knotted my hands. People had Q-tips out. At one point two of the neighbors looked at each other—squatting on the sidewalk, a knee each on the slate—and said This isn’t working. And then they were holding feathers.
DAVID EBENBACH
The Flower

The poet from Iran
was born before her parents,
is what the interpreter says.
It means she knows everything.
When we give her the tour,
she says, Let's go inside,
where she keeps wearing her
white coat. In the campus chapel
under the new ceiling, beside the new
stained glass, she asks me
if I go to church every week
and I have to say I'm Jewish.
She takes the quietest step
backward. And when we get to the room
where she's going to read she sits
in the row in front of me and turns to say,
Sorry to give you my back.
What you say in Iran, I know, is
A flower has no back.
muddy dahlia
of my heart,
pronounce me
whole—I
convoke eye’s
ark-signature,
(l) slew & splay
a hive-vein’s
brighter aspect
heretic-pee
unforge myself
as braille-
chapel, spline
adrift in nights
tender spine
of being-breath
undappling
in its gene-mote
I pledge my
(brutish) anthers
to your dream-
festival, one-
& only-hospice
I cross to the outer garment where the wound waits. The wound is an old friend. The wound is expecting me. I wrap the wound in bits I've snipped from the inner garment and then, side by side with the wound, we turn back to face what we've left behind. *It looks so cold* is what the wound says, from its wound-mouth. It's not what I would have said. It's not my general feeling. But it's important not to disagree with the wound while the wound is talking. So I wait for awhile. The sun sets. Flocks of geese spin overhead, drafting consciences for politicians I'll never vote for. It is all very beautiful. *Are you done yet*, the wound asks, suddenly. No, I'm not.
DENISE BERGMAN
he opened the window’s slit and climbed in

a friend suggests “compassion” “society” “circumstances.” I tell her I don’t care

I don’t care if he was born into a tangled skein of back-stabbing brothers. so what, wrestled under the see-saw kicked in the face on the slide. I don’t care. told tough it out don’t cry no dolls god forbid no Lamb Chop mutant turtles and plastic characters whose names end in tron. I don’t care. high fives slaps on the back never an embrace do I care. no. army boot camp be all you can be not who you want to be. I don’t care. my dog would have lived a simple dog life and I after forty-one years would be writing about the mockingbird mimicking a squirrel to scare the neighbor’s cat or about medical supplies blockaded from entering Gaza. do I care if his father left town his uncle pulled him into the woods. no. what is beaten out of the boy what is forced into the beaten-down boy so what. I don’t care

I slept through the rattling unoiled half-broken sash cord rollers. I slept through his steps on the floor. a moon was somewhere and somewhere was rain

blood on my shirt from my mouth never washed out. do I care where he came from. no. I don’t care

he had a mother he did. he he he had a mother. she caressed him at least once he knew a caress. do I care. no. I don’t care
Deeded sand underfoot, in hand
Packed and patted
Cold stone grit specks and dust familiar as our first

Shaped and shadowed hands.
Hands. Old old ages of hands, hand and hand-
Prints, before gust or breeze.

Handfuls handstamps pails. Sand-
Scapes: abalone moonsnail razorshell and calloused heel flakes.
A particle’s fragments’ fragments.

Used to be outer layers of packed sand trickled
Scattering the end of day
Blurring the background like a mirror.

Muscle under the sand sculpture’s windblown skin
A new
Skin until it too the weather crumbled.

Used to be weather
Happened when we didn’t make it happen, happened
Despite.

Used to be tides
And craft and chance and homemade calendars with penned
Numbered days.

My expectation was time-exhausted
Smithereens
On a beach of slow erosion.

But this
Explosion on trial in a court of explosion.
Someone can’t wait—

In a wink our mothers’ maiden names.
In a blink the cuneiform tablet, Mesopotamian comb
Carved tender ewe.
The current charged.
Ancient earth’s fierce fire through filament-thin
Detonator wire.
German Expressionist painter Franz Marc created nine tarpaulin camouflage covers, assuming that those in the style of Kandinsky would be the most effective against aircraft flying at 2000 meters or higher.

Art masters, you’d think, would cautiously mete out their talent, deal it ace by king in lucky breaks, not treacherous losing streaks.

Blue Rider, swashbuckling the blind forest, trampling hens-and-chicks sedum, moss clumped on your horse’s ivory hooves you trekked vale to battlefield. Was there no better use of your palette—slippery blue, green jest, brown fleck—than the flickered delusion under which we hide disguised, hide, as time rears, as arsenals rearm with time?

Franz! mocking Wassily’s blue circle, red square, forging your friend’s serpentine black line—war steals then fences provenance, smears charcoal deceit while behind a studio’s primed stretched canvas or in a field under draped raw cloth a horse whinnies and its belly growls.
XANDRIA PHILLIPS

from Black Eyewitness Directory

Elmina Castle

at first only the rivers and I wept
for you in your journey (like the waters’)
from tropical interiors to the estuary

slap of the ocean’s cupped hands
and then your absence became religion

as easily as creating meaning from loss of limb
you fell into crates that rustled from within
to the tune of the wind’s phantom chorale
The Good Ship Jesus

you and I spoke the same language
so we cursed and sang and closed each other’s
mouth to preserve moisture, and with the ocean
at our backs we shuffled through piles of death

and then you were in that pile, but I never
stopped talking to you—not even after I found
my legs—not even after I found my pupils refused
to shrink in their want for gathering darkness
Tuskegee, Alabama

in a fit, you slapped my fingers onto your forehead and asked me to pull off the horns growing there, and I felt and saw nothing, and I told you these horns were lovely

someone told you that eating chicken would shrink your brain and darken your skin, but there wasn’t much else lying around, so I called it duck and pried open your mouth
Angola Penitentiary

I am the one who visits you and I swallow
a key for every year you’re put away
and I swallow our entire home and I stuff
books and television shows into my pockets

before I can slip you a single comfort
between your teeth they pick me up shake
me and confiscate everything on my person
into a box labeled CONTRABAND
AMANDA BALES
Brisance/Advice for Beheading a Chicken

Cut high and leave brain stem.
Enough, hear tell, that a man
once toured a headless pullet
sustained by grain water he
dripped down esophageal hole.

Cut low and blade meets bone.
Enough, I know, to call
a second strike, a third,
as many as it takes
to get the job done.

Space enough for error,
a measure learned by IED,
and so this morning saw you
pinned to floorboards, my face
mine and not mine as you labored
my name until I collapsed.

Light stretched, but we lay
as if in shadow of a predatory bird—
mouths pressed to pulses.
Your hands hatchet burdened.
1. Whistle and Scrap

The whistle, so I should get my ass in gear,
get ready for what’s shrieking toward me:
grinders starting up, stone wheels spitting bits of sand.

A litany of scrap: clatter of magnet as it gathers
to its truck-size breast a car wheel, Camry quarter panel,
stainless sink, bent John Deere steering column,
crumpled dishwasher, bundle of rusted rebar, bucket
of roofing nails, screen door, bank
of busted high school lockers, coil

of wire trailing through the scrapyard
like the bald tail of a rat. Trolleying
toward the furnace room, screeching on rails,

this crane and its quiver of junk
drifts then roams, sways into a wide arc
to take the swing out of the load, hovers

above the open hellhole of the furnace,
obey the index finger twirling down,
down with the load, down

with it, ready, ready—
fist opening—
ungodly crash and molten tramp trash stink.
2. But Lovely,

    some of this world, I think.
Like after sandblasting, the way steel looks—
a morning sky, gray clouds in a creamy
endlessness, no shine, no pit, no blemish,
a pewter muteness from which everything
of night and day has been honed out.

Sand goes airborne on the whisper
of a better time, dazzles as it floats in rays
that slant through corrugated eaves.

It falls on hardhats, into the pockets
of beastly hot twill coveralls, cakes in snot.
I pull the dusk mask tight

across my face so that the paper smell
blows back with every breath. Oh hell,
let’s get the damn shift over with.
3. Aladdin Thermos

A tin box sits on a Formica counter in the lunch room with grimy stickers advertising *STP, Skoal Racing, Ducks Unlimited*, and all the union strikes I’ve been part of.

Inside the box, Chinese leftovers. “Take them for lunch, Lily won’t eat anything but mac and cheese.” I’ll wash down the salty beef and broccoli with coffee,

still hot, from an Aladdin thermos that sees me through daylights, afternoons, and sleepless graveyards—its steel shell, like my lungs,

pitted by silica, rusted by chlorine gas.
4. A Dream of Quitting Time

From break to break, I’ll wish my shift away, shower off sand, go out into the crystal clear all-clear of quitting time—midnight in Arizona, soaring like a nighthawk over Guadalupe, this town I work in, where Yaqui Indians have been driven into the corner

of a long-lost nation; sail further to Apache Junction, home of Nate’s Used Cars and GIRLS, GIRLS, GIRLS; to Globe, Morenci,

where copper towns are dying, leaving high-rise dumps of orange tailings, listless hills of slag; or down the dried-out Gila River, into a basin of forgotten lives, where Brandi Riley says goodbye to Jason Sanchez, a loud kiss, a silent night in Casa Grande;

or float above a lonesome bird’s eye of saguaros; careen on desert monsoons almost to the border; to Bisbee, home of the famous deportation, surrounded by the tufts and brambles on the otherwise bare-assed Mule Mountains— I’ll float into the desert night beneath a firmament of sand.
I said, Fix your buttons.
He said, We have to see if it is Saturday.
A man with the weight of belief in one of his pockets, and these fill up fast. He said, We have to move the bodies, and since he was not broken by such talk, I endured his broad deviance. He said he would have to — and when he said it again, then left it at that, I smiled with terrible tangles in my love. We were told to expect such knots. He wanted it to be Saturday. He could go empty those hidden days in between. I watched his fingers scan his glossy picture on his door. This was all of him. His fingers formed his own double
collars, ecstatic
exhausted cheeks. Lost,
you might say.

but we didn’t. I said, The sun
has again become
rain. I said Dad, and he tried
to arrive
with a new sentence. He said, Out
in the earth, time moves

like an angel.
His watch swept

the hours. I said, Let us
take what’s not
even there. He listened.
To elapse this story means to knifework & life-ease
the unbearable. So when he calls, instead of driving, I sit hushed
in this repeated city beside the embarrassed crisp trees, too much
concrete pigment. My father outlines his now-failure
& death & discontinue. Again, again, whatever won’t quit
his mind: the bike the bag the way the seat
made people disappear. All the while, the body
of with & against buds without nouns, but I know
his crammed overgrown frets that hasten
to anger. The dashboard clock goes on, the same numbers
re-ordered. He tells me how he fingerknocks his scalp
of its allegiant spots & I love that head
that’s sun indulgent, that orphans its smallest terrors. I watch
people walk along the nearby folds of road. A whole hour
through his joists of memory. My fingers fish my purse
for random dirty sweets. I’m seeing through glass
how we were five & sweaters & faith
wide enough to sing God’s names & later down
to one, one, one, one. I have to figure
he is an old man hammering dozens of times
on the story & its contamination. The whole city can see me
sitting here as his words curve to my throat. I take them,
take them; you can’t want a man to be quiet without
stuttering with death. The words back-to-back flint
every next thought. You might think I wait for every clump
of foul from his pockets. I can’t stop the time
to headlong my silence. There are days breaking this blood. Days after
to slip under its flank. That’s why I’m in a parking lot
holding my hand in my tired hand & saying
love, the word stuck to my palm. This teaches me
not to hurry & this is not enough. *Love, love*
& again the traffic light burns up with red. The sky falls
toward night. Saying it in every available absence.
MICHAEL BAZZETT
The Men Who Disappear

There is no box with mirrors.
It happens as someone watches.
They go out to the woods to live.

Most change their names. One
liked birds. Also archery, often running
his finger along the feathered fin
that held the arrow true in flight,
the feature known

as fletching. So Fletcher Starling it was.
Whether changing names changes

other things is uncertain. These circumstances do not

submit easily to terms of cause and effect.
There is no bureau one can apply to

with such questions, a lack of authority
that would be appalling were it not

the norm.

The man finds shelter and quits shaving.
His wisping hair and beard become
a nest for his nose and cheekbones.

His features sleep silently, side by side,
like something discovered in a quiet glen.
One problem
with these men
who disappear

is that once
they do it
they’re still here.

When they walk
mountain streams
broken reflections

stalk them:
a fact that should
be obvious yet

often eludes them
until the moment
they see two

eyes floating in the water.

Many of them become proficient
at tasks we relegate to earlier times:

knot tying, whittling, reading
the weather as a well-thumbed manual.

Handling boredom like a claw hammer
that both drives and pulls the shrieking nail.

Understanding that the sounds own someone
are locked inside of lonesome one.
The observer of the disappearance
is often an interested party.

Female witnesses are not uncommon.
These women swear that someone was

*there* not two weeks ago
and now, *this*. They indicate impressions

left in couches and easy chairs, claiming

*That’s not the man I married.*

These words are undoubtedly
true yet sometimes understanding

takes years to arrive.
They didn’t notice it at first because of the adrenaline coursing through their bodies but the monster was too old. Its muzzle had gone grey and a number of its claws were cracked and broken. It even trembled with a bit of palsy when it settled back on its fat haunches. And every time it put somebody’s head into its mouth and tried to shred it clean as a plum from a stem, one of its teeth broke and it howled in pain and spit the person out with splinters of brittle enamel clinging to their sodden clothing and then they too began to scream or possibly moan, if they hadn’t already begun to slip from consciousness.

Strictly half-assed, said Steve and he dropped the sword he’d received upon arrival at the refurbished warehouse painted to look like a cave with a coupon for himself and five guests to do battle with a bona fide monster of “cannibalistic mettle & unequivocal medieval rage.” ™

Fluorescent lights flicked on when the manager entered wiping sweat from his head and apologizing profusely. He wore a navy polo shirt with the company logo
as did the chagrined trainer who was attempting to lure the monster back inside its chain-link enclosure by offering it a rank knot of chickens tied to a pole.

It mostly just seemed tired.

Brian climbed unsteadily into the unmarked Ford van they used as an ambulance and Paul held a wash cloth to the puncture wound in his neck with one hand but he had a beer in the other and already he and Steve were beginning to laugh about how half-assed it was and the manager promised that next time would be better, that a new one was en route from Arkansas and still mostly feral, so next time they might see what it felt like to be alive.
MICHAEL BROWN, JR.

Freedom

Salt laid across my lips breaks down to stardust.
So, when I speak, I spit creation.
Now these scattered lyrics are beautiful, but they are not mine.

My fears still fang to nascent lead-cracked muscles. And cording spirituals and soliloquies
Struggle to sing from coke-locked jaws. And the sackcloth flesh
Of freedmen frame my shadow. Now, all these things may beat my heart, but these visions

Do not live. They haunt. I hear them all. And they're echoing through my soul.
It sounds as if from a tomb. And I awake all these nights, sweating, having swung
Pendulous through history. Now I wake and see the lips of lion-like ladies speaking up the sun,

Though they call it “God.” And I hear this great migration of laughter
Swaying rapturously through the close-knit buildings. And I take joy in this music, dancing now,
Dragging all those phantoms with me. All black, all shouting. And in this beautiful babel, I lose
My name and lunge into a body.
What if I’ve forgotten the dream / what if
    I was awakened hurriedly / what if the forgetting
    is what I keep in mind / what if it’s the fretting?

There was an ocean / there was a metallic
    wave / there was alarm of no speech /
    symphony of echoes / assault of wind.

Is this the dream I must keep in mind:
    blank radiance of a faceless embrace?
    I have had too many coffees / too many

    dreamless nights / far too many
    stuporous mornings trying to rouse
    myself into some entrancement

    of the believable good.
again with the american journalists
who come to call
my sons murderers, again
with my sons who rise redly
waving their four good hands
like their best name has been spoken
by the wide blue mouth of their god
or prime minister, O,
when a child dies, the village keens,
when children kill, there is only
one mother to kneel & lap
the blood from their names,
O forked & feral tongue,
i spit in the tea & carry the cup
to the journalist perched on the couch
i cleaned just this morning, whose bald head
shines like something polished, O stupid sun,
O futile gesture, smokestack, yeshiva, fanatic
in one hundred languages, O headlines,
bylines, ball bearings, rigged & riddled,
O new & no speech of mine,
when i die, who will be there
to write the end of history?

Note: Geula Amir is the mother of Yigal and Hagai Amir, right-wing Jewish brothers
and conspirators who assassinated Israeli Prime Minister Rabin. Although the
brothers take outspoken pride and responsibility for the well-documented
assassination, a third of Israelis, including their mother, do not believe they are guilty.
1.

A tradition is not a police regulation
every kind of oddity of device or
accent, square as a cover of mature
suburbanites down in the rumpus room.
When you listen closely, there is nothing
everyday about art. A life of enormous energies
keeps pouring itself according to its fate into
the imaginative world of dance. An expressive
play of changing proportions shocks
sensitive persons; they are not treated as
pictorial possibilities. They retain their weight.
The art of dancing must be a real thing
to some people some of the time:
the trouble of keeping in balance.
2.

The trouble of keeping in balance may be compared to lifting a table by one leg and keeping the top horizontal; a fine art of understatement, she throws up the leg in a flash, a formal limitation of movement. The extra power is like a sense of transport. People are so to speak their better selves. A step action can also be a magic emblem. Dancing became exhilarating not only to do, but also to watch, to remember, to think about. A voluntary, a purely human attentiveness. Unless you catch it in motion, you don’t catch it at all.
3.

In motion, you don’t catch it at all—she seems to watch over her integrity with too jealous an eye. You often look at a free meter and listen to a strict one, the difference between getting the ideas and following. Rationally it seems odd to confuse the metrics of music with musicality, as pleased as a hen who has just laid an egg. What are all those bison floating on if not on a steady beat? The risk is part of the rhythm, a single revolving vibrating shape which kept changing in the air, a prehistoric pleasure.
In the air, a prehistoric pleasure,
a kind of crooning. Painful
situations, strokes of wit,
hallucinating contradictions—
there is nothing comfortable
to rest on. The glamour of momentary
success is no solid foundation. But
dancing that makes sense is so rare
it is worth being serious about,
power and unction in her hips,
knees, and instep, her elegance
of motion, her private integrity.
A bit of insanity, it has been
doing people good for a long time.
5.

Doing people good for a long time:
classic steps turned inside out and
upside down—retimed, reproportioned,
rerouted, girls dancing hard and boys
soft; the victim has been struck square.
Some people complain such dancing is
mechanical. It seems quite the opposite
to me. American ballet is like a straight
and narrow path compared to the pretty
primrose fields the French tumble in
happily. A certain sanctimonious decentness,
a note of expensively meretricious tastiness—
I felt again the homeyness of the first time,
like a party where everybody acts nice.

Note: All text is borrowed from the dance criticism gathered in Dance Writings
We can’t all be Otis Redding. 
Let the duet singe your soul. 
Ignore saxophone bloopers + 
the clang + clack of drum-
sticks flung staccato to tile. 
Cacophony. No coffee—black, 
iced, Irish—required. Stall-
bound. Yayo bouquets high-
light set breaks. It’s late. O-
paque. ATM’s busted, as is 
the lock. Though lungs grind 
overtime, windpipes do not fade, 
nor do game, thinned-out aortas. 
Score. Glorious hymns. Relax? 
Dirty verb. We wax + blow up 
as green smoke lights the low hat. 
Two floors up, a beggar’s foam 
cup collapses inward, alien slop 
crushed on the sidewalkscape. 
String picker with no strings, he 
hums a song he can’t sing, man. 

Clouds cull smog water for issue. 
Across the street, reggae thumps 
from a gaping bodega doorway. 

The world is slow + heavy. 
The world is rolling + fake. 
The world is sham sham sham. 

But not downstairs, where we 
hunker + hanker in this bad, bad 
bunker, bracing for an attack that will never, ever, + I mean ever, transpire.
COLETTE INEZ
How We Got Here

We walk, a dapper couple
holding hands in May
on Broadway.
Too late for the movie,
we find a sidewalk table and chairs.
Lincoln Center, and it’s Paris, sort of:
chic, convivial crowd,
trees coming into their own
Cezanne green, the sun
our Edith Piaf singing “La Seine."
Autumn back then on the rue de la Sorbonne,
Marthe et Georges discussing Kant’s “Critique
of Pure Reason,” wine swirling. How they stumbled
into each other’s desire, qui sait?
Love, my start a year after yours
in the Borscht Belt, Labor Day. Sylvia and Max.
Pop knocks back a little schnapps. Syl, too.
So who knew?