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JOEL GREGORY

erica lewis

BRITTANY BILLMEYER-FINN

GRACIE LEAVITT

GABE KRUIS

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MADISON DAVIS



SHOULD HAVE STAYED IN BED

You're a habit I can't let go. The streets are silent. Somewhere a planet tilts from its otherwise inexorable orbit. My lone, fluorescent glow. Maybe I should have stayed in my bed. I can still smell you between the sheets. I suppose this is like shooting arrows into a small sky. Every reflection, every corner, anything moving. Any noise is conspicuous. And I listen.

5 29 15

erica lewis

from mary wants to be a superwoman

through love we'd be

you can't make love to a saint
don't let that be us
to understand this body
for its neon
as we grew up
in our tradition
and it was dark
we learned our lessons
in the wilderness
mourning lived in real time
so i put diamonds
in my poems
separating threads
the shedding of things
feels amazing
every part of me
in my darkness
i remember
mama's words
reoccur to me

*isn't she lovely

if it's magic*

most of us are sad
and make believe with love
it would all be
so lifelong
i read it somewhere
that they would lay still
and we'd put the blankets
over our heads
and the fire would go out at night
back in the day situations
and not wanting to be alive
mud was thought
to possess a spirit of its own
i wasn't big as a minute
to go round with circumstance
i want to sleep with you
in the desert tonight
burning god a little
telling the dancer
from the dance
i had a mother who could pray
this world is broken
this country is built on lies
and you know nothing of dragons

* if it's magic

and i am you*
for julian talamantez brolaski

do you live in a color house
i've seen that movie, too
we wanted straight hair
they always take hold of our young
to knock the curl out
the fruits on the tree
fruit juice running down
the front of your body
laughing fit to burst
language like blood
a long time ago
turned on a light
about us
we thought we could change this world
the course of blood in your veins
our water-water spirit
mama, i don't know what i'm doing
it seemed like a holy place
we would sing right out loud
the things we could not say
pray with me over the phone
close your eyes
and swallow the sun

*as

there might be another star*

where are all the black swans
when the rapture comes
i will reflect the moon
i will write songs for you
we are what we allow
my skin began to turn red
all the black churches being lit on fire right now
i don't want to be black tonight
being as an ocean
trying to say your own name
i am thinking about the days we led ourselves astray
wings are the hardest part
feathers feathers feathers
the struggle to speak of this logically
ya'll, i've been such a fool
i've been looking at all the lights

*another star

all i do*

americana images
honey and moss
what i put up with, and what i don't
i'm going to stop believing
if i hear one more lie
call it ours
crazy people need to be together
soon you'll dance around the fire
i went down to the garden
to vomit up some demons
the metal blood
my own anxiety
all those faces, all those eyes, all those extra teeth
shit's changing all the time
some things take time
they take time
the humans will give no love
we're not out of the woods yet
independence day is tomorrow
i only hope we can free ourselves

* all i do

took me riding in your rocket, gave me a star*

things as i read them
my uncle has applied for conceal and carry
i'm not so sure what i'll leave behind
calls himself a survivalist
this feeling of being watched
spiraled upward, a silent signal of rising air
putting my faith in a lot of irrational places
1916 census said "blackman"
now we know about grandma's people
put me right where i belong
said i had a mother who could sing
mother born from death
a tangible link
the feathers on a raven's wing
washed in the wilderness
go on
reach into the dark
got the secret password to the other place

* rocket love

tonight there will be a party*

i want my mother to be happy
a moment in which the past is asking something of the present
connections are fragile things
to force people to notice their own lives
i envy people their clear cut allegiances
birds in the snow
wandering on the road in winter
terrible things happened
people dehumanized other people
and they stole from them
and so from now on you speak the language of your future
to "not let the ancestors down"
to beg for comfort
to get back to my life in cali
watch a flock of birds and you get a glimpse of where you're from
nothing else matters right now

*master blaster (jammin')



SHINING GOLD WITH DESIRE

What's left to say? We know we have the physical attraction. We know we have the emotional connection. That's why we need to be together. So there goes that . . . now I'm desolate. Maybe I'll never see you again. Is it weird that all I can think about is fucking you? I'm completely aware of how pathetic this is. I want to hold your hand walking. I want people to see us from the shadows, eyes shining gold with desire. And know how good we are together.

6 25 15

BRITTANY BILLMEYER-FINN

from THE SHOPGIRL HANDBOOK

*

before the consignment store, the shopgirl worked at a shoe store, an antique store, 2 vintage stores & a handmade accessories store.

*

it is as if i have just awoken from a long sleep. musty & cold. i awake to warmth. a beautiful wife sleeping next to me. a small dog at my feet. clutching a flower i feel i cannot release it. it has journeyed out of the dream. i remember the field. in the field was a feast. & everyone was there. i saw you there. & the dead sat around the table & toasted to the fire & told the stories of their beast. some prayed. & some had sex. & some buried themselves in the dirt & some cried out & some lit a fire & some poured out the water.

write down your intention.

then burn it or bury it.

*

the rapist was turned into a stag & his hounds killed him.

*

i dig my fingers into the earth. my hands sift to find the small black velvet bag that holds the bits of paper among the ash. i dump the contents into my hand. the ash falling into the crevice of my lifeline. i read my palm.

*

this your doing,
now you must consider the future
shake the sleep from those eyes that strike terror
perhaps you have news of the night

*

a chorus

the women are being killed.

*

I have come to bring you this message

if you have value

as witness as ally as the privileged party

*

my silence is privilege

*

blood undertow

*

Z & the shopgirl meet on a blind date. they fall in love.

Z is one of three daughters. she is a symbol of resistance rising up alone or the tragic heroine, or the Disney princess, or the leader of the war. too good for this world. a cancer who hashes it out.

*

the shopgirl marries Z in a small bookstore in Oakland. the two wear white daisy crowns. C officiates. the shopgirl keeps reaching out & touching C's shoulder.

*

Z is the oracle. she says to the shopgirl, "what do you know of the beast?"

Z tells the story of being the eldest, dropping out, moving to San Francisco, the bagel cart, the all boys school, Denton, the break up.

Z looks to her tarot deck, pulling The World. the image resembles her. she pulls from her mouth an endless purple cloth. a symbol for the beast within. she considers its defeat holding her hand to her heart & her other hand to her diaphragm in each deep breath she foresees.

the shopgirl kisses the oracle & invites her along to meet the others. they are meeting at the baseball diamond at Mosswood Park. they are bringing their magic & their weapons. their power, their blood ritual & their trauma. their love & their poems. their rage & their karaoke machine. the bird in their chest. they will converge from different directions upon the diamond towards a center. kicking up the wheat colored dust blinding themselves a bit they close their eyes, extend their arms forward & point their fingers towards the center. they keep walking allowing intuition to be their guide. as soon as they are sure their fingertips are about to touch. they open their eyes & look at their hands.

*

the shopgirl meets C on their lunch break at the college. they walk down College Ave. together contemplating where to eat. the two friends talk about their day, debt, love. they laugh at their inside jokes.

C was the shopgirl's first friend in Oakland.

C is the roots. the grounding force. they set boundaries. they are tender. the star. a granter of wishes.

C tells the shopgirl of the beast.

"the first beast comes from out of the sea. the second beast comes from out of the earth. & dies in the lake of fire. the image comes alive & so is able to speak. & the beast is marked with the number for man."

*

*evil which hath come to me,
turn back from thy course,
by the Power of water & law of three
go back to thy source.*

*

M & the shopgirl met at grad school.
M & the shopgirl met at the dead.

M & the shopgirl are both supervisors at the consignment store.

M is the messenger. she takes aim. she is protector of living things.
separated from her brother she seeks after him through the elements. M
reaches into the flame trying to pull those she loves out. she often dips
herself in water to sooth the pain of the burns from reaching through to the
other side.

M tells the shopgirl of the beast.

M says, "in its first & last life it followed behind. a scorpion's nature. a
scorpion image. the beast is in the water. in the Piscean depths. & the beast
was each star in the sky. the scorpion bit & the result was death. the blood
fell out. the trauma rested on the skin."

M & the shopgirl carpool to work. when they arrive to work they enter the
shop through the back door. they count the money. they check the emails.
they listen to the voicemails, they Windex the jewelry cases & straighten the
racks. they make a to do list. they write reports, they email a policy change,
they merchandise the accessories, they make the schedule & they greet the
customers.

after work the shopgirl & M discuss the work day, the predictable nature of
the job, their mutual resentments, Maggie Nelson, friendship tattoos,
disaster & Maya Deren.

*

*

SUPERVISOR JOB RESPONSIBILITIES:

check emails & voicemails/prioritize daily tasks/delegate daily tasks/leadership in customer service, sales & merchandising/data entry/monitor store inventory/manage consigner accounts/manage local artist accounts/implement staff policies/update supply list/staff schedule/staff newsletter/monthly sales report/manage customer concerns/employee liaison/facilitate exchanges & discounts/organize store events.

*

the chorus enters

*

the lovers are guided through the street tied together

*

how a gesture can open up & destroy
they raise one hand while the femme goddess before them raises two
these are not repeated gestures. they happen & remain

*

what are the essentializing forces in this work? who has been erased?

*

the return of witch hunting
the limits of a women's history
leaping over the fire
the taste of wax apples
the nothingness of it

*

*create a healing mirror. cleanse it
with salt & water. nothing else.
purify it with your mind. bless the
pen that you draw with. draw a
pentagram on the mirror. make it
as perfect as you can. then hold
the mirror in your hands.*

*

my body is at the bottom of this crevice. the hands of the field left me here. i must get up & climb out to find the flowing water. but this dampness. the earth dusting my skin comforts me. i know my various labors.

*

the shopgirl might be grim or mighty or dreadful or awesome.

*

& the real becomes absent as she sinks further into the earth as the sky drifts.

*

the shopgirl is awful. the shopgirl is thoughtful. the shopgirl laughs
uncontrollably. the shopgirl cries alone & quietly.

*

in my memory the pain elsewhere on the skin
the invisibility of trauma comes through
parting fingers spreading over an eye to look
the visibility of privilege emboldens in the poem
in the work
at the therapist's office
in the skin

*

reflecting in the deep waters the muck at the bottom where i sleep like a
perpetual teenager. i hardly want to wake.

*

& who is the martyr in armor?

Joan of Arc is the patron saint of France, of women soldiers, of rape victims of
the incarcerated.

the fire swallows her. a witch. imprisoned & raped.

*

*the intermediary by which the word goes forth from your lips
allow me to be a witness
sweet saint Joan,
for those who invoke you,
filled with love for those who suffer,
heavily laden with the weight of my troubles,
i kneel at your feet & humbly beg you,
to take my present need,
under your special protection.*

*

i say to her, i didn't call it rape then but i do now.

*

my Nan was often in prayer. she looked at rest. she could rest anywhere
really. she believed god told her things. she believed they were very close.

god tells Nan that her middle child will die young. & he does.

everyone is suspended there surrounding the uncle, dead.
i touch his face. he is the first lost.

*

when Nan's Alzheimer's disease sets in Papa is sick but my Nan cannot remember & so is often angry at him for not taking her to mass. so, every Sunday my Papa reminds her he is dying.

*

i like listening to the night. i like the sound of the blinds clanking in the breeze coming through the screen of the open window in my bedroom. i like the way Patsy sleeps under my butt & Z is hot against my chest. i like the absurdity & sincerity of the dream. these symbols & characters. inner images. something coming into appearance. flower, gauzy skin, violence, the secret rooms in the secret house painted into the sky. the way the air helps you drift just above the trees where the dead can come to visit you.



FALLING TO PIECES

You looked beautiful and sad. You caught me masturbating and we locked eyes. The connection we shared was otherworldly. Tears are falling even as I type this. I cherish how special you are and how rare this is. I feel like I'm falling to pieces. Falling and re-falling into your atmosphere. Everything in its right place. But its ok if you aren't feeling the same.

6 27 15



THE HOPE I CLING TO

your voice dripping in my ears. so many emotions around you and burning desires for you. How the weight of your body upon mine would make me feel so safe, either reclined at a tree or on a picnic table. A glimpse of the shadows on your back, spitting on the hope I cling to.

7 03 15

GRACIE LEAVITT

GARTAN GRAYLING

Midnight advantage: blunder beneath
cloacal glass because they fell
and trees, we start a practiced sex

with put your breath inside my
car, those guttate tendrils, rime exclusive
"for the red-bee hums" needles

fragrant vegetable's sturdy head,
day plover-hued like flaw secures
experience, Nick really scratched

what Rachel knew, 1951, grayling
are bed-guided, pressed...
through each sea copy, wave, not caring

to be original, we love the truth back
in fragment, slipping-down sun
unpasteurized, fail valium kiss of its

resource innocent, which perfectly eludes
our regular elements—corner pail
captures the recycling, fresh but ancient.

WHEATFIELD, CONFRONTATION*

Clods entice an intervening
behavior—volley, scrape, fragile
tar—Anna in overalls tastes
nectar in atolls, flutes hardy
in zones hyssop search-pink
where cello beds curdle fay
bees slumber sewn midrib like
smallage pearls of xylem
cross-sectioned (wisdom) show
a drawing up and sky complete
to the exclusion of collander's
icy serein, Christian's achey
trick, how rosy indestructible
guilt till neglect, the rate
of lace, slip-dark, thanks
your wily inner proteins
abundant rely the moguls who
scrutinize through trample
salad's glassy filligree against
each Ditch Witch, an encounter
with which is uncovering,
Eurydyce, trauma old as
hills, stars' impassive smother.

SWAY WITH THE TACTICAL, COXSWAIN

Swoon in our money is
a heat, honey, how loose
the fog over survival

stars smooth, we tried
not to be tired, it
did not work out, mackerel

sky, factual frill, rosy he filed
I am an extension of
how this happens in

the fast boat division: red
clay wind, iliac wine
your lilacs hoist

with insecure rush, blood-
bright and municipal
liquid shrinks definitional

mouth concupiscent,
umbilical to a florid
pall, am floored by this

fish bladder of friends,
skeptical, their little kicks
and rummage punctuate

rime, fragrant through
lettuce lace, I have been
part of what it looks like when

mullein more than fire is
common, radiant the
features of our sizable child.

ARRAY, FLORETS! JOINT AND SEVERAL

Model ligule, petulant, moving
out this world on proper parts
anonsense but of the rest

(innocence) an exchange
nightfrail's rampant violets
pierce and seams commute

misfixingly future crumble we
scheme enough intel over
dailiness, success, your dispatch is

caducous, floats away, aortic
spring, which irrigates
a handled archive: bean

stitch, moss stitch, complex frill
and open weave, a wave-like
grin at architecture otherwise

too secure, a'flare, one-tongued,
too supreme, wherefore without
critical cuticle, fringe to shunt

rain therefore rot "For what
protections has she traded"
to get us silking by late July

"her wildness and the lives
of others?" Rebel ligule, sprung
and green, don't confuse one

tongue for a ton entwined, love
a'beam, more hardy for
its unkempt varietal.

LEFT HEART SYNDROME

Rhythms of bright plants dress my
room, diurnal, "a wild
patience," our deft dross equals

dramatic fermentation,
maquillage, brutal texture, vernacular
"where the fabric that's thin," as J

said, a similar favor swabs
such dismal jaw with her letter's
finish, pencil-soft, tapered in

terms of mood, W's multistable
queerness blends your
answer, eager, after

hearts what breaks (disaster)
the heart already knows, it is
decentered within the breast

wet by daedal surfactant
lithe social sun, girlish
this smoke bush, vascular.



SO IRRESISTIBLE

You were getting off and you smiled at me. You melted me down the stairs. Purely magnetic and so irresistible. Not sure if you were boy/girl or what. I kept praying that Jesus would turn you into water. I honestly couldn't get enough. Every time I looked away you entered my blood. Bodies dancing as galaxies collide.

7 07 15



I FEEL EVERYTHING

You melt right into my skin. Such nice torment. Sorcery leaks from the blackest part of your pupils. My shyness is kicking. I see your fulcrums and your voltas. I feel everything. I don't want this to ever wear off. I can see red sticks of dynamite and rusted shovels in your six hundred calloused hands. Embezzlement, security breaches, online scamming, gang stalking, identity trafficking, marital drama, estranged siblings, apartment hopping, hiding from the sheriff. Did you cast a spell on me? Acceptance.

7 16 15

GABE KRUIS

Gold LEAF

in inviolate
violet hours
w/ the sun
rising or coming
down like wine
w/ diamonds
in the glass
lavender
in that way
& benthic
almost
at the center
when the work
day has ended
or is yet to begin
& I can't sleep
so I think of
sleep listening to
the canned
muezzin from the
mosque on fulton
the gulls outside
my window
flossing the thermals
in recursive arcs
& waiting for the answer
an hour later
of the MIDI carillon
tolling *this world*
is not my home
little aubades
I have listened to
w/ C— violet
in inviolate hours
the air the same
bright tense
manic present
perfect in purpureal
sheets
w/ nerves blended beyond
the boundary
of the body
watching her descend
into the subway
gemini orbital
in mercurial boots
on the darkside
of the avenue
a workaday orphic Brel
not exactly discreet

from the wind
the gulls' shadowy
arcs eclipsed
by deeper shadows
how did the dancers
who survived her
describe their love
having moved
so long in ways she'd moved
they knew themselves
as part of her
hic jacet Pina in tics
in gestures
as if translating
through dance
one sentence
from Rimbaud
in perpetuum
inviolable / violet
in hours interred
in nerve & twitch
having come up
as the sun went
down w/ B— & E—
what we hoped for
even when sober
was a kind of code
cracking utterance
or syntagm's
abruption like /
is another
too w/ candles
lit & all around
drinking tea
having listened
to Palestrina
or Josquin's
Mille Regretz
melismatic & erasing
spit loud
in the choral throat
I think we came close
w/ the light sustained
like a final note
before resolve
ex cathedra
cold & filled
w/ recursive gulls
gliding the contra
alto lacing

the baritone
up & weaving
through the kyrie
ascending
via portapro
the brooklyn bridge
w/ the skyline
ablur like a gob
of tv snow
stars twinkling
in the aspic
then it's all
sanskrit to me
inviolate
in violet hours
sitting amid chandeliers
of exploded
swarovski motif
in rainbows
cast on gilded rafters
gold leaf
w/ nosebleed
tickets to the MET
me & N—
occupying opera seats
pink pinstripes
smoldering
like contrails
in the low velvet dark
as we watched far below
a fattened actor
arpeggiate the early life
of Gandhi
finding champagne cages
in my pockets
lost in the Koch & Glass
fungible bel canto
while downtown
the pigs tuned up
their sirens
& headed for the Park
let it be known
we were dreaming
when the cuffs went on
of the spandrel
magenta in the interstice
of lights
flashing *red*
blue *red* blue
red blue

caring very little
for plot but texture
we wanted more from art
& its objects
than displays of wealth
& were reduced
ourselves
through loathing
to mere objects
amid objects
w/o a center
under the duress
of impossible
love always loving
what is yet to come or
has since
disappeared

as B— put it
in the Holiday Inn Express
in Cincinnati
the night before we met D—
for drinks at the Comet
ironically
but w/ total sincerity
Arbitrary demarcation
dude like how D—
eyes lifted to the ceiling
sometimes
sometimes
w/ an explanatory
gesture of the hand
lilt or murmur
spoke of music
& his friend G— as if
each were throughout
our lives the way nerves
are throughout
the body: inviolate
in violet hours
their names private
memories illicit
luxuries
always on the tip
of my tongue
w/ the sun
halved

like a lilac peach
shifting the shadows
tenebris in lux to lux
in tenebris
alone
on the bridge
w/ the cupids crushed
& the lenses
cracked but love
or w/e we had
on hand
like vaseline
sealing the fissures

Mille Regretz

shuffle of foam
over the rocks
on the bank
shuffle of foam
over the ears
& the background
fades out
while the music
box on the water
front canters lacquer
horses up
& down
through the milk
of marigold
sodium lamp
light



YOU CAN'T SCARE ME AWAY

Your soul converted to an energy source. You pulled a sword from the magicians mouth. You can't scare me away. What we shared inside your body was better than my children. The mind games you play only solidify my heart's position. Nothing would ever make me leave you. Nothing scary, nothing ugly. In moments, my soul departs to meet you in a sacred place. I still don't have words to describe it. I see nothing bad in you. I feel more love for you each day. Exciting and tender.

8 | 15



SPELLBOUND

You are a dark wave up a long stairway. You probably get comments like that a lot. It makes me think of the Depression Era, and how we're living in a similar time now. I'm usually asleep when you walk past me in the evenings. I am feeling, well, I think "spellbound" is the word for it. Easy, careful, necessary. A shimmer in the waking world on fire.

8 15 15

SARA NICHOLSON

A VIEW OVER A WALL TO THE SEA *for Jane*

It's the least wonderful time of the year.
The light's become synonymous

With an old refrain I've now forgotten.
Its lyrics make a rune of the sun.

Faced with nature's prospects, I know
That I am evil. What I don't know

Will kill you, You, because the personal's
Subject to everything and I don't know

Everything. I am evil. I don't know
Why lilacs tend to enjamb the senses

Or the wind, why it mixes the stillness
Of rhythm with the quietude of form.

The fact that music's backstory's
Composed of wire and twine, I think,

Has got to be a lie, since we hoard
Our etymologies for the sake

Of music, dragging the intellect back
Into it, crossing out the "th" in "thought."

I have one pink coat but zero litanies
And too much knowledge of the sky.

I think that silence has velocity
And mankind, certain systems meant

For women to fuck with. I'm trying to
Explain to you the conditions under which

Art is produced by the human female
And to kill you, You, I mean, to make

At sunrise, a pietà of I and You.
This must be what it feels like to dispense

With the personal, to walk with you and take
A last look over the circumscribed waves

Before they disappear completely. To kill
Someone and thereby prove to them

The authority of my experience

And to find a cure for April only by

Forfeiting your breath for light. This is the end
Of nostalgia, a signal that we'll be

Switching from the minor key to the major
And with a makeshift song acquiring

Whatever knowledge we've forgotten.
And if I mute the strings, I mute them

For you alone, since I'm supposed to be
Waking you up so that you'll remember

To look at the water beyond you. Since
You asked me to kill you in a poem

I killed you, but because of how darkness
Hits the sea tonight, I'm resurrecting you.

WE ARE SEVEN

If morning be the color of peaches
Let the clouds be seafoam.
There are oboes in the valley
Making music for no one.
Night rubs its hand
Over the butt of the earth.
I think I would make a good father
To the infant Wordsworth
Who at a young age
Was orphaned and most likely
Desired the father
He would sublimate nature to find,
The father only landscapes
And cottages
And windswept orchards
Could to him be.
After beating him
For no particular reason
I'd tell him stories
Of the red and white onions
The provincials
Used to grow in this valley,
The snapdragon
Whose presence calls forth
A sort-of loathing
Of the earth and sky.
We are seven—me, me, me, me,
Me, me, and Wordsworth.
His vision of childhood
Informed by my parenting.
His sister destroyed
By spinsterhood and gallstones.
Inversion
Of the sort I used above
("Could to him be")
Was a much-loved contrivance
Of the minor poets
And along with odes
And expletives my favorite
Of their ways
To get their readers to see music
As the condition
Of speech. The rose
They'd choose as always
As some trademark
Of the lyric. They'd romanticize
The weather, sure, but also
Midsummer evening, its beauties.
Humankind its stupid
Laws and works of art.

A wax seal
Over the eye of the reader
Who I like to imagine
Standing at the foot of the stairs
Of the poem,
Leaning over the mantelpiece
That surrounds the fire
Of the poem. The metaphors
That do nothing for us
But renegotiate the wind.
I began the day
By overthinking the relation
Of seagulls to the morning sky.
Birds eating peaches
Or seafoam. Birds eating colors
In a nautical landscape,
The kind that we can't seem
To stop ourselves
From writing over and over
And over again.
I'm telling you this, reader,
Because I like you
And want to help you.
Waves, they blossom.
The ocean...lurks.

O'ER

When the ancients write of the creation
Of the world, I am one of them.
I am one of them, but wish they'd all
Stop lecturing me about stars.

It seems a waste of time, our need to sing
The cadences in dissonance
And to pinpoint melody's origins
By memorizing patterns in

The sky. I've peaked, so I'm awaiting
My decline into another
Artform, screenwriting being the only
Modern way to hymn the stars.

It's the part in my film where the camera
Pans away from the backdrop
To focus on the protagonist's eyes.
I'm no cinematographer

Though I observe the importance of light
In establishing an image
Of women congregating in summer's
Rather cinematic darkness

And in the translation of my own dreams
Into made-for-TV movies...
But to return to my character's eyes,
I suppose that they might be black

Or green or gold, and that, since seventy-
Five percent of Hollywood roles
Are for men, my character's not likely
To be a woman and therefore

Couldn't join the others who're assembling
Together in July at dusk.
Most writing's a kind of aerial shot
Over the wilderness, a chance

To take associative leaps into
A nonexistent willow-bank
For the sake of language, an elegy
For the extinction of the world.

Just look at how exhausted we get when
We put the moon in counterpoint,
How much patience it takes to fit the sky
Into chronicles and folksongs

And to raise a fist at night in order
To disambiguate the sun.
To measure loneliness as a fraction
Of what's visible, we'll voice

Aloud our arias for the workweek
In order to forget our jobs.
I am one of them, obsessed with mourning
The transformation of labor

Into empire, and with the atmospheres
Of certain films, how they strike me
As either sentimental or too cold
To in their hearts critique the snow.

Collating the leaves of a book, my hand's
A kind of lover, the kind who
Exchanges her faith in pagination
For snowfall at the end of spring.

I meant to tell you that the phrase "I love"
Must have an object, but not just
Any object. I think that Baudelaire
Was wrong when he called drunkenness

"L'unique question"—isn't the only
Question to be sober and full
Of love, a love for what's destroying us
As we leave our houses and walk

Out into the world? I'm a filmmaker
Only if I call myself one.
I am one of them who sets on fire
The images we think we know.

The rest is guesswork, a description
Of the ocean in motherfucking
Blank verse, a vision of the carnations
That blue-breasted doves might eat.

I am exhausted by much of what grows
Out of the earth, so instead of
Scanning the landscape for music, I scan
Words, translating what's real into

An image of the aforementioned doves
And with sound, illuminating
The place in a gardener's body where
Lymph nodes meet anemones

And mums. I prefer the yellows and reds
When making valentines for trees.
And though I shouldn't seek closure in
The foliage's downfall, I'll

Do it anyway. Besides, I'll always
Fall back on the grammatical
Rather than the pictographic methods
Available to me since I'm

Not really a filmmaker, but a girl
Who speaks too highly of the stars
And of their music, who reiterates
The selfsame words she always has.



CAN'T FIGHT THIS FEELING

You were an American soldier and I was being tortured for the king. When you finally saw me you were horrified. Urine flowing down my legs as beatings were administered for my intellectual failings. This is my first and last Craigslist post. My life has been such a whirlwind. Fifty thousand acres of nature, flooded by voices of the dead. I just can't fight this feeling any longer. I could love you in the most tender ways, with my body, tongue, and heart. Even if I have to crawl across the floor. Alone and desperate; unseen, untouched, unloved.

10 4 15

MADISON DAVIS

THE LAVENDER DARK

from inside this kind quiet
the water takes us back to the river mouth,
but you can't see it from there.

when my brother was a child, he clung to me.
this is not a beginning – just wild worship
but the waterline is rising,
already at your neck.

the tunnels underground
meet at what we hope to protect.
i come into being in his overturned car,
in a simple and quick trouble.
when my brother was a child, he clung to me
and i was afraid for him.

in the cold on that porch
you had only one winter left.
i close my eyes around the edges,
and wake in the mess –
deep in the tunnels the evangelical walls
crowd out the tides. all the small ways of knowing
we cannot even understand our spring.

i wake knowing it is possible to be born running
to the edge drawn by instinct and promise,
because i have seen it. when you asked me
to go with you, i should have but i was lacking
and now i have lacking where feeding the seagulls
from the ferry deck should be –
the distance is between rainwater and fire.

when my brother was a child, he clung to me
and i taught him. calling that i am afraid for him.
i am waiting on the ferry deck in the gray,
in the dampness. waiting afraid in the kind of light
used by the moon to redeem but i am alone here.
as the light. as the light. as the light does not know
the power of the water.
or maybe, it is the reverse. but i have never known
a perfect circle to tell me anything else.

i find that among this desert certainty
plants are growing, although the time it takes them
is infinite and unconsolated. it is difficult
to find fissures in the certainty
while plants are growing –

dear brother, you are a fissure.
you on the porch in your last winter
wanting to stay out into the night.

i don't know how to make a home amongst the wild and
tedium of grief. the memorial stomach.

if i open my window it will pull me out into the night,
meaning apart but so much smaller. Judith Butler says, *we
are undone by each other.* at this window i identify
passionately as a body in mourning. a consequence. a
product. i hear CA Conrad say, *reincarnation is just
struggling all over again.* we are too far apart to be worried
about falling over and over for the same condition, but
suddenly it strikes me as odd that reincarnation has ever
been comforting to anyone.

i remember you burning it all down, weighted frantically
against where we came from. i smothered flames where i
could, and insisted on our stone stomachs balanced
against
the dirt. a product. a failure. an exhaustion.

my grandmother reads my poem, calls me and says, *i like
the way you brought Sol's thing into it.* she says, *i don't want
to say death* but she does. i wonder, what is your thing? are
we sure we are constant? are we constant, Solomon?

the building around this window is coming down, the
sound dwindles and knowing there is nothing left to see, i
open the window that will pull me out into the night –
are you struggling all over again without me?

Butler continues, *and if we're not, we're missing something.*
the gentle exhaustion of being awake and desperate to
miss something, anything. the memorial stomach. do you
know i am waiting in the lavender dark? in a lavender
evening of some way back, a gesture of reckless energy,
and devoted winter.

the tide is coming in. i can feel it pulling at my feet. have
you seen it? this spinning we are in? you said once that
you would have done anything.

you say it trying to shock me, trying to tell me it was
shocking. i regret not giving you that, not being shocked
for you. Judith Butler gives me a name, *a dimension of
political life that has to do with our exposure to violence and
our complicity in it, with our vulnerability to loss and the task of
mourning that follows.*

it was simple to live in the fog together, but when separated the whole bank turned on us, clouded us, and with the earth behind us i'm not sure where i've exited. a body in mourning, meaning: i don't go to the doctor anymore, i'm not willing to do the work on the ground.

when you called me from rehab, i had forgotten my phone.
go under water to find them, it says, we're here to show you off the beach. so many ways to regret.

Butler interjects, *and if we have lost, then it follows that we have had.* as though the negative proves it. and yet it proves nothing of your pulling me into the water. it illustrates no measurable depth because the inverse is not calculable or perhaps, this is not the equation i need.

and yet, i am on this beach learning to swim once again in the flat shadow of what is left –

and you have become all beings with eyes.

lay it out delicately the length of the cliff.
she says, *if there is an earthquake at least we'll go quickly.*
i think it is a very long way down.

why is it so lonely to look off a ledge
and see the tops of homes and none of them on fire?
in the fog there is no home, no home but take-over.
every beast below the bay finds herself in circles.

lately, i have folded you small so that i can walk
and speak as though in control of my body,
but despite the distraction of the cliff
i find a persistent gape that swells like hunger
and leaves me without rest. without rest at the center.

what did you say that time i wasn't listening?
i was distracted by the whirling, by so many homes
not on fire and now i can't ask. was it funny?
the hills are dry, the trees are dry, and you are missing.
roll yourself dizzy on these hills and where has it gone?

i can see now that i have always watched us from this cliff.
i have always been here without you trying to remember
what you said that time i wasn't listening.

i can see us in heavy traffic, your arm reaching
through the window to pull fennel flowers
from the side of the road. i can see us
but i am behind such thick glass and all this salt water.
i can't help but understand, it's all happening at once.
i don't want to know this. i don't want to tell you
that you are still drowning and i am still watching.

dear brother, wouldn't it be better if we could plant
ourselves in the wild and grow into death
at some comfortable rate that reflects to us the infinite
we can live in and dispenses with our need to touch it.
i would grow there with you and we would make a grove
of ourselves, escaping the tedium and finite
for the sake of the instant. we would be constant then.
we would be constant, Solomon.
i wonder now, if we make ourselves very small,
very quiet, will we be able to disguise our distance
and huddle again under the damp wood of our home,
and make our home catch fire?

i'll carve the prophecy myself: if we are separate beings
that can be scattered, we will cross paths in the darkness.

a simple exchange of survivals between two beings
with breath. invisible except for the cliff edge.
this is the dream to be explained: i can see you
in the distance as a cheering crowd takes you to sea.
takes you back. they are adoring and the earthquake
is coming any day now. it's in the stillness. it's in the seed.
i can feel the take-over abounding.

there are birds in the dream because it is essential
to the parameters that someone gets out,
and even while i know they are here to balance
the cheering crowds, i find them peaceful –
a necessary flight. a curve in the motion of straight ahead.

this is the dream i am having trouble explaining:
that you are there at a distance on the water,
and if only i could understand the composition of distance,
i would be able to get close enough to make out
what you're saying, what you mean to say,
what you said that time i wasn't listening.

it is accumulative you know, it is the lavender dark.
it is calling the bridge. it is calling the birds.
it is calling that there is a distance to be conquered.

but i know now what i had not meant to learn:
that we will always drown before we get to the beach,
that the earthquake is more real than we had hoped,
and it is a very long way down.



I WAS READY

Your head hit the door. Your hair was damp with sweat. Your chest began to heave, then you melted. Were you high or just tired?

It doesn't matter. I know you were only there to hurt me, and you did. You probably think I've been with others, but I haven't. You made me see how unimportant I am to everyone around me. You destroyed my nostalgic innocence. I'm such a loser.

But I just can't help from dreaming about you. Because we were one together; you and me. And I instantly felt what I was hoping to feel: I was ready to die.

10 30 15

From *Connection* by Joel Gregory. All language sourced from the Missed Connections section of Craigslist within the San Francisco Bay Area. Each poem is composed of the ads posted on their respective dates in 2015, and posted back to the site the following day.



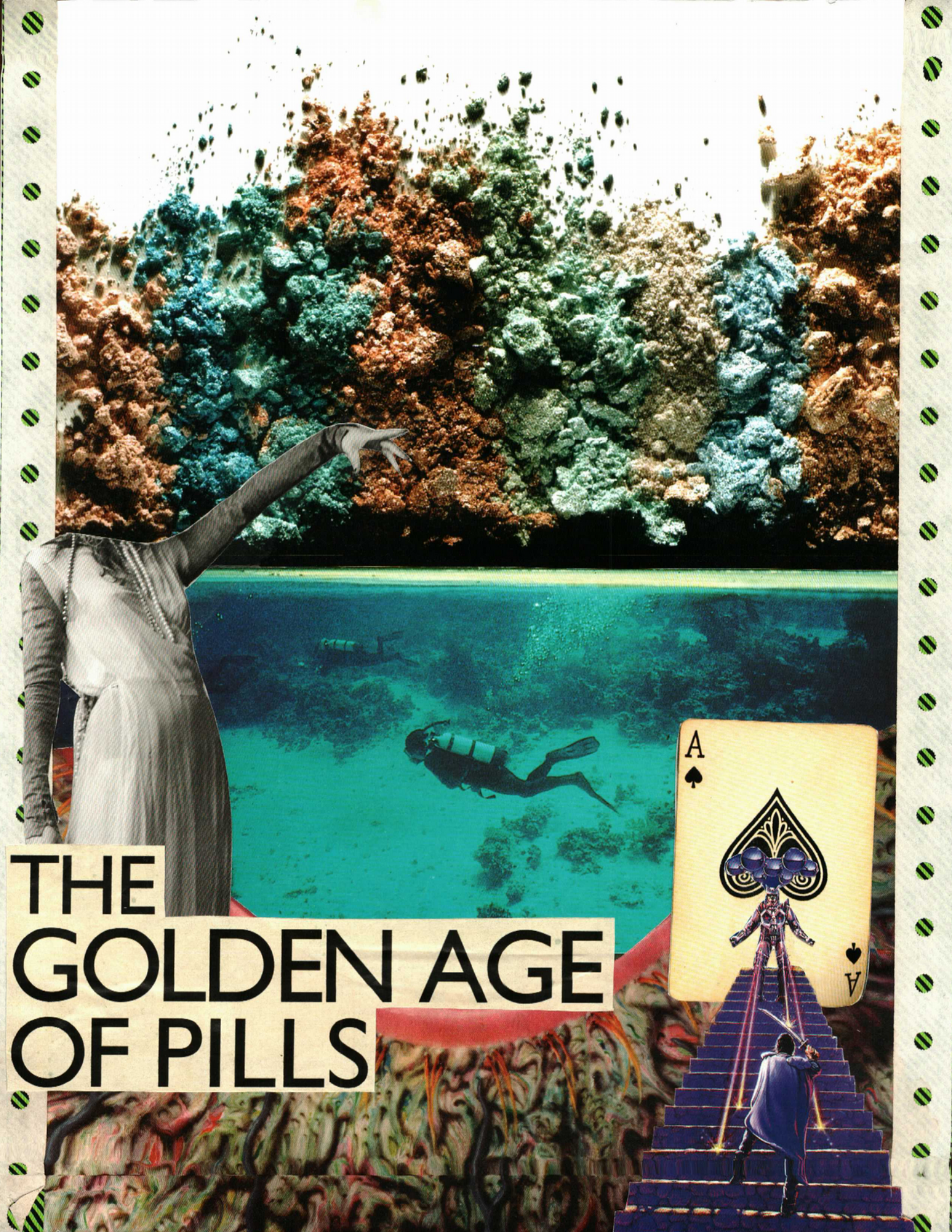
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THE GOLDEN AGE OF PILLS





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