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# Leaves and shrapnel

Michael Luke Belch

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LEAVES AND SHRAPNEL

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A Thesis

Presented to

Eastern Washington University

Cheney, Washington

---

In Partial Fulfillment of the requirements

for the Degree

Master of Fine Arts in Poetry

---

By

Michael Luke Belch

Spring 2013

THESIS OF MICHAEL BELCH APPROVED BY

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MASTER'S THESIS

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Leaves and Shrapnel



## *Dim*

*And when we look ahead, expecting light,  
as oft as not there's only grimy glass  
and dirty, broken windows to excite.*

*And when we reach for what's to come, alas  
sharp, shattered expectations slice our hands  
until the pain and murkiness surpass*

*the gasping flame of hope that yet commands  
us carry on in Sisyphus' last rite,  
until we swear off water and drink sand.*

## Part One

## A Purple Crow

A purple crow stands over  
the rubble of my dreams,  
scratching my unbearable question  
in the dust.

I have prepared myself  
for this end, dear ones,  
have nothing left to give  
now that my stubbly shadow  
drifts into nights  
of ghosts,  
white with longing.

From crucifix wings  
the crow whispers  
like the hiss  
of a steam train  
*Where is salvation?*  
Night comes on like  
the sha-shunk of the last train  
leaving a bombed city.

You see, my darlings,  
nothing left,  
no magic joys,  
no wise roots to plant you among,  
only these moments strewn  
like debris across the stillness

of these streets  
and the shadows of my questions.

## Lost Causes

Tree says to fire: I'll stand.  
Chicken says to earth: I'll fly, or swim,  
or leap out of this picnic basket  
and flop across the road.

Earth still spins  
around a sun's child support:  
heat, photons, the occasional  
birthday cake. Still,  
all we want is some magic  
as we run out of gas.

How to quantify a lack?  
The belly rumbles more,  
the dark darker,  
Eyes dry for days at a time.

We're all together in this  
failed petition.  
Spiders to bird: Please.  
We leap into moonlight,  
silk lifelines billowing like anchors.

## Distance

Sometimes distance  
sails apart  
like two dandelion seeds  
on August breeze.

The moon turns her dark side  
to the stars,  
but her face she gives to a sleeping planet.  
And behind her, a star winks out –  
the moon still smiling  
ridiculous and huge.

In 1990, twin girls were born sharing the same  
body: two infant cries,  
two wrinkled faces,  
one overworked heart.  
To think the doctor wanted to cut  
one from the other in the delivery room,  
as though it were better to be alone  
than to be alive.

## Missing Her

I miss her just now  
that she's back.  
Funny how one moment can be enough  
for memory and regret  
to bloom like sweat on the brow,  
sharp and blinding.  
We have to be this close for distance to hurt.

Remember. We dance still  
in August glow.  
Crickets and shadows  
ease to twilight.  
When the moon blushes and steps  
from behind horizon's curtain  
even bees forget  
the sun will blaze tomorrow.

## Memory

The moon turns half away.  
Tide advances over a town  
of carefully constructed sand castles  
that cannot answer the question  
of who we are.  
July evenings  
and cool brooks do not speak  
our words.

We come to in a home  
that is the howl of a coyote.  
How long have we stared at dull embers  
of each other's eyes  
and felt alone?

In the dark  
fireflies answer the moon.



## Firefly

The symphony of light sounding off  
across the field is not a galaxy,  
only the glowing echo  
of lonely flies. How many  
have tried to reach exotic grasses, the  
drowsy scent of pine and forest?  
One tail sparks longing, another  
gall, and how do we know  
fireflies don't flash  
when they weep?  
Maybe, in the hazy swarm  
as July shimmers in the afterglow  
of sun, one firefly sings  
a happy song. She has been to the forest  
and returned to the open field ecstatic.  
How would we possibly know which one she is?

## Out of Place

All the bones and baseball stadiums  
and school buses are out of place  
again. It's that sense you get  
after moving to a new house. By habit,  
you open a cupboard for a plate  
and find molasses instead.  
You think for a startled moment,  
This is not my home.

A mother walks into  
her lost son's room to look  
for some misplaced knick-knack.  
For a startled moment she  
sees only pez dispensers, dusty trophies,  
small brown glasses.  
Her mind revolts, tries  
to forget, grasps at dust  
falling through the sunbeam,  
a white sock on the bed,  
dirty windows.  
Relentlessly memories press in

like gasps after a fight.  
Always we carry the sense  
that we are out of place –  
a father yells himself red,  
neighbors exist in the spritz

of sprinklers,  
black cars fume around the block again  
and again, and I,  
holding molasses  
stand startled  
in some stranger's kitchen.

## She Bore Other Sons and Daughters

The mother of regret sits by herself  
dying her burial robe blue,  
pulling at loose stitches  
where the earth will finally creep  
through her ribs.

She rocks on her heels, arms clasped  
around her shoulders like indigo chains.  
The children  
have left the world out  
all night again and  
gone to the fields  
grown up.

She's born many  
hopes, dashed now.  
She bore Cain, the brutal,  
who grandfathered wind and fire  
from the ground, bent  
iron to his will.

She bore the memory of Abel.

She bore Seth, and a hundred great grandchildren  
who didn't crush the serpent  
or the fear that hope is a child stillborn,  
blue and too soon.

The wind calls to her like loss  
from the deep veins of the forest,  
softly rehearsing memories.  
She lets the robe fall, listening again  
for the dead to whisper.

## The Children are Dancing

The children dance  
like yellow petals  
falling on the graves  
of their parents.

The dance is their lullaby  
and the memory of a kiss  
their ghostly music.

Tiny tongues nurse  
on loss while infants dream  
fireflies and eyes  
of mothers.

The mothers hear  
feet dance like parades  
of broken twigs  
beating at their graves  
like a strangled heart.  
And *oh, oh*, the mothers, sing.  
Come and sleep with us.

## Midnight at the Drive-Through

Ahead of me by the dumpster  
a mother smacks a cigarette from a crinkled  
red and white box  
and three boys press against her legs.  
The oldest mimics her,  
smacks imagined box and clicks  
his thumb like a lighter.  
He can't know the nicotine,  
not the gesture is what she's after.  
The youngest boy laughs though,  
and the middle one eyes my #4 combo  
as I ease past them towards the street.

We arrange what we know  
like a child's treasures  
on a windowsill that  
cast shadows of ships,  
monsters, dark and flying carpets  
across the floor.  
This miracle of change  
is our beatitude,  
stars that salt the sky  
as clouds roll in.

## Losing Her

Sometimes my daughter and I waltz on the beach.  
I bow, she curtsies, music rises from across the world.  
How gracefully evening serenades the sea.  
Does the foam know  
those wind-whipped harmonies  
are a dirge?

What if the star that winks our cadence  
has already burst,  
scattering dregs of afterglow  
over our wishing?  
Would the shattered spindle curse her  
even as she reaches almost far enough to touch  
evening's first pinprick?

The sun is just over 8 light-minutes from my head, its' half-circle  
nesting on the horizon makes up 99.8 percent  
of the mass in the solar system. And then there's Jupiter.  
We are only an asterisk.  
Why can't I simply dance and wish for unicorns?

Until now, I've mostly hidden my faults.  
And while she still orbits me,  
other lights, brighter,  
more massive, threaten to collide.



Her clapping hands will always fit between my fingers, won't they?

I clasp this to my heart.

The next wave laps my ankle and my daughter's hand  
slips from mine as she dances up the beach without me.

## Mariah, Even Now?

Mariah, where has your daughter gone  
and where have you left her?

At the market where you traded  
winks for green plantains  
and sex for bacon slivers?

On the bus she hid behind  
the rough weave and tattered hem  
of a stranger's skirt.

What hand followed you home  
tugging at your waistline  
and your thigh?

Mariah, have you loved  
any of your men?

They visit you in the morning  
like ghosts  
in your children's eyes.

Even now your daughter wakes  
to eat bacon and boiled plantains  
beside another man.

## Dammit, Lorca

The gypsies have left their  
impossible colors –  
red lipped blue guitar,  
obsidian night with its blue tears,  
red skirts that whirl their dervish,  
and the moon's pale grimace –  
to torment me.

Lorca, you must have wept  
your words onto the page,  
knowing life  
cannot follow the flourish  
of the gypsy fire dance,  
nor feel the devastation  
of their crimson llanto.  
The pomegranates  
of your women's stormy eyes  
turn our days to sawdust.

I cannot allow myself  
the yellow of your weeping suns,  
the deep pathos  
that is peril  
to the unsure heart.  
I mutter my winter  
where darkness falls early,  
hoping your gypsies will gallop back

and plunge their glowing knives  
into the hard clay of my heart.

## Dandelion Autonomy

Dandelions have it easy,  
no wondering when they'll finally let go,  
no fear of fulfilling their purpose,  
no moral debates about seeding  
the lawn across the street.

*Autonomy is our curse* I think  
while dragging the lawn mower  
back up the slope of my front yard.  
A little boy with yellow hair stops  
in front of me,  
picks one of the juicy stems  
and holds the bouquet of white seeds  
to his mouth. The breath he takes  
makes me think the whole world waits.

Last week I stared for hours at a wall  
decorated with self portraits  
of seventh grade art students –  
sphinx noses and mouths like fish on a line.  
In one painting blue watercolor background  
bled across the bold black edge  
of a girl's face, coloring the cheek purple,  
like a bruise or makeup.  
I recognized the struggle in the paint,  
the losing battle to keep the world out,  
to keep herself,

herself when the borders blur and run together.

What I really want to know is why  
the boy with hair like the sun catches his breath  
right before blowing  
and drops the dandelion back to the lawn  
where it lies under the sky  
and waits for some other wind.

## Thoughts at Night

There is a distance,  
unknown and black  
between where I am

and where I need to be.  
I sense it in the keen of aspen,  
in the urgent fox dash,

in breezes that bring grains of sand  
from across the ocean and  
salty foam from the bay.

And oh, the nights when stars  
seem close enough to leave alone,  
when distance between each one is

a finger or two held to my eye,  
when something bears down on me  
with the hot breath of July.

Does a dandelion seed know where it will land  
when it leaps, or is it enough to be  
balanced over scurries of field mice,

not thinking about where to land?

## Prodigal Sketch

The obvious: pig slop,  
hunger, dysentery,  
jeering friends,  
the paste of dirty  
hair and teeth.

The less apparent:  
longing  
choked back,  
hope hurting more  
than poverty,  
and days of blanking the mind  
from the face of a father,  
trying not to dream  
    anything but pig dreams



## Parable

1

A man and a unicycle making their way out of the desert.

The man wonders how to carry a unicycle.

By noon: a beaten man and a refreshed unicycle.

Obituary: a man plowed, tripped, waded  
through life's flooded rice field. He owned a unicycle.

2

From their perch at the flaky crest of a sand dune the meerkats laugh.

They say there is no arriving, only moving on.

Chase west like your tail, north like mirage.

Somewhere a man learned to ride the wheel.

He became a unicyclist and rode

every day, farther

over the deep sand of the sun.

The silky meerkats made him a god, tried to raze him.

3

A unicyclist is learning to crawl

under the weight of the wheel

towards ribbons of water.

Years later the meerkats no longer believe in unicycles,  
but their pups enjoy evenings on the rusted  
ferris wheel and nights  
in the haunted pit of bones.

## Morning Fear

Morning again  
and my first breath  
like a purple finch  
blown out to sea in a storm,  
flapping hard  
and falling steadily  
to glinting steely waves.

If the tide dragged a finch in, drowned,  
right to our feet as we walk  
as near each other as we dare,  
would we raise a requiem to the sky, spade  
a grave on the beach, find  
only tiny bird bones  
everywhere? –  
water rushing in from beneath,  
to drag everything back out?

## Remorse

1

Rattlesnake does not care  
that Red Hawk is sorry  
for slicing talons  
through his backbone,  
that her chicks are hungry.  
Rattlesnake is not sorry  
that it manages to rake one angry fang  
across Hawk's thigh  
as they lift into the  
hot desert winds.

2

What does it tell you that  
Coyote is never sorry,  
no matter how many quail  
he tempts into the dancing desert?

3

Have you heard of a cactus without spines?  
No. Cactus is the dessert's whip,  
makes you pay for survival,  
for longing after water.

4

A man lost his way in the desert.

Mirage possessed him  
for days, sang like wind  
caressing fields of maize.

He *was* sorry he'd tried  
to cross the sand,  
but when he finally stumbled  
onto a highway  
and flagged a ride out  
he turned back,  
looking for the shimmery  
embrace, the sultry invitation to drink.

5

They say there is no apology  
in the desert, the sandy blaze  
and sweeping arms of dunes  
simply consume.

But I have heard Coyote  
crying and the moon  
weeps every night.

## Part Two

## Leaves and Shrapnel

Sometimes there are no words,  
only connections.  
Mortar blasts, birthday candles,  
wildfire licking across a meadow.  
Our minds try to make sense, try  
to decipher the message.

On a day of impossible blue and yellow,  
this crisp hue of tart apple,  
someone prepares to jump  
from a bridge  
while the level is low and dry stones  
gasp for air.

We speak our litanies against loss,  
that life is what we make it,  
that love will bind our brokenness.  
In spite of our lore,  
leaves streak the air  
red and gold and glinting  
like shrapnel. Up and down the street  
children throw themselves  
desperately to the ground,  
trying to cover them all.

## Those Who Wait

At the shore  
the tired sea rises against cliffs.  
When the waters fall again  
and the sun sets, boats will set out  
for the last time.

Many hopes will  
fade with that tide  
of fishers and warriors  
crowding the surf like  
driftwood driven in from far lands.

All the people stand at the shore  
to watch boats strike into sun  
and only one small girl wonders why  
with this tapestry of cast gold  
spread over the the water  
like a melody  
there is still war.

The kings stand on cliffs  
and laugh down at the ships.  
They fling their hammered scepters  
at craggy boulders  
and drink strong wine and  
only one young boy wonders why  
kings laugh at so much death.



The watchers at the shore are silent  
as rowers strain up sloping waves  
until the ships are lost in night.  
For a long time everyone waits,  
even as rain begins to mist, then comes  
in rages and torments and wind  
tosses the crowd like ships.

By morning half the people have left  
and the kings are drunk and calling  
for more wine. They and the leavers  
do not believe the boats survived the night.  
One small girl and one young boy  
step out into the choppy gray sea,  
hands held high,  
as though they could reach the boats  
or offer fists of sand in elegy.

## Aftermath

*[Two] bodies were recovered about 20 yards apart Thursday morning in a marsh near McLaughlin St.<sup>1</sup>*

At night the water  
like blood, dark and seeping  
through arteries of streets,  
seemed less fearsome than  
wind or hail. Morning,  
and the water everywhere still,  
cast iron under sky gray  
gloom and gray sand left  
like clods of dirt after burial.

Where is the gravedigger's shovel?  
and large how large must it be?  
Did he cast it into the sea  
past Staten island or return it, in good  
condition back to God  
with two young souls.  
They, who instead of dying  
of a less momentous cause  
washed up as though on the shore of Galilee  
inexplicably calm.

1. *New York Daily News, November 1, 2012*

## Knowing

We whisper our love  
into darkness  
afraid that in embrace  
we are singular  
as the black goldfish  
in deep shadows of the koi pond.  
Our tentative releases flood out  
like turbulent debris  
left to dry on the scarred bank  
or carried down clouded currents.  
We are like a woman awakened  
after giving birth  
by the horror of her empty womb.  
We give something vital  
to know each other,  
like Christ, writhing  
there on the cross  
to feel our pain.

## What Prayer Is Like

At sunset a dog sniffs  
in bushes and tall grass.

The dog pauses, perplexed  
as its small brain roots

through available smells  
for something familiar.

How strange that particles colliding  
with the olfactory nerve

bypass memory like  
reflex, skipping the mind

so that the essence  
rather than image

of thistle, rabbit, mud  
flood the dog's nose.

It knows a certain scent,  
lost now, in early moonlight.

The dog has never seen the girl,  
only the sweater her mother gave the police,

and yet it knows her – static plastic of a slide,  
vanilla lotion, sweat

from fear of a stranger.  
The dog lives in these scents.

It does not know the terms ‘citywide manhunt’,  
‘press release’, or ‘jurisdiction’,

does not know a hundred people  
hold their breath

as it pauses to flop its ears.  
No amount of coaxing from its handler,

can spur it any faster  
or change the agonizing facts:

the scent was there  
but now it is gone.

## The Desert Again

In the desert again  
searching for tracks,  
where God might have dragged his feet  
tending this rock garden.

The sky black above and grains of stars  
marking the silence like headstones.  
We are lost in this whirl of galaxy,  
this cosmic afterthought.  
Lost, but love is here,  
circling a black hole  
that can only consume.

Under bare feet grainy sand cools.  
Night and the moon rise over cactus spines.  
How easy if the crickets' scratching  
carried the voice I long to hear.

I wait in a womb of darkness  
without awareness, absorbing all sounds,  
every touch of breeze,  
each dry scent of rustled tumbleweed.  
This widening plain of night  
has left me empty before,  
yet here I am,  
looking for something luminous  
even if it glows far across the cooling sand.

## Circles

The way she looked into dark trees  
beyond the back fence and wondered  
if wolves or sex offenders  
would come for her children  
is the stalking premonition of our need.  
I was ten when I shot a bird's beak away  
with a slingshot,  
and couldn't finish it off.  
*I'll let it live*, I thought  
as I ran home.

When something is killed  
blood splatters  
as predictably as the roundness  
of a ring, as red  
as a satellite flaming  
over the ocean.  
The circles that surround death  
are not orbital streaks  
nor dark descents of vultures,  
but the spinning of the earth again  
and again. Every night

something brilliant is gone  
and even the moon's pale shoulders  
can distract us for only so long.  
We trick ourselves as we sleep,

so that dawn becomes a beginning  
rather than a plodding on.

Sometimes I envy the beakless bird  
as it thrashed and bled out,  
how much life it felt in one moment,  
like ferrets who mate until they die  
from exhaustion, or deer,  
flush with terror  
as wolves circle in.



## Oh, America

*How shall we comfort ourselves? - Nietzsche*

Evening skews  
across frozen grass

like a thing clawing trunks  
in the deep forest.

I fear that we are like this,  
America, fading

wrongly into night.  
The withered leaves of our hands

flutter finally down  
on skiffs of scattered breeze,

roots tap for water  
in scrapes of dry bedrock,

our wells are dark pits  
of fern bones.

Let's call down the shaft  
again as we drop the pail,

maybe something is listening  
this time.

Where will we go,  
when we are thirsty?

What will our children say,  
that we were too strong of will

to doubt ourselves?  
We have dragged

buckets through dusty cisterns  
and passed them to hospitals,

bars, and swimming pools,  
as though we had always bathed

in dirt, as though  
thirst never compelled

the way a beak shatters a shell  
or wings catch a hawk

at the bottom of its plunge.

## Dogwood

I could tell you we're like the dogwood,  
dropping white petals in our yard.  
Blossoms all spring,  
then passion and berries in the heat,  
and when the air cools, leaves  
never quite radiant  
but there  
behind the maples' fireworks –  
and always the dead months.

You tell me friendship, not love,  
is the hardest art,  
all those tangled brush strokes,  
perspective shifting like trees  
absorbing a new season.  
You ask if by berries I mean sex  
and I wonder if you're being coy  
or just stubborn. I'd say no:

if we manage to find any ripe berries  
before the sparrows take them  
home, before the tree  
litters them all over the lawn  
and the county arborist sprays  
white x's on the trunk,  
if we do manage to get our tongues  
around a berry, it'll never live up

to its hue. It tastes like rind  
and too many will make us sick.

Or I'd say yes, at least the dogwood  
puts itself out there periodically,  
puts on rouge and winks  
long leaves at the stoic larch,  
wears scarlet, musses its branches,  
and whispers to the birds,  
*we know what these berries are for.*

But I'm tired of expecting the dogwood  
to blush. I look outside again  
and see it's not flowers settling  
through sunbeams, but the first snowflakes,  
wet and big as petals on the dying grass.

## To Say We're Different

is to say we're not the same.

Horsecrap! My grandfather would say, and Mom adds, you know they actually call it shit on the farms. Out there in the fresh air, no one notices the Oakleys I left

when I ran, or the chicken I stole from the coop. But maybe the tractor I ran into the river. It looked so easy to drive – a green lever, a rusted wheel, my heart like rubber balls

thrown in a greenhouse. To say we're all different rejects how we're the same. Yesterday I had to fight off militant vegans while I slaughtered a chicken. Good protein, sure,

but it flaps around guzzling afterlife with such gusto. All we can hope is to thrum through the end like a lost comet. A matter of perspective, perhaps, but all things being equal, we'd all be the same.

I sat in a gray and mauve waiting room wondering what the applicants across from me had that I might not. I hoped they'd piss themselves, saw how they looked at me the same way.

You and I keep saying we want the same things.  
But I turn on the lamp to read  
and you roll away from the bulb.

## Couple's Therapy, Week 2

The therapist read the following from a vividly pictured book:

“By thursday afternoon the flies have begun to menace. The vendors take machetes to their melons, severing them on their rickety tables. *See, see?* says one vendor. *This stench, it's not from my fruit. Surely it is from Juan Pablo's next to me.*

“By Thursday afternoon the children of the vendors have shed their clothes and slosh through the cramped market like drunk flies. They sing as they flit about, *Sí, sí, we are the pigs. We've escaped from the butcher and we do as we please.* The flies and the pigs and Thursday afternoon easing towards sunset.

“The vendors know that soon they will trudge up the mountains to their farms and the new day will find them with spoiled melons and not enough coins for feed or food. They begin forcing their fruit on passersby – thirty five vendors pressing sliced melon into stranger's lips. A swarm of children snatching orange pulp from raised and swatting hands, leaping through stalls with melon-drenched laughter, colonies of flies staking claims in pulpy, green rinds.

“Thursday evening and Juan Pablo kicks the legs from his neighbor's table– laughs like tumbled melon. The neighbor reaches for his curved blade and just like that rust and blood on the breeze. Juan Pablo recoils pleading, *See, see? It was an accident. See? It's only a few melons.*”

The therapist slowly pushes his glasses up and looks at you from the book in silence. Finally he says, “I think we can all agree that the lesson here is self-evident.”

## Aftertastes

### Salty

While the little carcasses are still fresh,  
butchers bring them in from the flies  
and pack them in pounds of salt.  
Even now they are pampered,  
those prize piglets that roamed the forest  
rooting for nuts,  
fattening to the perfect flavor:  
oaky with a hint of fresh acorn,  
the brine coming on at the end.

### Sweet

Fruit flies swarm small wounds  
in the skin of mottled pears.

### Rancid

we would say  
as the flies dive in.

A ripe banana has been:  
green, then appley,  
finally sweet.  
There's one day for a perfect banana.  
After that, bruises,  
a wet paste like honey.



Bitter

Our tongues lick into the guts  
of a teaspoon  
left on the counter. The last of the vanilla  
flecks the bottom darkly  
like heartburn.

We react violently,  
think always, always  
*why?*

Sour

Milk, the way its curds float,  
the liquid almost clear.

Lemon zest, somehow synonymous  
with clean.

The sweat after love,  
reeking of the end.

## Dandelion Innocence

I'm tired of watching  
dandelion seeds blow by.  
I want to join them,  
the way they  
carpet bomb a lawn with serenity.

Who are dandelions trying to impress?  
They only happen  
to end up in the fireproof of my neighbor's  
windshield or in some sparrow's  
tiny stomach. Dandelion seeds will never care.

I wish I was as innocent  
of regret, as free.  
Even now I can't get past how I betrayed you  
on an afternoon like this one – warm breeze  
in the curtains, dandelion seeds slipping through  
windows and landing  
just there, next to me,  
silently asking me to fly.

## Dandelions List their Grievances

We've been called weeds. We prefer  
lawn herb or natural perennial.  
We're wholly unrepresented  
on postage stamps, murals, state flora lists, and license plates.  
Van Gogh painted the sunflowers  
while we breezed through his back window  
every morning and evening.  
It has become fashionable to strip our greens  
for salad, add them to the menu,  
but never to name a child after us –  
as with Heather, Rihanna, Rose.  
No one considers our art. We whiz  
through evening like sparklers  
We dance with abandon and without  
fear. "Stop fighting," we say.  
"Live," we say.  
You only answer with some  
'all in one' herbicide  
or multi-pronged torture device.  
But no one wonders when we rise  
from the harvest moon's loamy grave.  
We are ignored, expendable, stepped on,  
as though we were weeds.

## Trying Again with Distance

I don't wake frantically,  
flailing to escape  
the smell of cheap whiskey  
and the battered scruff of leather.  
Still, I've sifted through these memories  
like a prospector desperate for a strike.  
I need to find that I'm like you.

When I was twelve, my mother swam with me in deep lake water.  
*We are real people* she said.

*Your dad and I.*

*We all are.*

I remember the cold and darkness below us.  
Numbing  
like the day  
my best friend told me,  
that instead of sending students to detention  
my father beat them in his office,  
after school.

Still twelve: my blowgun in hand and blood  
in the hollow of my brother's elbow,  
and none of it accidental.

Thirteen: I regret the blushes on cheeks  
of girls who caught me peeking  
between buttons of their blouses.

I rifled through the underwear drawer  
of my mother's friend  
while they drank coffee downstairs.  
A bird had flown through  
an open window. It burst  
around the house, then finally against the screen door  
straining even then  
for what it remembered of freedom.

## Story of a Man

The man has come  
to believe  
he requires answers  
in order to plod on.  
All he has left  
are prayers  
scattered about  
like rubble  
after bombers  
thrum through  
night skies again  
and again.  
Sometimes  
even the slow swing  
of seasons  
outpaces his heart.  
A moment billows out  
like a sail in wind.  
The man sees wafers  
of autumn leaves  
suspended in air,  
dredged in the dark wine  
of loam, or  
rising reverently  
as though to trembling lips.  
Even now  
resurrection labors

as seeds  
imagine sun  
and the man groans  
to bear this strain  
of becoming.

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