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sometimes I can't help myself
    i watch you
    and hold you
i have an urgent need to enter
the simplicity in which you move
    the grace of a breeze
dancing through
    an ancient forest
taking with you leaves
each filled with my admiration
    and desire for you
and one day there will be
    a union
'midst you and i
to sleep in each other’s arms
    satisfied
each other’s juices
drying on our skins
    like dew
drying on morning grasses

--Michael Mendoza
ON THE EDGE OF DAY

There are days like this, when nothing falls into proper order, when no one is there on the edge of day, when nothing clicks into place. When the rains fall, washing the sky, loosening pebbles from the earth, drowning the impurities of life, no one smiles in my mind. On the edge of day, light declines to make room for the glowing October moon, hovering so close to the road that I can almost reach out and touch it, taking a piece for myself. It's during these days that I don't know where to go, I can't find you through the haze of my mind that keeps your face from returning to my reality. I move away from the light that dances on the curves of your face, towards the rain-drenched night.

--Julie Dyson

Untitled #2

Two feet
of high
rising
driftwood
Louisville slugger
34 inch
Jack Hammer
wall breaking
American Law Abiding Citizen
of John Jones Lane
Our town, Idaho
where the potato
spuds slam dunk
the competition
to where the
sun don't shine
over the river
and ripping through
the woods
dressed
in
blood red
foreboding

--Jeffrey Dellapina
A Journey Taken In Twos

On April twelfth, I did on Earth appear,
and through my crusted eyes confirmed the moan.
Escaping - crucial air and mother's tear,
A journey taken in twos although alone.
The taste of life's first pain, the faceless shown.
I do not remember the dark of the womb
and forgot the hand finishing a home,
as much in death I will remember the tomb.

A mother sustained seventeen in fear,
for lack of childhood beauty turned to crone,
and father's feelings, are they far or near
A journey taken in twos, although alone?
Or add another lie onto a bone,
to grow a family skeleton to loom,
in dusty pages unlocked, unaware, I groan:
"As much in death I will remember the tomb."

"And from the sting of antiseptic, my dear,
beginnings shape the tunnel to ends unknown,
not differing the light." But through the seer,
A journey taken in twos, although alone.
I went away in this, not as a drone,
and satisfied not by impending doom.
I don't understand secrets my life may own,
As much in death, I will remember the tomb.
Inside the softness of sleep curled a clone,
A journey taken in twos although alone.
Is there no meaning in a vacant room?
As much in death, I will remember the tomb.

--Amie Arnold

WHAT'S EATING HER?

A vast blood vessel mountain range
Builds this topographic map of indigo
coral reef, and fretfully shuddering
Aboriginal thigh.

Striated flexor muscles act as fulcrums
Straddling the thin separation of the shore of her Mind
And the delta of her Purpose.
Silt and sediment run in and out,
Rough, grainy hills finally transmuting...

She was taught to have a name for Everything,
To gaze out from rented eyes and
Appropriate the desires of a set of Designated limbs.
The same eyes are the ones that analyze,
And have begun to distrust the surfaces,
Setting flame to agendas,
Traveling inward.

She cannot find the hands that were once
Given feeling by the pouring in of hollow Words and phrases.
The hands were never hers anyway.
They have just fallen off,
Disappearing into a formless, gleaming, growing Whole
In the middle of her twisting, beating Chest.

--Carol Wade
Gaze

After a night at the cafes, (looking through windows to a world framed in store fronts) the ache of sitting on wooden stools is still beneath me - even now, the next day. Everything, watching cars drive by, old men playing chess, trees turning greener through the middle of summer, is seen through a window ... and here I am again. Another next day. Roses grow wildly from the cabin of an abandoned houseboat beneath me, outside this window which looks onto a placid canal whose water, were it not so brown but just as still, would be a mirror and not just a mirror but a window out of which I could gaze. But here I am, sweaty hand to this frame, and down below me thorns poke unabashedly through the day. Dizzy with not enough sleep, my eyes are glazed as if (like glass) with winter frost. Nights are spent on bar stools, staring out windows and in sunlight, in another place, I am still receiving ways to accept this world from The inside looking somewhere back out.

--Alison Burke

...she's like the good sickness, the sugar sweet sticks to my lips and lungs and sleeps beside me, as i wonder - is it really that good, this life that i'm leading, leading her on, leaning on her like a crutch, like a dependent, she's relentless, odd...odd how we repeat, how she repeats a sentence in her sleep in the bed that i'm writhing on shifts from her turning, her echoing words are...are not far from what i'm saying, far from how i'm feeling, this sickness...this wishing...this definition of happiness, of sanctuary i'm feeling in this sickness as she sleeps, crumpling the sheets and this paper that i'm writing on...

--Vincent J. Calone

--alison burke
our song

depressing, channel surfing
on the radio brings back
nerve-wracking, burnt-out candles
and cold dinners and sour wine!
nice try. what is next in the
dripping aggravation of
drawn-out courtship? a new song,
except free from the air waves
breathing in our heart’s content.

--Debra L. Ortiz

carol wade
Priceless Words to a Daughter

From my blistered hands,
I gave you
What I could
as long as what you asked for
Wasn't too much.

From my proud heart
I let you run your own life
Yet I was stern
When I needed to be,
And when you hide the tears in your eyes
Because I couldn't give you allowance.

In my heart of hearts,
I hoped that by saying
"No"
To You, I've said
"Yes"
To another day to your life.

In wearied flesh
I was there
When I could be,
To clap and cheer and cry
At your shining moments,
Even though crying
Burned my weakened eyes.

And when you rushed towards me
I quickly hid my tears in
Words of ways to better yourself.

My chest aches painfully
With pride because
I
Knew that it was
I
Who pushed you this far.

With my overworked body and
Encumbered spirit
I showed you in so many ways
Yet I did not think that
You needed
To hear those words,
Those precious,
Priceless Words from
My rusted mouth.

So if you are listening to or reading this poem,
Read and listen
Very carefully and
Take to heart
These priceless words,
"I love you."

--Ly Lee

Sunday Ballin'

Sundays on canvas
are languid drips:
reddish orange.
a flaming lemon
in an iced tea sky,
elongated shadows
prance erratically
on grooved pavement
like devils in firelight,
perfectly contained
within steel mesh fences
and chalky lines.
rubber souls screech
elbows jab guts
the epidermis cries
making lips salty,
reddening eyes.
throats burn and
froth forms
at the corners
of the mouth.
the rock is thrown
around the world.
shoes scuff asphalt.
spectators spout
from metal seats
slicing the air like
margarine,
howling like the wind.
hands grip jerseys
fingers release
weathered leather
like a beautiful swan.
the buzzer squawks,
the webbed tongue
snaps
and devours
victory whole.

--Joel B. Boyce
The day I left had been the hottest yet of the season. I took the pickup and just drove around for a while, not really believing myself, not really thinking that I would go. I'd thought about leaving for a long time. It was inconvenient. I was going to start college in the fall and I only had a few more days of high school left. I went anyway.

I paused at the door and turned to face my mother who had tears brimming and said, "You coming, Ma?"

"Baby, please..."

"Your loss." And I turned and walked out. The screen door slapped the molding and has continued to echo through the years.

Now, when I was younger, my dad took me fishing. It was his favorite thing to do, and whenever we'd go he'd always be smiling for days after. Those were my happy memories. I suppose there were more of the bad memories and I won't say I have forgotten them, because I haven't. I haven't forgotten and I certainly haven't forgiven. He killed me and he killed my mother. He made us bleed and cry and whimper as the last strings of hope flowed from our hands like wisps of icy air from the freezer. He watched us die, and smiled. And then I left.

A friend passed along to me her obituary a few years back. I should have taken her with me. I should have dragged her tired and swollen and bruised body into that truck and taken her with me. But the screen door had closed and it was too late.

Last week I had stayed over in a small Louisiana town much like the one I grew up in. Now, I had taken a walk and I had come across a pond much like the one me and Dad went fishing in. And I stood there real quiet like for fear of moving. I knew if I moved, life would move and then
My mind would move and then things I hadn’t thought about in years would come running back to me like the Devil on God’s lightning rod. But of course I did move. And quietly, the veil lifted and I saw the shadow of him come alive. The rusty sailboat and the Sears fishing rod was held steady in the morning breeze by his calm and calloused presence.

They say dreamers dream and lovers love, but baby, this wasn’t no love affair. This was a war. A knock-em-down-drag-em-out fight as Mamma used to say. I didn’t run this time, but I didn’t fight either. I didn’t cry because it didn’t help and all my tears had dried up on that hot June day anyway. I wasn’t a fighter and I wasn’t a winner. I just stood there and watched.

Did you ever notice that if you take a glass of water and put one drop of milk in it, it makes the whole glass cloudy? So goes the game of good and evil. Goodness may win out, but not without being tainted first.

I heard a few days after Mamma’s death that he had drowned her in our pond. So, he had killed everything.

When I was a child, he was my god. He was my punisher and perhaps my redeemer. Maybe he still is. But Jesus walked on water. My father was no Jesus. And when he stepped off that boat, his evil contaminated my goodness.

Forgiveness is not on my lifetime agenda. When that screen door hits the frame, Momma cries and Daddy smiles, knowing he got what he came here for. My pond is useless now, as useless as that rusty row boat. I never liked fishing anyhow.

--Cynthia Vercruysse
born from the garbage and the dirt of the earth
fatherless creatures assign me a place
for i am the dishonored one

body decrepit, eyes burn with hatred
as the coroner shrieks, alive i will be
for i am the one filled with rage

creation, laughs and spits blood
my mother a madonna in her own ways
for i am her only sin towards man

a foreseen Armageddon
on any judgement day, i will choose who lives
for i am the guilt in your eyes

for i am the sweat between forbidden lovers
for i am the crack baby's failing heart
for i am the fallen blood-stained syringe
for i am the last liquor laden breath
for i am the pain flashing in the corner of your soul

i am
the memory that will haunt you the day you look to make peace with the
world
the joy you remember when you have no other
the vision you will have, lying on the stretcher next to you as you call out for help
in silence
that hand that will not take the hair from your face and close your dead eyes
the stabbing laughter that you hear on your way to hell

for i am
.................gone.

--Michael Mendoza

You are carmine, hunger-faced,
Winding through ribbons of swimming, slack
Intentions running along the roads.
Used car lot surface dances in the
Late over-greased fluorescence.
Twelve by Eighteen neon sign
Reflecting East River's shine
Casts shadows on a surface of
Solid flotsam.

You get home.
Turn down the radio, flip the switch.
They're waiting,
Smiling out through the living room
And she dances for you,
A round two-step she learned today.

And it's late.
The mirror register the flatness of your skin.
There's an image behind you,
You've seen a million times,
Brushing teeth then pacing,
Waiting silently for you.

Now you must try with all outside.
You and you will try
To crawl beneath a shade of
Green you feel, flushing your
Fluid veins.

--Carol Wade
Relic
Penciled in body---breaking thinness,
His flesh is stretched
wrought and wrenched,
A concave chest
on coagulated canvas.
He's hairbreadth and haggard,
walking in clamber
Like a sweet string
of sugar taffy
Limply suspended on
silver spools.
Once as ablaze
as Adonis,
He listlessly lies,
limply curled
in a ghostly shroud.
A sick sackcloth.
Eruptions he breathes,
bubbled at night,
a blanketed blue
based blackness--
A crown for the hurting,
blocked by Heaven.

--Amie Arnold

Graffiti wall. The wall is covered in painful sketches of your need to exist. Graffiti etchings, simply, do not define you— you, who are so sure that smoking will be by far any kind of death of you.---These lines make pictures of you, but still you seek to break the reflection of me in you...simply, you in me. These lines, lazily, hang limply like broken arms from sockets. I would stand to support you, if you knew how to land on hands and knees in front of me and say, "I need you." But you absently gaze and sway nervously in front of me, shifting your weight from foot to foot. Instead, you seem so sure in the notion that another body carries too much weight of its own. But I...I'm acutely aware that the length of one arm is the distance I should keep, unless I harm or merely awaken the thing inside of you which could not for your life confide in me. So I'm forced to square and straighten my shoulders, stand and ignore the weight in my chest. And like this wall, I'll allow you to paint over me with a distant view of dimly lit sketches and arrogant gestures on which your life will be spent.

--Alison Burke
There were no plans for His grim and bitter arrival. He made His entrance unannounced, and took His bounty in broad daylight.

With his senseless timing and relentless resolve, He stole everything precious and priceless without a sound. No second thoughts, no mistakes, and no regrets. And we were left to wonder what we had ever done to deserve such an unspeakable crime, just when we had finally recovered from His last visit.

--Jill Chmelko

Blackout
(An Excerpt)

Yea, man, its sucks being young and black. But I'm different. Ain't no stereotypes gonna hold me down. I read, I don't sell crack, and I ain't got five kids running around half of hell and Brooklyn. I work for my living, makin' shit for money, but hey, it beats having the five-O breathing down my back and some punk nigga trying to kill my black ass. I'm going to college, too. Well, so it's only night school at Brooklyn Business College, but I'm saving so I can go to a real school like NYU or Harvard. Don't fucking laugh at me, I know what I can do. I know that I can get my ass out of this shit hole if I really try...

I know it ain't easy for most brothers growing up in the 'hood. I'm lucky, I got a moms and a pops around and they don't do dope or beat me or shit like that. Tre had it hard when we was kids. He never knew his pops and his mamma done left him with his grandma when he was four, 'cause he was eating into her drug money. His grandma was too damn old to keep her eyes on him so Tre got into a lot of trouble when he was twelve. He got his ass sent upstate for a while, but it didn't do him no good.

My mom and pops always treated Tre like one of their own. Pops would lecture him on how the black man should "rise above the chains that the white man has placed upon us and overcome the confines of our color."

"Tre," Pops would say, "I know what you doing down on that street corner everyday. You is perpetuating the plight of the black man. You is almost as bad as the white man 'cause you be keeping those brothers down with the dope you sell. You, as a black brother, should be helping brothers instead of hurtin' them. I tell you boy, you could be preaching to the brothers, showing them the error of their ways like I'm doing for you now."

Tre would just nod his head and say, "Yessir, Mr. Wilson, you is right," everytime Pops would do this, and go back doin' the shit anyway. Pops would just shake his head and say, "That boy never learns. Thank Jesus I got me a boy with a head on his shoulders!"

***
I must be giving y'all the impression that I don't like my 'hood, 'cause I really do and all. It's just that I need to get my ass outta here to start my life. I don't wanna raise my kids here or nothing. It wasn't so bad when I was growing up but the shit is getting really heavy now. I can't even walk home from Gulio's without worrying about some nigga casin' my ass. I got my ass kicked a couple of times in the past year or so, but I'm damn lucky that I didn't get whacked.

My building ain't that bad. Mostly old folks and some young couples with kids live here. Once in a while someone will get ripped off or something, but no one gets hurt or killed or anything like that. Everyone takes care of how shit looks --the stoop is clean and no one leaves garbage laying around the hall or nothing like that. They may be poor but they proud, like me.

Gulio's sits at the end of the block. He's real good to me and the rest of the 'hood, not raising prices like those Korean motherfuckers at the other end of the block. Y'all know what I'm talking about --they be following your ass around the store making sure that you don't lift nothing. Then the motherfuckers sat they colored when they want to get on your good side though. Shit makes me sick.

Gulio's is a small grocery store and newsstand where I work. It ain't nothing too big, but you can usually find what you are looking for. My job ain't that hard. I have to keep stockin' the shelves, cleaning up the place, taking care of customers, and sweeping outside the store. We talk a lot about life and shit. He tells me what it's like growing up Italian, and I tell him how it feels to be a nigga. We's different, but we got a lot in common. Know what I mean? Gulio is one smart dude. He and I read the papers early 'fore it gets busy and talk about what's going on in this fucked up world. Like this election: Gulio wants the brother to win just like I do. He says that that other motherfucker is a Nazi or something. This guy wants to get rid of welfare and social security and public assistance. You know how many people around her need that shit just to live? Damn, he must be a fool to think his ass is gonna get elected. Shit, don't he know that we ain't a minority no more?

--Erin Dougherty

The Great Lake Review

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