



no, dear

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No, Dear

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THE WRITING
ON THE WALL

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INTO THE LAKE MY CREATURES

soften a bit now, goose dictator of the shore
distanced from fish that nibble on skin when you stay still
the guard dog turned deaf sprawling out on the lawn
a new question pools in the abandoned truck bed
and on our legs stick bugs surface as if childhood scrolls
unraveling, thought I saw a version of you behind the shed
composed stacks of sunscreen, retired motors, missing teeth
the straightener you worked until the fuse blew

revealing the freeway you said *beautiful*
to see motion above us, dark bristles on fruit fly backs
beautiful makeshift recycling bin who believes in individual duty
and faces the murky lake, where bar fights bloom shiners
where the flatness of that rock doesn't feel right, so human
we leave our shoes on the dock overnight to prove
we don't care what might reclaim them come morning

Lichtspiel Opus

The blue works so hard to flash on this film so sincerely. I love the blue thumb
the blue egg the screen size determines which as the color becomes
mountains. I love watching the blushing skin of the blue as it falls.

Outside the green of my neighbor's window carries steam in it like a crystal
ball the color of cold a camp green an inky green of emerald and lead. I am
wary of poison on the bone-white walls the red ink we press into tattoos of
flowers and socks and scales the pipes I am distrustful of the materials we
build from.

The texture of a walk any errand an exercise a vision test a cement wall
everything eventually is sediment Imagine the stars granular splinters
boiling so rapidly they seem perfect they seem safe smooth and near as
the purple lights across of the bay.

I hear a silver herring break the surface I wipe my eye an oyster think
about the statue of liberty the dark every color is a technology: the language
developing for imagery.

I know the water and the growling road are both kinds of machines like me a
blessing to be made of skin and sand and glass and bone materials I trust
inherently like the salt I squirt to keep open a wound

Let the red jump across my body a stroke of blue from the pills I ride along my
gums to shape me soften me the mouth is a dam blown open the
dissolving pharmaceutical fish in my blood molecules of desire flood me

And hunger is a kind of color blue plates remind the body of poison They say
this is not safe to eat, they say see, no fear can stay entirely away.

I have seen that color too, on you. A jelly a want to roll to paint to grow.

iterations

A docudrama on tiger sharks is playing on the projector. Our bodies form a kind of
imperfect architecture and I can't pay attention to the film's re-enactments. It's clear
that someone has been bitten by a shark. Scenes of deep blues and bright reds play
against the wall, interrupted by the hurried motion of limbs, an occasional arm or leg
cuts into the scene. I think I feel like I am looking at us from above, like with a
stereoscope blowing up the scene so that the contours of our bodies appear separate,
sometimes strained and out of sync, among bright blues and deep reds, interrupted
briefly by the occasional motion of limbs, the occasional readjustment of an arm or a
leg resting on top of another.

Exploding Whale Day

November, Lane County. A crew of men are learning
 what they cannot contain or throw away. A beached gray whale
 is everyone's Friday headache. It is too large to burn
 or move or cut smaller, so they decorate its sides
 with dynamite, planning to make it disappear. They hope
 it will vaporize, know why they cannot slice it into pieces:
 no one wants to stare all that death in the face. Instead,
 they ignite. The air clouds and is silent for a moment

before chunks of whale rain down. They hail.
 Blasted-apart blubber, slabs of fin and tail.
 They smash through a car, shatter the parking lot
 with pellets of rotting flesh. The men barely laugh
 before scattering. Tomorrow, they will bury the pieces
 with bulldozers. But today, they wish their mess
 was still whole. They are somehow still praying
 that pieces will vanish into the bellies of gulls.

Becalm

Sailors fear two fates
 (among others, but most of all):

- 1) Drowning.
- 2) Becoming stranded at sea from
 a lack of wind

("doldrums").

He comes inside her
 and she considers how

each night he stops breathing
 in his sleep. The tide of his chest

flattens, the air

against her back dies off. Then
 he chokes as if to pull
 water from his lungs.

And she wonders if she should
 wake him and drag him

ashore.

look at me

men on the playground bite heads off cicadas I draw a line in the clouds
 move a razor loose dirt your crescent face smart I hear the beads

sloping toward you arcs of fake malachite clacking the wrist
 a moon emptied another in warm water a pool what did you say

let my toe inside a used condom part of the earth or not
 tear it to not become it I could be for \$3 drinking soda in bed

painting myself with pressure alcoholic volume
 a close distance between starved legs a pit a wing a wheel

so tired of earning I do not earn I want I do not earn I want

Resolving Host

I listen to my neighbor talk on their phone

looping our
 one-sided

forgetting

the prayer of wind on seagrass

the driftwood trees
 marooned to the shore of the salt marsh
 like the jawbones of ancient
 megafauna

still
 wildflowers surviving

the landscaped beneath

two men presiding
 over them
 like a service or a deployment

my chair covered in birds

the collapsing weather

rushes through the window

and everything's been all rippled since

Moon Water

Every night I visit death in my sleep,
A myriad of nonsensical truths,
In some dreams; I somehow weep—

Remembering the prisons of my youth,
And in my awakening I find—
Incarnation is incarceration of a kind,
Time being the jailer who leaves his markings on the faces of all mankind;

Walking on a downtrodden path to
Heaven or to hell,
In my silent dreams I can not yell—
When I wake I can not tell,
Whether I was really in heavens where Angels dwell and from where satan fell—
But my journey is a reminder that my soul I will not sell,
For my soul is a ticket to meet my maker and break life's shell.....



sèkpexën¹

the sea doesn't speak *commodity*
ask kin² if you are beautiful
and you will think you haven't received
an answer if you are waiting for
the language it's time to leave behind,
for the compost to take into its
hot generous belly and transmute
into the beginnings of ruderal growth.³
toddler species, clucks cattail,⁴
step off the shore and wash, let
algae, ray and oyster⁵
have a look at you without eyes
until you've loosed the lenses
you don't remember putting on
and weep for what you came so close
to losing
until it's unclear what you're swimming in,
until your tongue meets new words
for this world
and your body

¹ Sèkpeḡen is a Lenape word for “the distance across the water,” or “as far as the water goes.” These lines find their grounding in the bays and waters around what is now called New York, Brooklyn, the unceded territory of the Munsee and Canarsee Lenape people – the plants and species here are not abstractions but the specific and vital intelligence of this place, stewarded by its original peoples. Source: *Lenape Talking Dictionary*, 2022.

² “Grammar is how we chart relationship with language,” writes Robin Wall Kimmerer. Just as it would when used to refer to another person, she argues that “using ‘it’...for the other 8.7 million species with whom we share the planet... absolves us of moral responsibility and opens the door to exploitation.” She adds that “among the many examples of linguistic imperialism, perhaps none is more pernicious than the replacement of the language of nature as subject with the language of nature as object.” She proposes a new pronoun, from “ki,” signifying a being of the earth, taken from the Anishinaabe word *Bemaadiziiaki*: “kin.” Source: “Nature Needs a New Pronoun,” in *Yes! Magazine*, March 30, 2015.

³ “Ecologists use the term *ruderal*, from the Latin *rudus* (rubble) to describe disturbance-adapted species. Ruderal species embody the unruly, tenacious, and opportunistic qualities of vegetation. They are metaphorically paradoxical: indexing catastrophe and abandonment, yet conversely representing resilience and renewal.” Source: in “Ruderal Aesthetics,” from Sarah Cowles, lead at Ruderal, based in Tsibili, Georgia. More at <http://www.ruderal.com/pdf/ruderal aesthetics.pdf>

⁴ *Cattail*, or ahpawiäk in Lenape, is a native perennial plant which forms dense colonies in wet soil and which is commonly seen along shorelines of both fresh and brackish water. It offers multiple traditional medicinal uses. A blood cleanser, it can be ingested for menstrual pain and to stop internal bleeding, and its pollen can be applied to wounds. Mashed roots become a topical poultice for anything from stings to blisters and infections, and the flower becomes a tea for intestinal issues. Its roots can be boiled and eaten, or pounded into a flour. The narrow-leaved cattail, *typha angustifolia*, is salt tolerant / more likely to be found along the bays abutting the Atlantic. Multiple sources. *Traditional medical applications from a conversation with Curtis Zunigha, co-director of The Lenape Center, for the Columbia Nursing School*, 2021.

⁵ Except on the most bitter cold of days Pier 4 off the Brooklyn Army Terminal is full of fisherpeople, and their catches are visible on the blood-stained slats – they complain across languages, Chinese and Spanish mostly, about the prevalence of sharks, (Sandbar, Sand Tiger and Scalloped Hammerhead babies, mostly) though after a storm even bass can become plentiful. Success here is inextricable from an intense inhabited awareness of conditions, species, and each other. Frequently, cownose rays lay face down on the picnic tables. The rays, in turn, feed on the clams, oysters, and other invertebrates of the brackish waters in and around New York Bay. Sunset Park is South enough of Manhattan that the island is relegated to the distance, a right hand glance easily and skillfully dwarfed by the scale of sky and water. Multiple sources, artist’s own notes / research.

Image credit: digitally altered aerial view of New York / New Jersey estuary and surrounding region. Original photograph from NASA, shot from Space Shuttle Columbia mission STS-58, fall 1993.

Water Goes Falling out the Window and Talks to Me Before it Did.

It actually did, that day when I started packing my suitcases and leaving. I saw the window sill, and water started appearing by the window sill. The single window in my room was open, though the music playing on my playlist wasn't romantic, but made me stop. The water actually started talking to me, in between I couldn't tell you the song whether it was romantical or not, to save my broken relationship in the crumbling sheats of my own concept of water that happened to subside and plonk like a snowball but still the water Talking to me said not to leave or give up, saying before it did poignantly falling out the window, at the sill part I remembered Phil and knew I had to go and pack even though the water when it spoke to me was interstellar, celestial and quixotic but so very filled and captured the mood, my mood after deciding to leave Phil after all and say goodbye as I did I turned the lights off in the room and the water was falling out the window in constant surfeit.

She Says

I want submersion in water or
to lay in a grassy field, looking
up. Sometimes I don't know what to say
to myself. My sister talks about a frayed curtain,
and then the terror of growing up, or old. There's still
so much undone. At the bottom sound melts
away. She flips a card. She says, It's nice to be
important, but more important to be nice. I flip
my palm. Otis Houston Junior, she tells me. That's
something he said.

Love (the attempt)

not the apple i gave
the dog not knowing it was
poison but

the afternoon i spent slicing it into
8 waxing crescent moons

not the house but
the haunting

how we let no ghost go
hungry

how every fish i ever caught
i gave back to
the lake

not the slaking

but the thirst

waking me always
waking me up at night

how i grip the glass
like a heart i'm trying
to empty into
my mouth

not the mouse parts
the cat
tried to bury in my sheets but

the fact that she killed it
for me

On Femininity

In the morning, the glass of water still sat there stupidly
full. I fed it to my plant, flooding the little thing,
let the liquid rush right onto the floor. Pretended
it was my water breaking. I don't want to be
a mother, I just want to be multiple. Yesterday,
my friend and I talked while she nursed her baby.
The whole time the little boy stared at me.
But I was busy searching her face for desire.
I might not have a child but I've had my nipples
sucked to soreness and it's been hot every time.
She was saying something important. I needed to focus –
I used to invest in Marlboro. Everyone hates Big Tobacco
so it pays good dividends. When the kid was born,
she sold. I tried to ask *if I don't become a mother*
who will make me moral? but my eyes were caught
on the wads of navel skin bulging from the buttons of her shirt.

Still Life, Blue Baby

We droop, we drowse, we dawn,
still blue, baby jar

of dried flowers, steam pipe
huff jaw stuffed
with gum, flour weevils

no hot water. Hold hope
dear splashing. We
droop, we
drowse

still blue, baby hold
still for the clippers hold
still for the whelping hold

still for the baby blue booties
my spangled shoulder
wrist begonia
tight ruined dress.

waking me always
waking me up at night

how I grip the glass
like a heart I'm trying
to empty into
my mouth

not the same part
the car
what to buy in my shirt box

the fact that she killed it
for me

More Than a Bottle

Feedings of liquid nutrients passed through a bottle,
the beginning of an existence needing to be swaddled;
can't feed you more than you can swallow,
because you may spit up some that may be needed for tomorrow.

My thinking used to be shallow,

I'm a survivor. I'll take on the next day when it's in my face

an Angel brought me a family that's slowly putting me in my place...

Mind, body, and Soul must be carefully equally nourished;

unconscious growth is equivalent to an unwrapped sleeping infant,

no telling where that child's hands will go,

self inflicted pain because someone will claim they didn't know:

By measuring today,

your mother and I are building the foundation for your estate.

As we know

I feel or think I feel my colon delink as shots of pain like pilot chutes deploy inside my GI tract. I might as well be flying. The fetus, my fetus, Demetri, my stunning unplanned mass

of head-meets-feet is mashed, hushed, and curried in amniotic magma, lapping meconium puddles from which a fiddlehead fern-furled spine worms and syrups toward a surge of stars

in the unbroken dark. So this is the swan-road! The reeds on the bank are reflected on the surface of the pond. I am compelled by my creature to disarticulate the mirror

that held us together along a wet edge. The whole absorbs my loss, our loss, soundless, two who wish to love one another more than two who wish to be

one another. You learn so early that holding your own hand offers inadequate heat. Your nails are sharp and my blood pools under your lunula where you shoveled a shallow aqueduct out

of my uterus, pouring life through a living pipe, your life sluicing through mine. Scraping the rough inside surface of the should-be-smooth rugae, you bald the nerves

in my pelvic girdle and alert me to the clysmic shifts of your doughy head and temples tentatively edging through the ridges and folds of my vagina.

It is painful but it was necessary to open my palm and expel the child from my innermost fist. I brace myself. Blood and mucus snake the toilet bowl circumference

and contractions hose me down for two minute swells at seven minute intervals for forty-two hours. The cervix is low and hard like a nose when closed but high and soft

when open wide. After thirty-six hours after thirty-six years I am ready for the epidural and Dr. White stabs the shallow catheter into my spinal column. But the drugs miss an innervated window

and my vertebrae chain is a livewire in an ice age, a rope of snow, fire, and cosmos ground between my diamond teeth and an empty hospital gown blown open by inner winds, that's me. Mothlike, we impoverish

our interdigitated under, undergarments: womb, caul, bag of waters. The OB slides a sterile sewing needle into my amniotic sac and it breaks the barrier between life and mind sealed shut by your fontanel

which I finger at the cusp. They call your position sunny side up. Instantly, my cervix dilates to 5cm, high and soft, I arrive in the dim room into which I will deliver you to a view

of Brooklyn Bridge, its weightless tonnage suspended by a spider web encrusted with sunset, and I tell you how my uncle, a cop, once talked a jumper down, and how Cecilia Vicuna, a poet,

said "every time you cross that river you jump cut worlds," and there's no way to know which world you're going to until you get there. Access to life is guarded, no, granted, by water.

I didn't know I had a heart until I didn't know where it was. Looking for it brought me back to the bridge. This river is a revolving doorway. I named you Ocean after the avenue my mom grew up on.

MY MOTHER WAS A STALLION

My mother was a stallion,
watching two birds fight over a seed.
Silver rain drips down the branch,
and I catch it in my mouth. No one

visits the treehouse anymore, though
Mother said the spirits weren't real.
A Ouija board laid out for all weather,
parts stolen for a nest. A stallion

will kick not for love, but for surprise.
A dial tone. Silence, then back again.
Wrists pale, in need of grooming.
Her hooves fill with mud.

My mother was a serpent,
and the one tempted. A feather
in the dirt points the way of wind.
Dust never settles where I want.

Teeth never sink like shifts.
Black ink is only part of a piano,
and not the loud part.
I draw lines in earth.

And what of water, never holy.
Hail to deserts, full of snakes.
Glory be to the mother, the daughter,
and the stream. Glory be to coats & skin & teeth.

edema

but they say bodies are mostly water
and how to accept this fact
from within a body, which
except when coming, bleeding, sweating,
crying, excreting
(and even then)
shows only its dry side to me

years ago I started noticing
the skin of my feet crawl

too young to die but not too old to dwell
in the hypochondriacal
wonders of the mind
i lied to myself,
up late on WebMD all the while
trying to feel otherwise
the heat swelling broke
in the endings of my limbs,
envisioning it as a kind of company or other
more cautionary metaphor

i wept a little fountain
in a momentary hell
without words
knowing there
was no other way
of getting paid for
the time and change
an otherwise well person
might spend overlooking
their hands, fingers, feet, and toes
while they slow-cooked from somewhere below
and not knowing
just how far down
lay the flames

that there is an actual depth of skin—
would this be enough to absolve
the ideas i have of it as a surface

a plane, a dam, and not
what it more literally is,
a constellation of holes
tethered together by mesh
made of whatever the opposite of
a hole is in the study of cells

so as well my allergist Sebastian tells me
dermatologists leave their brains
in the third year of med school
and i register a place in lieu of time,
an empty garage above the forehead where
there used to be a library
if only for an extended moment
before the test

my plague, however, is elsewhere
than vacancies; rather that something
in me, a fluid i cannot think or even see
has filled them

they say bodies are mostly water
but to be well
a body must be
not a well and be
not only unfathomably wet
yet so too able to empty
itself of itself, which i know
it to be doing
when coming, bleeding, sweating,
crying, excreting—
yet amidst which activities
i insist that what i see is not
so simply conceived as bodily fluid
but rather the dust of my human form
parting with foreign waters
which having flooded it,
now fall from it

and then there is me, also foreign
yet no more trapped in this body
than my unfallen substances which
i can only imagine somewhere there
within, hugging the interstices of that mesh
beneath the shins that I falsely call my shins
all the while being
carried on and about
by a carriage of arid language,
i appear nowhere other than here
as the as-yet unirrigated wetness,
waiting for the inevitable separation
with not only this body and its fluids
but bodies
bodies of water
bodies
at which point
all will have dried

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