

WEATHERVANE

by

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for Kat

The world feels full.
When we are silent,
we see it bare.

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PINE

Pine-needles grow like moss in the beam
of the streetlamp. Night is the stone
beneath. The green patch glimmers

as I pass—river now, and flowing. Ahead,
another light extends, slicing another piece
from the flank of darkness. Studied,

I watch the crenellating parts of nature
forming themselves. I feel, as everywhere,
a stranger. When parts of me peel off

they look much like this: a stripe revealed,
then vanished. The night recedes and rushes in
again. I don't think of the bent old man

still pushing carts, or the children huddling
in the minivan because they have nowhere
else to go. Instead I look closer at the needles.

From a distance they seem one mass: up close,
shining from the light, you can see their joins,
perpendicular to the dark, living wood.

RADIO

The clouds remain in the air: flute
and lilac. Somewhere I know
there are crickets. The dark hovers.
Outside, you forget, there is

a whole world of creatures: the cats
fighting over each patch of grass,
the raccoons, ingenious, dismantling
the traps left by neighbors—the skunk

running lookout across the yard—
what do they care of us? Do they
stop for a moment when we cross
their paths, as if afraid that they

might harm us? Again the deer
just losing their spots in the heat
are wandering across the street—
if no light catches them, they

will vanish from our world.
They say the deer are strange
people. We pause and pay them
our respects—glinting as they wear

our headlights for a moment on their skin.

ROTHKO

Quietly the lives of the animals are all
going on. Like the way you feel most
alone when surrounded by a crowd—

Out across the plains there are thousands
of vanished presences: eyes which
have not been gazed into have evaporated.

The lamp-post is orange's final boundary:
evening is slipping into night's pale blue.
The dogs are out again, they have broken

through your fences. Everywhere now is
the crickets' crackling static. When space
is cleared you can hear the sounds

which listening forbids. Now we are turning
over our kitchen tables to find the things
we have lost hiding in the hollow between

the surface and the wooden floors. Now
we are watching the cold light
of the refrigerator spill—

WEATHERVANE

what is it like when the weather
changes as if you have run now
into a long marshy field hushed
by the folding wings of grey geese

the sky like settled snow grey
and pockmarked like feathers
might be disturbed so you must
tread quietly lest they wake

while the howl ruffling feathers
never comes you imagine it
but only breath fills the marsh
lying asleep in the morning

HUSH

The breeze that seems
like breath to fill rooms
when only the dust

is there—this sound
not sound like a hollow
threshing layers of bone

from ribs—the eye
shaped like a coin
is paid for the rusting

ship that ferries us
nowhere—this sound
left over lingering

in the air like a cloud
over the water which
does not rise

nor sink nor vanish
but simply floats
a brush-stroke forgotten

in the pause
when the brush lifts

TRANSPARENCY

Staring into the black glass, house-lights
are indistinguishable from stars. And now
the choreography of evening: the wind

soaring down spins into a pirouette,
the outline of lavender. Following
the leaves, gold and changing now

to grey ash. Against skin cool:
the bitter table. We are building
our houses always on the ground.

A hand enters. Bowing its small
respect. The expected sea hovering:
we realize that the night

is empty. The dog chained there
in the middle of the field. The flash
of someone else's hurt.

THANKS TO THE DOG

thanks to the dog there is a little spot
of cream in the world today which is
full not at all of yellow leaves and now
withering branches like the skin of old
and intemperate men look at him he
does not know that strangers may bite

thanks to the dog I am remembering
the smell of autumn a brown ball
of parchment paper and the grass which
endures the jacket of ice each morning
if he can look up to the things above
and the things below why not us

thanks to the dog there is something
which is only good in the world today
watching his high-step march filled
as he is with excitement leaping
at the sight of anything rolling himself
in the things we forget about

HYENA

Told to pretend to be a hyena
at a party, you recline and appear
to sleep. I am myself pretending
to be angry. I chew the carpet.

Now we are pretending
to be each other. We try
to imagine what it's like.
We are already there.

You pretend to be concerned.
You do it for so long your eyes
get a little squiggly.
I am pretending to be myself,

or at least who I think I am.
And you are still pretending
to be a hyena. Huddling on branches
you hoot and I pull up my knees

and shoulders. The moon sees
only owls. Are you pretending
to be the person who I thought
you were pretending to be?

Do you believe that I believe
what I say I am only pretending
to believe in? We are pretending
to be each other. I am told

to pretend to be a hawk. I stand
on one leg and squint. And you
are still a hyena. I am told
to pretend to bite you and

I really bite you. I pretend that
I am sorry. Now I am pretending
to be a tree. And you also
are still

BOG-MEN

Paper might be made from them—
illuminated as the hidden book
plated with gold held from fire
and thief at Kells—look, they

have turned to stone. Look,
they have lost each other in
the ground. As skin and bone
fused. As wishing hands

coupled finger-to-finger.
Only five hours spent man and
wife. On the cold and lonely bed
lain before the firing squad.

A little cross in Kilmainham
yard. Holding in desire until
the whole body shakes—until
the little egg-shell worn as skin

crumbles. Swallowed by peat
and made mummy. All sucked
from the body and only
the outside left. Only skin.

PAPER AIRPLANE

crumple the paper and watch
with trembling hands as flights
of others rise only yesterday
in the long backyard the grass
like a younger brother still
pacing in the tantrum's afterbirth
gave you breath lift the current
you race across the sky folding
edge over edge the difficulty
of the crease made with wrist
not the pliant finger bones
that do not want to bend that way
folded down like the seal on the jar
that held a spirit such precision
required to contain you but nothing
can hold you down to the earth
except falling

LAP SWIM

The thing with swimming laps is, you
can never get to the end. Each kick
of the lap-lane's end leaves a nick
in the concrete. The water tastes blue

and covers like the night. Flip
turn. Life is like this. Each arm bites,
is bitten by the water. Wheeling kites
of hands. The feeling that you could slip

and fall, though the water is there
to hold you. Flip turn. Sometimes across
the lane, someone appears. And the loss
after they have passed is hard to bear.

KISS

Like the moment when you break
the water's surface and breathe
in the first lungful of air, I
am trying to inhale the distance
between us. We are clumsy,
a bit drunk. Although we have
already stumbled across the air
parting our lips, although our bodies
have been this close before,
there is something remaining,
something that makes us need
to lengthen our quivering fingers,
to brush anything we can touch.
Although we have left the friends
with their gossip, the pigeons
hopping in circles under the stars,
although we have left the noise
and press of the club, an urgency
remains—

ICEMELT

I wake running thoughtless
into a broad and open field—
an intruder in a gallery at night—
each statue draped with a veil—

I stand among them lost
as the animals themselves
might stand when no human
voice is there. A sudden,

unseen signal—the sound
begins—first angry, like horns
the call of the numberless birds
unmoving—the moment breaks—

I reach out—brush a shoulder—
your eyes startle—the morning
brings again a delicate thaw—

OUR SEA

Santorini

It's an overwhelming
feeling, as if your mouth
were the center of gravity

drawing the past continually
into the present. My eyes
which once were stones

turn to pools of water.
Your fingers make me
taut like the water. And

somewhere I find under
your skin the ocean
lit by its own moon.

Florence

The night condenses. There
over the river you can see
the dome Brunelleschi built.

The streetlamps flank
the water that is as deep
and quiet as the sleeping dead.

I perch above a graveyard.
The wind has died down,
the lights cold, undisturbed;

and now I begin to feel
the tug of your absence
like static in the air.

Mykonos

In a tunnel halfway up
a hill on one of the Greek
islands you are pushing me

into the wall. You are biting
my lip, your fingers everywhere,
your eyes shut tightly, looking

for something behind me,
something in the concrete
at my back. I turn you,

grabbing your ribs, searching
out your edges, trying to find earth
under the stones in the riverbed.

Santorini

Your mouth is around me.
Hastily I think of the sea
and try to catch the surf:

I am shaking like a fish
caught in a net. Water
never held me as you do:

each fingertip like a wave
cresting, the brush light
and frothing like the foam.

I think of us on the beach.
The moments linger like
stones at the point of impact.

AT NIGHT

i

Walking, later, still kicking up silver dust,
we find the long bird-cries wheeling in wind
like divers—the whispering kind of upslope
breeze, carrying the sound of cattle sheltering.

The rose-wound light of the mountains
binds us. In quiet we cannot see the trail
ahead. Like water sucking in, our treads
vanish down into ancient seabeds.

ii

We talk for a while. But while we talk
I'm thinking of you—like nautilus-shells
hungered deep into spirals by their need,
you keep shaping me with your absence.

Led on I think of time spent sharing a bed
in the innocent past.

iii

And at night the choirs of the unborn,
the unremembered, the dogs, the forlorn—
the snow like falling stars, losing form
as it shelters the red sandstone. Black

and trembling, the air descends. Grass bleached
by winter wavers and cracks. The coyotes,
thin with cold, spend the little hours murmuring.

iv

We leave each other messages, but I think
only of fingers lithe and reaching. Brushing
a scar left in childhood like the lessons
we learn by falling. By scraping our knees.
By getting up again.

v

And at night the stars lit by a candle
are sliding past the airplanes, matching
the tide. Dreaming over the Atlantic I
am strangely restless. Anxious dreams,
steeped with the uncomfortable deepness
of hands whose reachings miss each other.
Beneath me the endless heap of all the creatures
piled in the sea lies unmoving. I draft
regretful letters I will never send.

vi

The distance between us brings a quivering
unlike anything I have ever known. As pines
may be torn from the soil when a flash-flood
rushes headlong down the mountains, this pain
uproots me.

vii

Tautly your eyes ask me to wait.
If I wait any longer the rain will eat me
down to my bones. If I wait any longer
my skin will shed me.

viii

We are meeting in the airport. We are talking
around the weight of a black star, pulling in
its net as it catches us in orbit—we wheel
and turn like kites held in the same fist.

Your foot tapping against mine says more
than hours of conversation.

ix

And at night I wonder, as stars fall and die
in the great darkness—how is it that we come
to open our eyes together? How is it that when,
like divers caught in the billowing mane
of bioluminescent coral planed by the hands
of fish, we look upon something we mistook
for something ordinary—

x

And at night all our caution wraps us
like bedsheets. I wonder at the way our eyes
are trying to say something we cannot come out
and say. I want nothing more than to say it.

DECEMBER

The wind has gone now, and the morning is quiet. We get dressed in warmer clothes than yesterday's. Some few leaves are still clinging to their boughs—the snow

cannot quite stick to them. The sun spread out across the whole sky—no part whiter than another. Like fossilized bones the black trunks of the trees emerge from snow.

I sit inside and read. The world is hushed.
The snow still falling. The first snow of the year.

CRYSTALLINE

The glass on the window seems to be
solidifying dirt and ice painting it
so that when the sun grey and cold
with winter comes flat against it
the crust like the grime under fingernails
needs to be dug out the air grey too
coming to wrap itself around shoulders
around unleashed dogs creeping in
to every bed a ghost tangling sheets
when no body is there not only glass
but the growing things are turning
slowly to ice the empty spaces within
expanding cell walls cracking one
by one freezerburn coming now
to shine the edges of things but
look how beautiful they are jacketed
in the thing which kills them

SNOW

to turn from your words still stinging
I consider the snow heavy and dead
unfeeling as the ground supporting it
the day is a single color grey longing
to become white covering everything
the way it clings though the warmth
will kill it the way it frosts a nose
or a hand although the heat of the body
will destroy it the way it packs itself
though it will become ice inimical
to turn from your words although
the ice will kill them although snow
will pack itself although the frost
will come to seal the sky silent
as the grey and unfeeling morning

DREAM

There you are, lying in the dark
shaken by the short fall taken
after almost having fallen asleep.

The eyes of the angels like points
swallowed by the sky are closed
and the blue night settles in.

Earlier the fog made the streetlights
faded and muffled the sound
of footsteps until I was alone.

Out there you remember again
what you forget while in a crowd
that the body is eating itself.

The small buzz of things hangs
like the snowdrifts cover ground
cold and heavy as the grey fog.

The knife-edge is poised again
to make you remember the things
you forget until your body shakes.

Rehearsing the words of those
who we still remember holds
the heavy wings at rest.

The window's beam casts you
into the quiet blue water
which you must pass through.

Sleep again, and do not let
the night's angels or fog
or any cruel dream trouble you.

THE FIRE LEFT

for Yoshi Endo

The snow comes early branches still
burnished gold even though the frost
lingers you who cannot but be
remembered in your presence
in the everyday when you rustle
leaves or disturb the air at death too
the world does not alter the vanished
taking with them the things
they saw and touched untouched
by spring's fire green and leaping
kindling in this branch or that
as in the ground what is gone
may cede its place to another fire
goodbye you who cannot but be
remembered we must take down
one by one the things you have left us
to furnish the place we build
for you

KNIFE-EDGE

Things proceed from sharpness
to sharpness. The leaves strokes
left in air by a brush. Swans

settling on each living pool, wing
to wing. The water hums in answer,
deepest, oldest. I am alone. Even

surrounded by such life. The curve
where the land meets water begs
as I do. They are different kinds;

they can only change each other,
mingle, become mud. But in change
the ecstasy of the drowning stone.

You are not the first to be a water
I cannot drown in, a wound
I cannot close. The sun creeps

crouched in the long grass. Its hand
pointed, reaching. Even here
the unfathomable touch of light.

What we grasp is only blood and bone.
It is not ourselves. We try becoming
in others. We only change; mouths

less true than those behind. Hands
not our own.

NOTES:

The first lines of “Hyena” are taken directly from J.L. Austin’s essay “Pretending”, and other lines are paraphrased and inspired by it; “at death, too, the world does not alter” is Ludwig Wittgenstein, in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*.