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A Woman Changing Into A Tadpole

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CUNY City College of New York

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COLORS

I. White Canvas

Pierce the snow
paint the silence
Break the circle
draw a jig
Move the pen
watch the sun
shade its shine
Skate the surface
shake the dullness
jumble time
drip shadows on the edges

II. Blue Bus

She sits in a fat sea of blue an ode to delft
 panting in royal sweat pants
Her head framed in denim
 aimed at sun or rain
Pulls her sky blue rosary
 buried under layers of old sapphire wool
Rocks and prays for the passengers
 an ode to blueness
Hanging by a thread

III. Yellow

Not the yellow of a new banana
Not the hue of grilled summer corn
Not the cadmium squeezed from a tube
Not the jaundice of the body's rejection
Not the yellow-orange of Christo's curtains
Not Aurora in her yellow bed
Not Narcissus' golden face
Not Donavan's mellow yellow
Not the ecru of an aged letter
Not a flashing yellow light

More like the yellow
of a thousand ground
crocus stigmas flavoring
my saffron rice

CHRISTINA'S WORLD

She wakes in the time between dark and day.
Starts hands down gripping each plank of stairs.
Her hair dangles like downed wires
on a storm road. Her brother Alvaro
sets a wad of yesterday's newspaper
on her kitchen chair.

Like a untrained puppy, she'll pee at will.
Even pepper sweet beach roses fail to
unhinge the urine puddling under the slated
seat. She rubs black soil off the potatoes.
Rips the feathers from game birds
on a wood peg.

Christina slices apples and pears into a pie
shell. In her kitchen, before the sun sits
straight over the gray shingled roof, she
unties two tea bags drying on the window ledge.
Andy adds milk to his cup. Their saucers
meet at the edge of his sketch book.

TURTLE DREAM

I am in the backyard.
All you can eat flashes in the sky.

Len shows me a turtle crawling along
the fence. I bend down but can only see
an iguana flipping its tongue trapping flies.

He picks up a box turtle
with yellow and black stripes.
It crawls into my hand. His nails scratch
against my skin as he tries to escape.

The back door opens.

Someone says, *Turtles were not made to live indoors.*
I ignore him as I step through the wide glass door
and step onto the white carpet.
The turtle turns his head, opens his mouth
and spews a stream of brown bilge.

Someone says, *He is right.*
Reluctantly, I put the turtle back on the ground.

WAR IN BLACK AND WHITE

The movie was rated mildly violent.

A woman was slapped around, her arm twisted
until she screamed but never broke.

Puddles of mascara streamed
down her high cheek bones.

The men and women and children of war
were halved in two separate camps.

Even in the 1940's no opponents separate
children from their mothers.

It was only a matter of time before her
silhouette curved by the slight of hand
of moon light would blind the enemy soldier.

THE MARRIAGE

It occurred before the time of licenses and ceremony.
A private vow whispered in a fifteen century bedroom.

Their countries agreed to merge
The bride and groom foreign to each other

Governments aligned, an arranged urge
Blurring the lines of boundary.

His ermine trumps her green velvet dress.
Two to bear an obligation arranged before birth.

Only the painter and a small dog--
Indifferent witnesses to history.

ANDY'S WORLD

Home schooled, wrapped
in a canvas cocoon.

His father's protégé turned
inward, learned to paint in secret.

Hid the desire to connect with
neighbors his father distained.

Andy watched people
from the corners of a room.

Painted the parts that didn't fit.
austere recipe; his anorexic

paint brush—only two or three bristles,
the yellow yoke of an egg mixed

with hand crushed pigment.
Each minute stroke a mantra

of his chosen solitary life. He sailed
on primary color pirate ships

but preferred muted ocher of the female
warbler camouflaged in her nest.

DALI'S DREAM

Let me wear a watch to mimic time
Watch a heart rhythm
Remember a place
Bend in space
Melt in the blue landscape of time.

ROEBLING'S DREAM

People came to both sides of the frozen river.
Men's woolen fedoras matched their wives
Button up coats as they watched. Iced mist
Sprayed black rocks clung to hope
Heat from the January sun. Gulls
Squawked an unlikely account.
The wide river crossed by ferry separated—
Two islands would be bridged.

FEAR OF THE ELEMENTS

Last night I dreamed

the earth
seeded the trees

pierced
impenetrable rock

wind
transformed molecules

connected sexed fire
spike of cobalt

lit the mark
water ambivalent

drowned
the sounds

of water
rearranging my bones.

ROSE DREAM

Camouflage green pants

merge behind the leaves.

Only the silver sunlight/moonlight

reflects off his knife

separate the intruder

from the garden of

thorns and roses in full summer.

JACK IN THE PULPIT

It's a perfect hiding place.
Tubular and long enough
to fit all the legs of a centipede.

Transparent white
like a tent shaded by
a grass umbrella.

The grasshopper rests after
a long day of imagining
rain under high sun.

He stays up the night
spying the early bird
stalking the worm.

A ROOM WITH THREE WALLS

The living room
is covered in a
cream shag carpet.
One wall of
of four walls has
no wall.
The room's edge,
a sheer drop
of waiting rock
drenched sea.
My dead father phones
he suggests dinner,
laughs in a way he once could.
Asks how I am. His voice changes
to a women I don't know.

FISH DREAM

Her small toe is cut on a sharp blade of grass
just as she finishes a satiating fuck
with a masterful two headed fish
who at the moment of orgasm,
tries to swallow her up to her knees.
She attempts to talk, to speak her ecstasy
but words would form in her mouth only
if she places a coin in the fish's bronze dish.
She mumbles, *will anyone hear what she had to say, anyway?*
It never cross her mind to act with diplomatic
indifference, even the smallest lie would upset
her internal meter, jar her solar plexus.
She fails to lie even in dreams
If her sleep is broken, she'd rise from bed,
find her grandmother's favorite canning jar
and chase reluctant fireflies.
When severe insomnia takes a toll,
she would cartwheel and dance,
perched on a wire as thin as a laser
where she could rest
as high as her body could float.

A WOMAN CHANGING INTO A TADPOLE

She noticed a green cast to her skin
deepening under the moon's light.

Later she saw the bulge of her pupils,
the space widening between her eyes.

That next night while reading, the book
slipped from her hand into the bath water.

She found she couldn't resist adding
house flies to her favorite apple pie recipe.

After cooking a thousandth meal,
she revealed she lost her taste her food.

While knitting a cap for her nephew, she
dropped a stitch and slithered to the floor.

Now a small bump at the end of her spine—
a tail trailed below her favorite blue dress.

THE NATURE OF THINGS

Grief prowls in silence

wears soft soled shoes.

A serge of

dammed tears

burst like an old

copper pipe.

No janitor

near. You've

to mop up

and move on.

“IT IS A TASK TO COME TO SEE THE WORLD AS IT IS.”

Iris Murdoch

The cat with white boots teeters
on the red brick wall uncertain

Is the lure of food worth
risking his freedom?

The mosquito tracked my pheromones a
found me in sleep bit my bare arm
Left a path of bites from my finger
to shoulder.

Soon after her mother passed away
she wore a new outfit from her
mother's closet everyday.

Microscopic mold sits on the leaf's surface
embedding its DNA into the membranes.

DINNER PARTY IN A FLAT

Aggregate

He collects the ingredients in the crisper
mixes, and piles the veggies high.
EVOO over the green heap,
adds garlic and sautés.

Alimentary

Attuned to the balance of nutrition,
he plans the menu an emerald green.
Feigns interest in all things vegetarian
still craves a burger with bacon and cheese.

Agog

His guests, militant vegans, sit cross-legged
sip organic champagne, nibble on spinach pate.
wafts trough the air as
they wait, curious and hungry.

KILLING THE BEES
for Eammon Grennan

You could hear them at night
briefing tomorrow's to do list.

Thick layers of plaster unable
to dampen their will to serve.

The duty roster commands
every bee to sing the work.

Practicing a love dance
their mother, daughter, lover queen.

Uniform of furry black and yellow
castes for eternal volunteers.

Our weapons concealed
behind masked shields.

A crater size puncture hit the hive--
spittle and grey layered walls.

Their collective groan raw
as they sacked honey.

Black carcasses dropped
to the hand painted floor.

Ours for the sweet taking
victory tea for the making.

Sun through the white lace
curtains lit our victory.

The bees lay stunned looking
for any remains. Smoke slowed

their breaths, burned
their wings, blocked any escape.

THE MINETTA STREAM

It's hard to believe something you haven't seen
or heard. Ask Thomas, the patron saint of uncertainty.
He'll tell you how many people pray to disprove their perception.

Native Americans called it Mannette
for "Devil's Water." Seventeenth century
colonists called it Mintje Kill--small stream.
freed Africans called it the Minetta Brook.
It flowed under the Minetta Tavern, the watering
hole of the Beats, in the nineteen fifties.

How did the canoes float and what
were watered by the stream
grown in free soil grown under
the sun of poets, the sun of painters,
the sun of writers?

It ran north under the asphalt,
under the granite and mica schist,
under damp sand, ran against rocks,
swelled with algae, swirled with microbes.

So you have to listen.
Listen past the traffic,
beyond the path of bicycles,
below Sixth Avenue bus fumes,
an ear to the ground
to hear the water howl.

The water subdivided,
lurks under the west,
west of the Village.

Now, just a trickle,
obscured by
the pull
of the
Hudson.

WINTER CORN

From an empty field,
vacant earth where seeds emulsified

He painted the wintered out
stalks against the red brick sky

He sketched the stalks
resembling a bickering couple

He rendered each dormant kernel
before it cloned its exact self

FRAGMENT

A piece of glass
polished by surf,

A walk in no
direction,

A thought unhinged
from context,

A remnant of
a larger whole,

A bottle riding
a river,

A word sliced into
chewy bits.

ELEPHANT BIRD EGG

Sometime in the seventeenth
century they disappeared.

Half-ton birds, too big to hide,
too slow to escape early
Spaniards' fowl cravings.

The last titan egg rolled,
tilted off its nest, onto soft
ground where sea mixed with sand.

Buoyed by warm salt water,
carried by the ocean's undertow,
the last mammoth egg floated
down the African coast
until it found marsh.

The original Big Bird
escaped the surge of tides,
the appetite of whales, now
rests behind museum glass.

AQUARIUM

The subway car fills
with silver water. We float
close to a small crest
of air pushes against the glass.
A pigeon sings in a deep
Pavarotti voice. A shark
flipped upside down
distracting us from
our last breath.

THE CUP

I have written a poem that must be kept in a cup
It must have a white calla lily somewhere in the design
search every cupboard but all the cups are gone

There is a three tiered wire shelf in the middle of a room
A woman is also heading towards the last remaining cups
stacked on three shelves

I help her balance the stack of cups already loaded in her arms
As I turn away from the stack of cups to help her, she grabs the only
with the calla lily design and says, "I'll take that one too."

The cup casts
a shadow on the white
linen covered table
it invites
slightly beaten raw eggs
chicken soup
chamomile tea
Johnny Carson's whisky
braced for coffee
cooled by water
The cup emptied
wiped clean
reveals no traces
keeps all secrets

WOMEN ON THE BUS

A fat woman is sitting on the bus;
she's leaving on a trip but has no money.
Her husband won't give her any cash;
he's afraid she will spend it on food.
I give her my secret twenty folded
in three parts hidden in my wallet.

HELGA

The light ricocheted
off the white barn.

Lit her braided hair
like a night fire.

He, married four decades ago
but had to have her in his way.

She, a body already promised,
opened to his heart's lust.

He chased her with charcoal,
surrounded her in daffodil

yellow obsessed with her
Prussian blue eyes.

Their secret two decades
season and season renewed

through tangled sheets, closed
doors and tracks in the snow.

ANT

If you look into his almond eyes,
down to his trim sectioned body,
you'll see he's not a drone with wings.
Six legs are a hoist and wench.
Two small black pools of eyes fixed
with only work in his path. Blind,
deaf to all but the smell of his queen.

FIREFLIES

Two black and white woodpeckers take
turns tapping out a good night beat
while fireflies shimmy up. Buried
deep under ground they are here
to flash dance. Electric green
pulses, dazzle the outnumbered females.
The boys starved for light and love pounce.
Bodies lock for one night, then bury a batch
of next generation. Two weeks of garden
fireworks, a carnal bliss complete in a flash.

NEST

Before birds mate they build
a nest. Each half of the couple
finds someone's debris.

A Swiss sparrow combed
the cafe searching for crumpled
paper napkins, cellophane
empty Gauloise packs,
and sweet croissant crumbs
on the linen covered tables.

DRUM

What's the Irish drum called?

He closes his eyes,
 runs
his hands along tight skin.
 finds
 every ancient note.

I wrap an unfinished piece
 of toast into a white napkin.

The jam
 stains like blood.

GOING HOME

The rained formed a wet curtain blocking the view of the house. She'd left the city to find a decoy-- something to stand in the place of what she left behind.

The road curved with divots of tar pocking the surface. Each hole, a sunken crater of earth fractured with a layer of frozen rain, reminded her of a molasses cookie.

As the car rolled to a stop, the sun had moved one notch lower closer to winter. She didn't know if her father would remember her or if he was still hiding his socks from himself.

UNLOCK

A photo of two women
smiling in day's light
flank a contented young man.

She looks at the wall
staring at a spot.

Unsure why she held the locket
missing its chain,
the surface flawed by lost gold flecks.

Round like a dime, the pearl case
sat in the back of
the kitchen drawer.

Tarnished edges washed away
from opening
closing
the past.

MOUSE: A-Z

She heard
a mouse.

Bereaved

his friend caught
in a pool of glue.
Despite warnings

posted
in the yellow
squares every where.

His mouse friend
figured
he'd get away
with
his plan. He crawled high

in the closet insisting
he could
scale the bag of kibbles.

In one leap
lunged
like a lizard
lifted like
a grey furry kite.

The almost
sealed bag
was a mountain Everest

He assumed he
could
hurl past the
noxious
opal
reservoir below

casting a smooth
jelly haze
along the rim.
Direct touch

to be avoided usually and
whenever

He had no
fear of being x-ed out

His grieving friend
never knew y since

even
the most zealous
mouse is
wired for caution.

No peach pie, strawberry shortcake no
sliced watermelon no
blueberry jam.

Wooden hives sit
a baritone hum
fills summer air.

No morning coffee, afternoon chardonnay no
olive infused martinis no

bedtime tea,
 Honey bees
 diligent day workers
 can't find
 their way home.
 Amnesiac bees
 legs
 drenched with pollen
 drift.

No missing person, DNA evidence
coroner's report no
bereavement counseling
for their waiting
hungry queen.

THE DINER

The smell of
toast hangs
above cold
morning air.

Neighbors arc
hellos higher
than the pitch
of the strawberry
shake machine.

Customers
walk behind
the counter,
fix their
brewed coffee,
order sunny eggs
bacon well done.

Hunters argue
ways to keep
deer alive longer
before carving
and freezing meat.

Boots rest
on wooden
chairs rungs,
slick pools
of melted snow
and blood
puddle on the floor.

A brass bell
out its
metallic hum
each time
someone enters.

LUNCH

Elevated tightrope tracks
travel over new Brooklyn.
East River eddys below.
Wheels rondo, the train weaves
straight across the steel path

The search of a critic's choice.
Perfected thin crusted pizza,
garden grown plum tomatoes,
Buffalo mozzarella—
air lifted from Italy.

Individual hand-built pies
topped with Spanish anchovies
mingle with caramelized onions,
swell in a bee hive brick oven waiting
for me somewhere near Jay Street.

HOW I'VE FILLED IN THE GAPS

I.

It was one of those sudden hot days
reappearing in early fall.

My father surprised me

picked me

up from the first day of school.

He drove a new car

Its surface

like the crow watching from a rock.

The car door

scorched chrome

handle, course camel-hair seat

bristled like petting

a matted cat's back.

He turned

up the radio I

sang along with Elvis.

His nearly forgotten face

becomes

the same as my youngest brother, Joe.

BEFORE THE DEVIL KNOWS YOU'RE DEAD

Warmed cocaine flows, mind ajar opens a blue vein.
Life did not add up to one whole self.
He waits.

A nearly flat line releases his flaccid body.
He waits to live up to the hand that held him.

He waits for his father to slap away his sadness.

APRIL AND SILENCE REMIX (AFTER T.T.)

My reflections are yellow flowers

in a pawnshop window.

Spring crawls up my side

with out consideration.

The ditch gleams out of reach

like silver fish.

in a black violin case.

I'm carried in my shadow.

The only thing I want to say

crawls escapes through the grass.

JANUARY WINTER BIRD DREAM

Birds refuse to fly when it rains.
They prefer to remain on the ground
hopping in place resting on soft space.

She knew the way to attract them
was to line her window boxes
with sterile white cotton.

Surgical cotton rolled like a small bale of hay.
The cotton glistened like peaks
of egg whites and new snow.

Here the birds could wait out the rain
yet be ready for flight—their impulse
ignited whenever the sun returned.

The longer the rainy season, the less
they remembered how to fly.

When the woman died and it was time
to sort through her things, We found
a closet filled with brown wrapped boxes.

We could hear scratching along

the stiff box tops and wings pushing
along the sides of the swaying stacks.

The lid once lifted uncovered
red, blue and yellow wings
piercing through the batting.

Blue jays, cardinals and finches
asleep, dreaming, remembering
how to fly home.