

The Sunday Before You

Poetry by
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"Mithradates—he dead."

There's nothing in silence. I know this now.
Bleed all you wish. There is no rest nor respite,
no recourse other than an in and out, steady
motion, familiar. Life bringing and threatening,
la petite mort - for they feared them both.

The undiscovered city block where the
weeds run riot amidst the broken
beer bottles and remnants of ashes.

No magic amongst the graffiti—
only art, slouching round to its frame
again, lame and thinking drooping thoughts of adhesive.

There is at least some modicum of denial
in speech. We can nod in the right
places, understand in the wrong,
and smile though we are
actually so tired. But every poem has a you,
and the taxing need to meet people and
create worlds for them to lay down and die in.

Paper's not like the world (and this is outside
metaphor), for an edge exists where
the semantic serpents pitch and yaw.

The moment--the zenith--an emptiness
that you cannot quite touch with words.
You do not want to touch it with words.
You want to strangle it with ideas,
throttle it with phrases
but they all fall down in the end
and we strain our ears for the lack of impact.
The unending unyielding wellspring of nothing,
an inexhaustible supply
where the pump is always primed.

I'm telling you something right now,
though you're not listening to me,
or perhaps you're speaking to me and
I'm not hearing you.

So hard to tell where you end and
someone else begins.

Your Body is an Alien Thing

Your body is an alien thing.
You're standing there at the sink in that tank top,
and the bare skin of your shoulder waits for me to caress it,
to claim it--but I can't.
It's no longer mine.
Just as the single bead of sweat that traces its way down the back of your
neck
is someone else's. Someone I've never seen.
Someone who doesn't exist but someone
who has somehow laid claim to you.

Part of me wonders if you're waiting, like your skin.
Part of me knows you can feel my eyes on your back,
the heat of this July morning nothing compared to the warmth of my impotent
need.

Perhaps if I could stand up from this table,
if I could make the legs of the chair
speak angry words at the tile floor
and take you--there, right there, against the sink--
I could get you back. I could bridge the gulf.
I could solve everything.

But instead, I sit and I watch and I slowly die.

Die to the point that in six months' time, when you call me,
to see what I'm doing, nothing more
(of course) and certainly nothing less.
I'll know why you're there. There on the phone
to see if there's any warmth left in my eyes.

But I wasted it on your back in July and you...
you let me.

Laughed To See Such Fun

This merry-go-round will grind you down
to a fine powder
if you let it.

So be amused as your body
joins the dust from which you were spawned.

Laugh as the carousel horses
spit and foam, as the reins,
addled with thorns, part seven layers of flesh
like a crimson sea.

The brass ring is electrified and guarded
by a parliament of wolves frothing
at your heels as you whip past their
grinning muzzles.

Skin like banners flutters in the wind
as you go, unraveling in your revelry,
unmindful and splintering, feel the wind
in your thinning hair and as your lips
are stripped away, you are forced to
smile.

For this merry-go-round will grind you down
to a fine powder
if you let it.

Untitled

Weaving in and out of traffic,
lacing my fingers through what remains of your hair.
A blunt stone takes the place of the shears
and begins to work its weary magic.

Sparks stir friction from flesh,
sweat collects in the small of your back,
and words drag their chains with delicious haste
across the hard wooden floors.

You worried they would leave marks.
They did, but not there.

Like a distant star's death throes on the sky at noon,
they raked their signature across my field of vision,
and the lack of any evidence of their passing
chills me more than the headstone we conceived.

A Prayer

Daughter of Kali and Shiva,
Harry and Robert may fight over the honors
like young boys will on the playground, but you
are the destroyer of worlds.

So many of them my own, it seems,
for the footprints dart up and down the sand,
chasing gulls, perhaps, or sunlight--
but they're always there--
they're always yours.

I see their ruins in the surf behind me,
the courtyards filled with silt and fragments of shells.
I recognize one in a Pompeii street,
in a building, and we should have been strangers.
Fingernails on a wall, they break for joy.

All of these and more, a cavalcade
of perhapsisms and ambiguous muttered agreements
to advances of profound futility.

Whatever the test might be,
whatever contest you bestow,
I willingly fail each iteration,
for I have lived a thousand tiny lives
and everytime I did, I thought of you.

Elated
but broken,
I praise thee.

Standing at the Cave Mouth

If I could break those bonds
and free you
from yourself,
I would be able to embrace the sun
which is you.

If you see the beauty in this,
then truly I can love you.

If you can share with me
all of the things
better off unspoken.
All of the things which are dead
but don't know when to stop breathing.
All of the things which are alive
but don't know how to start moving.
All of the things still unborn
waiting for your voice
to call them forth.

I'm huddled with them,
there towards the back.
Wet your lips now
and prepare for the true miracle.

The Old Souls
(a series of fragments)

1.

I remember when Diogenes was
in the Chicago streets, looking for an honest man.
He dropped his lamp in the barn and said to me,
"Shh. We'll blame it on the cow."

That's when I knew that honesty was dead in this world,
along with our senses of common decency.
Darwin was peddling them on the street corner.
They had metal keys in their backs.
And I was laughed out of church as a throwback
because I wanted to feed the sheep
instead of eat them.

And so the Earth shall inherit the meek.
The old souls know of what I speak.

I always said I wanted to buy an island and start over,
but back then I could only be trusted to
die for my country,
drink myself into near-death
and propagate the race.
 But, oddly, not rent a car.

These are the things I guess I should be doing
but I tried them without convictions.
Besides, you can't be an island.
At least not anymore.

Anything else than this and something must be wrong.
Why not grab the cheerleader, settle down, have 2.3 kids
and a picket fence on which to impale my dreams,
a two car garage, three cars, one divorce
and a partridge in a pear tree?
 Ay, there's the rub!

Give us this day our daily week.
The old souls know of what I speak.

2.

Two eagles clasped together,
suicidally dedicated to an embrace of passion,
hurdle towards orgasm in a sick race,
receiving either a lot or a little of death
in the end.

After such a feat as this,
would it not hurt so to light a cigarette,
ask "Was it good for you?" and
turn on the game?
No wonder the falcon no longer listens.

There is a valley behind every peak.
The old souls know of what I speak.

3.

Dearly beloved...and the rest of you,
Welcome to the glistening nightmare of skin
Clinging to infuse despair and beware—
This is your lesson book.
Read it all for it means nothing
but what you bring to it.
Mark my words and tear the pages if you must,
brethren and sistren,
fellow and singular vivisectors of God.

4.

The old man descended from the second story landing
and with a steadily shaking hand offered
his shoebox of understanding.

The fortune then withdrawn, read:
Know thyself and scream.
Know thyself and laugh.

Outward from the casements of my mean
endlessly rocking bring three days to roll a stone,
pausing only so that moss will grow upon the mover.
This applies to all but one, and he has eternity to wonder when
he does what he does to remake his point.
And at least he still has his liver.

Daughter of man, you do not know
nor can you remember,
his shadow in the morning rising to mock you
or his shadow in the evening stalking you from behind.
I will show you fear in a handful of trust.

5.

I can equate everything with nothing.
Certain sounds in the air.
Murmur of maternal inflammation.
No salve now, run up the pole to where the changes wait.

The boy tries to set fire to the rosebush;
whether he wants to illicit the help of a deific tongue or
make the shudder come round again--none can say.

But why? he asks as the flint fails.
And why? Again, damn you.

Habeas corpus: so it is writ, so it is done,
pointing the common toward self-creation:
immolation through pure thought.

A young uncreased brow tightens.
And ignites.

6.

I am wrestling with these things,
these things which will fall and christen me a madman,
for no man is an isthmus.

I am writing of these things,
these things which call me mother,
these bastard children which spring forth
from my temples and rend the curtain.

How I love these slices of life in death.
For the price of getting what you want
is getting what you want.

We are cursed to find all that we seek
The old souls know of what I speak.
The old souls know.
The old souls.

Paradise

Paradise
has lost its novelty.
It's like Disneyland at closing time,
the patina of glitter has been stripped away, leaving
the candy bar wrappers and the stench of human bodies.

There could be some semblance of a protest,
some shout behind the sigh in your voice,
but there's none.
The slow transition to ordinary was marked with
neither bang nor whimper. Nothing at all.
Just the Sunday before you.
And a lawn that needs mowing.
Kids that want to be driven to dance recital
and other loved ones that ignore and are ignored in due turn.

I grow old, I grow old.
I shall check the nine grain bread for mold.

Meticulously we build these traps for ourselves
And then back into them and feign surprise.
What we want, what we'd die to have--
and perhaps that's just it. We did die to get them
and never even noticed.

I died to get you, you died to be gotten
and thus the Us we had cultivated died
on the vine, the new vine
encircling our spines.

I can feel it growing up inside me now,
ready to burst forth once I am still,
ready to carry the spores of my mistakes on the wind--
I want them to take root in your skin,
I want them to bloom warnings into the spring sunshine,
Neon, candy-petaled warnings of what has come before.
No one will heed them, but at least they'll look amazing.

Devotion (I)

There must be a certain supplication
something to appease
But whatever its name, it waits in the garden alone.

We will wait here at the base of the mountain
for judgement.

No prophet has wandered up seeking
stone scribed with a foreign tongue
by an unseen unknown knowing finger.

Nothing here of idle idolatry.
No one has melted down their gold
in pagan impatience.

We are above such things as these
We sacred yet profane
We believers yet blasphemers
There are not enough saviors on our cross.

We will wait here at the base of the mountain
for judgement.

There are no lips forming prayers to broken stone
nor stone forming prayers to broken lips
and there is water and vegetation
Yet it all seems so familiar.

We have no thorns about our brow
(but the blood still stings our eyes)
no vinegar on a stick
no spear and then hand
not the shroud and the stone
and resurrection alone.

We are above such things as these
Betrayal Denial Martyrdom
No sacrifice is death.
Moreso a sacrifice is life.

We will wait here at the base of the mountain
for judgement.

All the onlookers have gone home now
How long should they wait?
How long can they wait?
Three days or forty days and nights?
Or forty years' worth of wandering?
None of this will help or harm them.

For me,
time has lost its
memory meaning cohesion
and I alone
turn my face to the sky
not to the tree with its sword
not to the burning unburning bush
not to the multifoliate rose
but to this simple, most beautiful of flowers.
Therein lies the source of my
Power Confusion Love Life Devotion

Each petal that falls I will catch with my soul.

and I shall wait here at the base of the mountain
for judgement.

Devotion (II)

A thorn ground into the palm's heel
not where the serpent strikes
not where the blessed bleed
but apparently the source of all my still weaknesses
for my foundation crumbles to sand
and excess thoughts, overstocked emotions.

This is how I love you.

Human driftwood stalks the beach
seaweed not woven but grown into their hair
planted by some watery mocking eternal embrace.
There are no footprints.
Nothing to follow, nothing to guide you back
Back to the genesis of wind and rain
back to the dilapidated shelving,
the vines overgrowing the door
the key in a cold corpse's hand.
Back to nothing. Back before then still.
Back before nothing.
Beyond these, the building blocks of our
greatest desire, all hollow.

This is how I love you.

I recognize fear in a handful of flesh
and in the migratory patterns of birds
and take comfort in the gaze of predatory headlights
No evidence. No survivors.
Listen while no one is speaking.
Hear between the lines and understand
that no one is speaking.
That there are no phones ringing
and that it is Calvary and not Cavalry
that awaits over yon hill.
Bite this. It will stifle our screams.

This is how I love you.

Perceive you my mantra,
forming frozen letters in the vapory air?
Distance and lack of acknowledgement adorn
our doors, look see you the blood?
Leave this fair prison be, pass by.
Witness you this manifesto written in the blinding cold,
out of adoration for the unwilling.
Is it disrespect that dances on my tongue?
You shall never see it. You shall never know.

Eyes averted, cast down,
sculpting dragons in the moss.
This is how you found me
and this is how you will leave me
For this is my love for you:
offered, duly noted, returned, and stifled
by two moistened fingers on the end
of a blackened wick.

563

the number of powerlessness

there are approximately 563 reasons why i do not run to you
and none of them are good enough
and none of them were good enough
and they grow with each passing day

They tell me the world is growing smaller
and i tell me that my world is growing smaller
but i know that our world is growing larger

and no amount of fiber optics can save me now.

there are more than 563 roads leading from here
and so few of them provide water, you see
and so few of them provide water you see
and so few of them provide

and a man becomes thirsty on this road any road
and what he needs is water

this paper is dry
this road is dry
my throat is dry calling not calling yet calling
for fresh water

there are places one can stop
outnumbering that number of numbers
almost outequaling the number of roads

there are places one can stop
and then there are places one can stop
for water

and their number
i tell you
is vast.

and i wonder still i wonder
why i malinge so long here
and i wonder still i wonder
if and only if this is where i am supposed to be

In Remembrance of Me

Such a paradox is this frozen rite of spring.
The equinox turns and returns on an unseen axis.
The pendulum to and fro never rests at center.

Thoughts such as these do not comfort
one who has come here seeking such,
treading through accumulated moments,
combing through snowflakes threaded in her hair.
She stands by the side of a still lake,
sheathed white in solid solemnity,
she will not place a rock at the head
of where the earth sleeps.
There are rocks aplenty she thinks
and the thought warms her.

The center perhaps will hold
Though the revolutions longer and longer be.
What has gone will return
given time.

She cannot wait here, but neither can she leave.

The stone falls from her hand, unneeded.

The Space Between the Silences

In the space between the silences
I can still hear you
beneath the floorboards of my mind.
At night I can feel you, walking about the room
in darkness, who keeps letting you out?
But I know the answer: it's always me.

Always me answering the phone when you call again.
I can tell it's you on the line;
the dialtone has such a distinctive, plaintive cry.

Bring me back, the radio static says.
Bring me back.
But I can't. You know I can't.

In the space between the silences
you're there, accusing me through the shop windows.
Your eyes that I would die for
implore me: Do that. Do just that.
Behind every untried door, in every unread book,
you're there. And only my searching makes you disappear.

Always you pacing around upstairs
even though I live on the top floor.

Bring me back, the thunder says.
Bring me back.
But I can't. You know I can't.

In the space between the silences
there's absolutely nothing there
but my own breathing.

And I can't stop that.

You know I can't.

In Remembrance of You

I dig this grave for you,
 into which I inter my memories,
 and then wonder if it is half-empty or half-full.

Every now and then, you tug on the string
 to ring the bell
 but no one comes.

I sit here, pretending
 it's only the wind. . .
 it's only the wind. . .

One Last Dream

We had fought to stay asleep
 so long that our realities had atrophied
 from lack of constant use.
We had built upon the foundation of words
 forgetting the importance of deeds
 too late remembering that neither words nor deeds
 have meaning inherent.

Thus, the castle crumbled.
 an air horn sounded.
 the window left open.
 the cold air came in.
 the bedclothes lay discarded on the floor.
 our fears were laid bare and shivering.
 blinked we into alien sunlight
 that was far too familiar for us to admit
 to ourselves,
 much less to each other.

Home.

But still,
 the question malingers...
 It will poke you in the ribs over breakfast.
 Felt it standing there in the shower, did you?
 pressing itself close into your nakedness?
Or did it peer over the rim of the coffee cup at you?

 Was it fear?
 the crack in the wall that would flood your brain
 with cold, cold light?

No.

You were haunted by that dream.

Was it some apparition of childhood
refusing to shed this mortal plane?
Was it some myth,
some phrase,
some promise that you had
sworn,
come back to stalk you?
Was it someone you would have died for
who died instead, yes,
but did not die for you?

Rifle through all the things which it is not.
Look to the bust above the door,
but it is not there.

It is always directly behind you,
in a place so recently left,
or just beyond the frame of your vision,
taunting you and teasing you
leading you towards that paroxysm of reason--

It is that dream!
It is that one last dream.

The one you prized above all others.
The one that meant the most.
The one you cannot bear to have again.

You will return and search through the ruins,
i have no doubt.
But bother not me with your petty excavations,
using your rough-hewn tools of would have been,
could have been,
should have been,
and what if and why not
and worst of all, why?

Why?

It matters not why.

The fact is it was a good dream while it lasted.
i remember seeing you

and you

and you

and you

and countless others like and unlike and dislike you.

We built the castle there in the dream,

but when the tide rose up

we awoke wet and

cold and

shaking, alone.

So why?

It matters not why.

It matters not whether we are butterflies dreaming of men

or men

dreaming of butterflies.

It matters not at all.

For, i tell you,

if we are truly dreaming,

then truly, we will never wake again.

and if we are truly awake,

then truly, we will never sleep again.

Whatever the case, i fear it is simply

more matter and less art.

But that was in another lifetime,

and besides,

the dream is dead.

The Doubt of Saints

Good old Noah,

 refounding father of the human race
 drifts alone
 with his family and other assorted specimens of fauna
 & is lulled to sleep
 & madness
 by the perpetual
baying lowing grunting pacing
 of his restless crew.

At first glance,
he projects surety,
but each day he is more & more sure
only that the endless expanses of blue
will swallow him.

In his sleep, he dreams of faith, God, & salvation.

In his waking, he ponders the wasting of doves.

Meanwhile, in Eden

We planted the ground with salt, but
still the broken images come to maturity
and we must harvest them,
fashioning blades from our words,
sharpening them on each other's eyes.
This is where we are, threshing the tall grass,
slipping on the desert, spun into glass.

Strange fruit indeed, again, dangles downward.
We are learning to grow things without soil.
We are planting them deep within each other.
I will check upon you in the coming months
while you wait for the wormwood to spring up in my path,
to fix the garland which you, the victor,
must wear--thorn-addled as it is.

Exodus 12:51

On the streets at midnight
 she locks the door behind her
 and with a look of mixed
emotion
 she tosses
 the key out
 into the yard.

In July, it will make sparks
 appear under a lawnmower.

On the driveway, the car is neutral,
 to avoid the noise of the engine waking
 the indifferent witness stars
or the indifferent snore that carpeted
 her footsteps out.
It rolls slowly out
 onto the street
 below.

She tries to ignore the cold in her
 that makes breath escape from her
 in cloudlets which, like
the exhalations of the storm drains,
 rise from black beneath to
 blacker surface
saying,
 "Go back...
 Go back..."

The Convenience of Isaac

Small children need no longer serve the function
of kindling, nor shall they be shoveled
crying and protesting into the mouths
of coal furnaces on dark metal wheels
careening down solitary sets of tracks.

Invention is the wetnurse of necessity.
Once need expires only desire remains.

The necessity of sudden altars on hillsides,
where the vulture turns in
a lazy gyre, has gone to weed,
and mothers should no longer seek
the comfort of convenient and blameless
handkerchiefs when the doorbell rings
in its releasing ominous tones.

The reasons for this species of infanticide
have all grown thin subsisting on their own
bile. They are cannibals of self, for there is no
strict canon against slow self-slaughter.
They go on and go on en perpetua,
ad nauseum.

God breathed relief when the ram arrived.

Mighty Yggdrasil's Stump

Some days you wish you had never met her.
Other days you believe you never did.
If she had been introduced to you as the woman
who would stand by the corpse of your world tree,
hatchet in hand, smile and say,

"I cannot tell a lie. You did it."

Then, perhaps
none of this
would have come to pass.

Epiphany (I)

This is the moment, five paces from morning,
that the alarm clock shoves a drill bit in your ear,
flicks a switch and says, "Have a nice day."

It's so hard to stay warm with familiar flesh
hovering near. To each and every living pore
a loving name and a notch in the headboard
of the creaking heart.

You bleed.
Liters upon liters of breath
have trickled out onto these sheets.
And though it is too late to recall their shadows,
the flicker of awareness meets an
exhalation of kerosene and all is not well.
No, not anymore.

This is what you wanted.

State it again.
This is what you wanted.
But the price of getting what you want is getting
what you once wanted.

So he spoke and I believed him,
but we lost you along the way. Somewhere...

Five Thoughts

1. The Random gifts our love with narcolepsy,
which falls into the bushes
and pricks itself to a glass-enclosed slumber
that we only wish was enchanted.
2. The Possibility quickens the pulse
and the step to the plank,
neither a thought to the sea ahead and below
nor the question of the vessel behind and above.
3. The Humanity weighs upon us even more
than we ourselves weigh upon Humanity.
Eyes like dominos seek the sky for a blue sun.
Eventually, they will find it.
4. The Change comes a moment too late, or rather
the realization of the Change comes a moment too late, or rather
the acknowledgement of the Change comes a moment too late, or rather
the argument to the Change comes a moment too late, until
the changed has died, all but forgotten.
5. The Shadow.
Simply the Shadow.

Shroud

This is the place where
love and terror embrace, drop
and copulate on the ground.
Where we drop bread crumbs to attract crows,
because they love the eyes so.

Forgotten poets rattle their casements
and refuse to leave imprints on their burial trappings.
The dust itself cries out with a thousand
voices in a thousand
tongues that never saw the light of the written word.
Ancient carvings of murdered earth goddesses
clamor on unseen shelves.
Timeless anthropomorphic personifications
who wear the faces of deities,
new, old and undiscovered--all these await jeweled
libations poured from your open palm.

For you say your body is a temple.
If so, then throw the moneychangers out.
Rend the curtain and count
on both hands seven times and then simply begin:
wait for the flames to bake your sky.

I have lit candles in memoriam
for years that have died sprawled in your footsteps
and now light them as a cheap prayer
for the raised letters of your inexpensive incantation,
soon to be filed down to nothing,
filed in unmarked boxes
and forgotten.

Wishes corked in a bottle.
Wishes attached to rice paper balloons
will be set adrift to cause some random damage
to someone else, to someone new.

Dies Irae

First we had a couple of feelers down at Tom's place,
in that Sunday before you. The dashes in the roads,
all Morse code for the gods. And they know what they wrought.
I can hear the wet giggles in the corners they've retired to.
The underlying meaning is flopping on the pavement.
It's suffocating. Its mottled skin steams in the morning sun.
If it could just find the shadow of the steeple,
the taste of the grapes, the wafer, the blood, the skin.
If it could just go back and lose its thumbs, glorify in gills,
distill this dust into sustenance--it could survive.

Survival, the instinct of it, forcing the mind to create
divinity out of coincidence, forcing the soul to pervert
the natural order of chaos. The blessed rage for meaning.

Tears into wine. That's the secret.
Sex in one, half dozen in the other, and you say it doesn't matter.
So it doesn't matter.

You can't unring a bell, and the two strangers who wish
they were talking suddenly become a chalice for blood--
and you can't unsee it. And that is an anagram for
Sex in one, half dozen in the other, and you say it doesn't matter.
So it doesn't matter. And the guards couldn't stop them anyway.

The key under the floormat of the abandoned Fiat
Next to the memorial telephone pole
and the rosebushes you planted and forgot. They've gone wild.
They've shed all the meaning that you planted on them
and they simply grow, grow like mad.
Grow like the festering would-be child.
Grow like the muse struggling to be born. They grow,
and the guards wouldn't stop them.

What shall we do then, you and I?
Where shall we go to set ourselves aloft, alight?
No more peeling back of layers and scratching at scabs,
let's burn, shall we? Let's just unleash the suns within us
and burn. Let's give off a good solid pulse and fry electronics,
like we used to. In the good old days.

I had surrendered up all my misgivings,
my preconceived notions about the suppression of the
goddess mythology, and the symbolic fish.
I had given up and torn down any of the barriers
that kept me solid.

All of that was supposed to be you. And would be you.
And will still be you.
And there's nothing I can do to stop it.

In the end, it all gives way to fire.
It does so at both beginning and middle as well
but as always we look to the end. An eschaton of emotions,
for that moment when we can finally lie down and rest.
It's coming. We know it's coming.
But there's burning to do between now and then.
Mayhap they will burn us past the end once we've
passed on our conflagrations to smaller, lesser versions of our selves.
This little light of mine, I'm going to let it whine.

In the moments of waking, the pressure sets in,
the weight of mistakes and realizations.
No, I am not that person I had striven to be.
I am myself. You are yourself. We are ourselves.
And it's amazing we're not instantly crushed alive.
The gift of dreams is both respite and torture.
For every action there is an equal and debilitating detraction.

Into the shower. Let the water sizzle and steam and spit,
fly from our smoldering skin. With the weight comes the fire
and with fire comes the loss of nerve as they all melt away.
And the numbness. Thank the gods, the numbness.

Somewhere around midday we try to fool ourselves
that the fire cleanses. That the fire releases.
But in the drowsiness following lunch,
we have not even the comfort of smoke and ash,
something to obscure ourselves, the sky.
No, we perpetuate, grow and decay, and it's only forever.

And then we'll return to this cavern of no phones ringing,
we'll exchange the briefest of parliamentary kisses and
have separate but equal conversations that lead nowhere.
Then a hasty retreat before we know it--
there are two sides to every mattress--
and we cling above the abyss,
managing to sleep the fitful sleep of the guilty.

The world is a burning house.
And all things are fire.
All is hell, all is hell
And all manner of things shall be hell.

The flames in this bed consume you and I and all
until the very lack of oxygen will douse them for another day.
So until then, my love, let us smother and be smothered.

Until then.
Amen.

Good night.

Epiphany (II)

We came here.

Fueled by hearts so unwise caged within flesh with no fear,
we found this forgotten corner of Gethsemane and no longer asked to be
spared the cup of poison, but rather asked that we
no longer be the cup. We runneth over despite ourselves.

Lips of strangers take and partake and grow strong,
they send their tasters away. They live long.
One man's ear falls for rage,
and out of love,
and the spaces in between are
where we dwell.

We came here
and were told many things,
and it was we who misunderstood.

We mistook care for caring.
We mistook that ear for listening.
We mistook warmth for comfort.

Feigned pleasures wax poor when givers prove kind.

A Prophecy of Deadly Space

In the moments between now and real,
who walk down the street hand in hand
(though they don't really talk anymore),
a species sneaks in to shout as one, the cry of a spoiled infant:
that they cannot evolve fast enough.

They have unraveled the riddle of blood
and bear the weight of the double helix around their necks
as if they alone held the cipher for the mind of God.

But Stetson's garden has grown to weed
and the dog has lost his wildness
and the corpse has lost even the faintest aftertaste of healthy soil.
He subsists on such bitter roots, they which grow deep and wide
out of sheer spite, if not ambivalent boredom.

Nothing left to winnow the weak.
The great cats lounge broken on manmade rocks
and cannot bear to face themselves in a common mirror.
Sad souls. Even the best of us would not
be worth a trophy kill.
Our ribs are showing, all except one.

While castoff kindred slither at bottom of dark lakes
and men lie awake wondering how to convince them to die,
while your smile appropriates my grin,
but for all the wrong reasons,
and while our future selves lay dead and cooling
under a bleak midwinter sun,
the wise man laughs or says nothing at all.

For this is the way your whimper ends,
not with a bang, but a world.

Almost There

This is when the mind shudders, and projects
its death throes upon the wall.
TOO MUCH, it cries in large, friendly neon letters,
a barely discernible buzz forming the
foundation for thoughts that drive
a small ring of cold steel to the
thinnest part of your home.

The images flickers upon a window
which sweats rain into the night,
wringing its arthritic hands
in time with the clicking of a clock.
Hands frozen, motor still running,
it stoically watches the play fan outwards.

The dampness of your palm is not an
argument for or against.
There is no one there to persuade
you in any direction.
Decide if you must, for the weapon
is elated and we are bracing
for your answer.

Blinded

We were so close to the source that
we no longer cast a discernible shadow.

Life's blood gotten fresh from the corner store.
Three aimless memories carried home in a small paper bag.
Kneeling for the mind to stop.
Please. Stop.

Still, the hitch in the voice,
the even tone,
the wretched undercurrent,
the answer no and then no and then chase me.

That moment when it breaks down
easy to pinpoint in the diagnosis and the diagrams after.
That bane of our existence
where falls the shadow.

And we,
so desperate and willing
for it to belong to the other,
do not see that it is ours.

Five Minutes

Everyone is someone else's nothing.
As I lie here awake, thinking of you,
I'd like to believe that you're doing the same. Somewhere.

But there's a very good chance you're not.
You're probably asleep. If you sleep.
There's an even better chance you never think about me.
That you, in turn, are thinking of someone else,
someone who has, in turn, forgotten you.

It's a daisy chain of emotional pockets,
enough to hold air if we can just tread water.
If I can just stay awake five more minutes
and flush my mind of you.

But five minutes is a long time to lie in the dark,
missing and being missed by the careless.
And if the negligent target of our emotions
were to turn somehow and acknowledge us,
what would I do? What would you do?

When the spotlight hits you, do you go tharn?
Or do you pretend it was all a misunderstanding?
Assuming there was a light. And if there was,
assuming you would ever wish to turn it on. If any of us would.

Because everyone is someone else's nothing.
There's some comfort that we're not alone in being alone
as I lie here awake, thinking of you.
I'd like to believe that you're doing the same. Somewhere.
But there's a better than average chance you're not.
You're probably asleep.

If you sleep.

Gratitude

Dwight Humphries is the best poet I've ever had the pleasure of personally knowing. While it was Uncle Ray Bradbury who schooled me on the proper care and feeding of an imagination, it was Dwight who taught me lessons in the creative work ethic that I could not possibly place a value on. It was an honor to serve alongside that veteran of the psychic wars in many an assault on the minds of the unsuspecting. And I'm so happy he got to read my first book before he left us. He helped to shape my work, so I wanted him to be able to see that perhaps his ersatz student had learned something. So with this second book of poetry, I've dedicated it to his memory. The leopard lives in every page of his book that I've saved and he will hunt again.

John Robinson
Atlanta GA
March 2005

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