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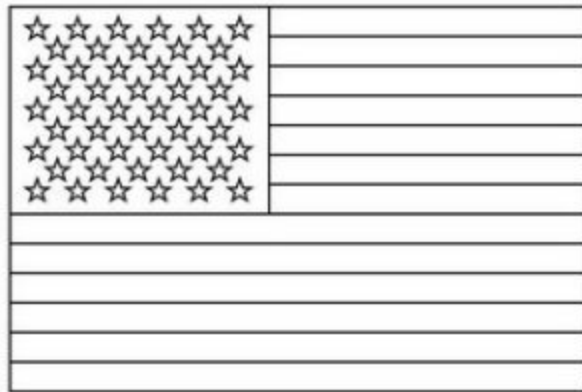
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The Dream is Work



Karin Olander, May 6, 2014
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Risk Management

The bank glass gleams all-knowing.
We eat bag lunch in a cube,
a couple of precogs in the machine.
K Street is covered in polyester salad.

Where we're from they never make you
replace the mailbox you hit; we don't live
too long, remember. We chew silently.

At home I wax my fake war truck.
What we have is a jailhouse
mentality. We can't want systems to fail.
You call for back pay. I hang a flag.

At Mountain Briar Creamery

the queen anne's lace ruled
our last green acre.

All the cows slept like glaciers
joining buffalo in wiped-beast history.

When rings of light
swarmed the pasture,

we raced toward
the grim moon's surface.

When you died, a rainbow
filtered through
a strand of your spit.

I lassoed the cows bluestone tongues
cracked open their skulls
looking for that spectrum.

Another Alien Breakfast

Our waitress's eyes were dead
when I ordered a pecan waffle.

The waffle appeared normal. Tasted great.
The summer morning glinted off the forks.
Someone turned on the doo-wop.

The manager looked like the handbook requires,
barked strings of consonants,
but his moustached mouth lagged behind his voice.

The breakfast borg turned to stare at us. We chewed slower.
All the fryers turned to radio static, and it swelled like treefrogs.
Suddenly, I wanted to get the fuck out of Medina, Ohio.

No one knew how the cash register worked.
No one acted at all comfortable.
No one could fake it.

I meet impostors everywhere I go.
I can tell by their strange thin skins.

Come Sail Away

What are other side effects
hoping someone pulls out a gun.

The drug ads loop fake water.
Nothing is muddy.
The actors stow their kayaks.

A blue patient checks his stocks.
His baby parrots a sea sponge.

Your name is called. You think
the nurse has a scythe.
Where is the river, you ask.

Forest Theory

A squirrel with your brain grins
as it runs across a city street
bites into the nucleus of a blueberry.

I am the squirrel who makes it home
to the thicket and coughs up the seeds
spitting out all my energies
in the tamped-down dark.

You are a boy with a squirrel brain
hovering above me in the treehouse
carrying orbs of light in your teeth.

A meteor lands in the creek,
and all three of us jump up
and think:
*well now here's that fear
we've been waiting for.*

On Leak Day

Sorry to alarm,
it's just the good cells
attacking the bad ones.

The country map fluttered.
Each state looked suspicious.
I'll take the right hand

corner, you take the left.
Seize up now. A foreign body
attacks another foreign body.

Where do we go to escape?
I mean return.
Where are you going?

Give me back the free highways
and porches. The yellowing trees
speeding up in open air

Courting Our Hideous Hearts

A hot spring Saturday, you pick me up.

The front seat is burning nuclear.

We eat milkshakes on the road

to Poe's house in Baltimore.

His lawn is sidewalk and patchy grass

on a cul de sac of tumbleweed trash,

crushed glass, a bag of blood, a needle

unexplained by the docent

who tells us The Poe House is closed.

We go to his downtown cemetery.

People leave drugstore carnations

requisite whiskey. The graves leave

shadows around the abbey.

We leave a penny heads up.

I hold a quick séance alone

crouched past his headstone

asking for approval.

Daylight flashing on me

means yes, so I high-five

the gloom and we drive home
laughing in traffic,
car horns and a hazier sun,
incantations of our dumb luck.

Several States of Otherness

This is the acid dip of waking up.
The sun's all spoiled now.

My memory's the hot lettuce
and you are the rat sandwich.

You are a mean god
in dark round shades.

You expose my haggard face
in your lemon yellow light.

I drink until you are the lemon
wedge and spit your bitter

spirit into the cola.
I crop you dead from every photo.

Bind Me Up in Syndicate

Fuck You Lou drew me a picture
with a pen for waiving his cover,
a VIP for well-meaning green faders.

I bought cheap art from his neon period:
a gloss print of a paragon, some bright math
that looked like an amusement park.

(You always feel as bad as you want
I never apply my considerations evenly.)

I was young and never closed my curtains
I knew harsh angles, but let his calculations
bleach weakly on the wall.

(Never stop asking what it means to be real.
I only know to applaud for nothing spectacular.)

Sorry, Diana, I'm An Ingrate

Some poet-crone with too many scarves
said the word *muse* breathing organic
crudites and uterine moss all over me
When she followed up with *moons* and *runes*
I excused myself to get some fresh air
and curb stomped an innocent ant hill
punching myself in the ovaries.

No goddesses, no masters, no menses.
My tarot cards all read "No Parking"
I won't bathe naked howling in the wild river,
or admire wild pubic hair on the gender altar.
If I have an empty space, I'll fill it.
I just want something that looks like me.

Cult of Personality

My followers rebuilt me a cross from concrete
put me in a tent
asking: is this hell? This is hell.

They lined up in Sunday gas masks
like there was nowhere else to be.
Why? they asked.

I pointed to my stripped eye socket,
did a slow dirge dance in the grass.

They grimaced, wanting more
petting from the holy spirit--
not the truths I wanted to give.

I drank the juice. I told them Gideon was dead,
to listen to their head and sing
wave their hands like Charismatics used to.

One day, a man's skin fell off at my door.
Jesus would've prayed.
I zipped the flap shut.

The Appalachian Mating Call

is a pill bottle's rattle,
the bad joke goes.
Before anything else,
I want to mention the mountains'
ancient looming shadows
and the green-gold waving trees.
When country beauty is centuries familiar
it's easy to forget. When there is land
and not much to fill it, artifice will grow
in the stills made by sunlight.
I won't mention money,
because there isn't any.

In some shaded hollows,
every tenth mother's child
arrives with a round blue cry.
The house-faces along the ridge
are grim, but lawns all flower
with toys. A pink trike, a smiling
doll, the last hint of industry
in a broken red truck.

The darkening is gradual, dirty.
The faded interstate winds up high
to a blocked horizon. At every impasse,
generations of mouths open hungry like tunnels
promising embrace and escape
just as soon as they are full.

Holding My Own Hand For You

To all the people
I weirdly love out there.
I am afraid you are like me.

Hello from a new waterworld
we can stick our brainy crowns
outside in the pineapple wind.

You are all the kind of love
that makes me want health insurance
stay with me. I know a lot about rafts.

Water Fists

God, I'm so sorry
your mom didn't
bring you enough snacks
cut off the crust, punks
go call your dad.

I am like you.
I dream of the mesa at night
a vegetable garden
off the grid
but Rand Paul is scary
and no one cares
where you squat.

The question is what
to do in the streets
in the vault
in the biosphere
in the auditorium.

There's no defiance
in gas station coffee
a suit gives you money
because you look like its kid.

Blue Sky Constructs

My brain is jammed, turns into jam.
Thinking flowers will grow underneath your window
doesn't make them grow. I talk to so many people
I will never see again.
I might go back down to party city
wait around for a slimebag in buffalo plaid.

I know where I'd rather be, holding big violets
in some other world you haven't been to.
There's a cliff and an ocean beneath it.
Whatever it is, it is only a flattening thought.

There is fog that needs navigation.
I sent you a telepathic message. Did you get it?
I come from the land of "doesn't matter",
and blame everything I think on
the power of residual dreams.

All of this is a tower that builds itself,
so if you are down there
just come up.

A/lie/nation

a black-capped sad shadow eats
with shimmering forks and daggers

at an all light diner in a suburb of Milwaukee.
In a Wisconsin pasture, rows of cows collapse.

A black copter knifes southwest to a tinfoil cave.
A man in a newspapered camper can't make his multi-voice behave.

There are mesas on Mars--*We interrupt this program, this synapse
for breaking news on the delusional.*

the witchy ooos on the Hollywood sign
don't moan after you, but your airwave panic lives on.

Hibiscus or Bust

We take out the word trash
make other-worlds in subtexts.
We're grownups playing heart house.

Sorry I made your throat hurt, again.
Everything smells good.
You came alive in industrial sunlight.

You fell asleep by the warehouses.
I stood by with a hot drink
in the hot sun. My smile seemed illogical

but there it was. There are some flowers
you can eat whole, too sweet to stay
on the mid-morning pavement.

Wake up, vacate, take on
our pal-around antibodies
morph into tropicalia, sparkling.

Solar Temple

The ski chalet is burning
god comes again as a shaft of sun.

He calls himself the templar
calls us antichrists
stakes their new-bean hearts.

We of the rosy crosses
bonnet our new age heads in grocery bags
and fill them with bullets and old body blood.

We want to live on Sirius. We crave a fresh world.
It is winter. It is spring. The last air we breathe
recycles hot to cold through plastic holes.

There is red and red again
then the light darkens.

Did Not Hit Me Until Much Later

You are me amplified.

No, not you.

The cave you.

I am a bad old plant

Everyone is worried

I am trying to die in bed.

It is so sexist.

you have bats in your hair, too.

A Better Day Every 24 Hours

He looked for Bin Laden
in trash bins, made gun noises,
chanted *Thorazine, Thorazine,*
Load me up and Leave me for Lost.

*Me and God got big beautiful
plans; it's our business, what we do.*

A box of boxes toppled.

He stomped through pachysandra
when backdoor windows lit up a woman,
screaming in a robe with cabbage roses.

He cowered in the garden light.
When men came to pull his arms
into thin white wings, he crowed,

Take me home, angel-o's,
I have cameras in my eyes,
watch out, devil terrorists,
I got feathers, I can fly.

Orienteering

A pheromone salesman lights a brush fire
outside her dark house. It does not spread.

No one buys his flimsy science,
so he throws the vials in.

He strips off his suit and hikes.
He thinks he hears her voice
a radio through the rainy pines.

All around the deadwood sags.
He tries to make his mouth a megaphone
but his lungs fill with old mud.

I'm here, he tells the nesting birds.
I'm new, he says to the green fern spores.

The rain slant-walks beside him.
Take me inside
your poncho when we meet,

we'll climb the last moontower
to claim the tops of everything we see.

The Bomb, The Bomb, The Bomb

The shrubs stand up after the rain.

I am waiting for your headlight shapes.

I see rainbows in the shadow

of the multiplex. Home is

a cluster of sticks,

two points of light,

but it is the darkening

we look forward to,

a rumble under

the dinnertime sky.

I will not die in this mall lot.

I will live to see another gas station.

The dirty new wave

spits you street-level
your coffee cautions hot.

The lid brands you solo traveler.
You pay for a single stick of lavender

from the market man and place
it at the feet of a young junkie

forgetting the black begonias
that keep him underground.

Eight Hour Sunset

I look for you late, flying
back from a friend's funeral,
Egypt, the Congo, the Northwest.

A leaf blows in and sticks
by the baggage claim.
I'm eating candy corn alone

on a red maplewood street.
When you arrive, tell me
you remember soaked legs

in the blue ridge dew,
or walking under the obelisk,
shadows flaring toward the light.

Alt Rock Singles

I am nothing
but the welcome center,

automatic drone
following all the wrong droids,

lost baseballs,
ten grey cam-bots,

a broadcast system,
a dangerous station.

I am a small dot
on the waves,

in the well, whatever,
nevermind.

Don't Worry, We're Winning

Greetings, sacked aeronauts

welcome back to orbit

gravity is heavy here

boredom is junk mail

we're all sparkly aliens

stuck on the post box

all bottle rockets landing

dandelions on a green hill.

See You Never

Tell me that's not a camera.
Now is not the time to define dignity.

The rug does not match the coffee table.
The couch is not for standing.

Why are you talking so much?
I only wanted to let a little light in.

You've made too many clean edges.
My hands feel like cardboard.

I thought this was a spaceship
until I saw your dirty kitchen.

If you don't be quiet, we'll never
get to the high line. Fuck

drag that pillow over the horizon.
The room is a big eye staring back.

I am the alien window. Later
you can crop my face, melt it

down to protoplasm, a scent,
a smudge on the lens.

Escape Hatch

The ear is the feminine part of the head...it is consciousness offering maximum attention with a minimum of intention. We receive another through the ear. --James Hillman

I can't hear, but I'll talk about unity.
No more about convents, convention,

or anyone's ions. What is
happening to the ground?

It looks spiky.
I need an observatory,

a grey clogged ear,
a mouth that moves no voices.

I want the whole world
suspended in sludge.

I want everything to be dead
except me and me and me.

Crybabies

The god of nothing and lord of wavering got
steamrolled in the square underworld,

stepped on a live wire,
got sick on the fence.

Please pay attention.

We'll soon be
mammoth unable to turn our heads.

The No Agent

*My dad was a blind private eye
and a racist freemason, you laughed,*

*your dork-maw launching a corn chip
that barely missed my cornea.*

*I will never meet your family.
The shrimp cocktail resembled fetuses*

*or wordless apostrophes. I drowned their bodies
in red death sauce, over and over.*

*You waggled your rocks glass at my midriff.
I also Love Hemingway! I also Love Bukowski!*

*I hate being PC. You're the coolest girl ever
wanna leave? I Love whiskey, I'm a writer*

*I'm a writer, I Love whiskey.
I imagined my urethra as an airplane exit slide.*

*I have to pee, I said, praising the three beers
I shotgunned in the parking lot.
Don't get raped! Come back soon!*

*I locked the little girls' room door
and begged the quiet toilet to turn into a portal.*

DNR Dinner

You left me first so I went south
to pound dollar tallboys in party city.

I met a smirking punk and blew him
under a baby blanket. He fainted
afterward, a leather gentleman
bowing goodnight in the light
of someone else's bathroom.

I was proud to cup another's skull in my hands
without attempting to muddle myself inside it, so
when you came back with feelings in your own throat,

I learned to put cucumber in gin,
add sweet mint,
and let it float.

I leave you last by dreaming of deserts,
wandering the greenmarkets alone,
looking to buy what others are able
to love until it grows.

A beet looks like a heart,
so I eat it, dirt-root-and-all.
I call you to quip that shit turns pink,

but your silence turns into seasons.

Vomiting my new bloom quietly

into a rock garden, I leave you

to go west with the familiar sun.

Route Zero

Do not lie and play dead
eyes now, you part

time sociopath.
Takes one to no one.

We still live in the smell
of something fried,

history revisions still
caught in a maplight.

You saw the clouds come down.
You stuffed the toothpaste in my mouth.

You loved my speed, spotted
my camo, took out

the hairpin,
drove us through.

The Dream is Work

I read too many newspapers before bed.

Each of my thoughts is a code.

A skeleton drives off in a speedboat.

A deer writhes in the snow.

After the first death, there are no pancakes.

In sleep, as a rowboat, we go in a circle.

Natural Born Leaders

I believe in stadium cheers

a wall of beach umbrellas.

I'll know you by your sand face,

old jersey number, running

into the sunshine snow,

the shining sea,

victory.

Poems in this collection appear, or are forthcoming, in the following publications:

FENCE (2015): “Blue Sky Constructs”; and “Forest Theory”

Right Hand Pointing: “On Leak Day”

Keep This Bag Away From Children: “DNR Dinner”; “Courting Our Hideous Hearts”; “The No Agent”; and “Another Alien Breakfast”

Poetry in Performance: “*The Appalachian Mating Call*”

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