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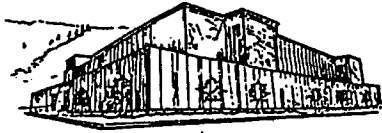
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Alula

by

Chad Blair

B.A. University of Illinois Champaign-Urbana, 1996

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

The University of Montana

May 2005

Approved by:



Chairperson



Dean, Graduate School

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Table of Contents

1. To Enter
2. The Oasis
3. The Sea
4. The Batholith
5. Light Mining
6. In Crevice Blue
8. Cicada Cycle
9. The Starving Bed
13. Water in the Baobab
14. Release
19. Rock Jumping
20. Blind Miner Blind Soldier
22. We Land
24. Waiting: Near/For the Nightclub
25. When My Teeth
26. ["Yesterday, yesterday I asked my eyes]
27. ["Where can a blind man live]
28. ["If I have died and don't know it]
29. ["In the end, won't death]
30. ["And with which numbers does the ant]
31. ["How do the oranges divide up]
32. The Tube
33. The Doric Columns
34. First Attempt at the Hill. Butte, 1869
39. David's Painting
42. Voice and Worth
44. After
45. Lantern in Barium
46. The Map
47. Notes

“I say they have grown out of you, and may grow out of you still”
-Walt Whitman

To Enter

a passage damp and lantern
unmoving when nothing is

the ferry slowly at dusk

the sky the same
color as the sound

in the beginning when the cormorants

were roosting
reptilian

as the time
before we slept

when gray was a metal
reflecting blues the daylight

consumed when willows
were not willows but another

threadbare skeleton
the moon

dark clouds edged one

afternoon
so many crows flew

between us the canal

became a window
and the layers of black wings

rain that holds

to a window so the houses rising from

the water were made

The Oasis

Visible because we've come

from it. We've traced maps,

heard the old stories, tomorrow
we'll dive into the river

where the river no longer
bends but palm trees

follow an ancient turn, to swim

into a forgotten temple,

water colored by steeping, history
our light in the darkness drawn

from darkness as our guesses.

From the top of the dune
the river is visible

not because the river is

visible but because the mosses

rising along the river
form a rectangle of green.

The Sea

Warm as skin and full
of plankton that lit up,

firefly afternoon, needle points pulsing
in the water drawn

by hands and arms like gold dust. The dark night

a lemon grove in morning fog. The sea, the occasional

glowing plankton sprinkling out
of the hand like glitter trailing,

like running through

a lemon grove in morning. Here the weightless
body forgot

the ethics of body and

floated, ancient, giving

and taking in and out of air and

water. The body felt between
two bodies that night--

the Mediterranean sky: a wet black
stretching, stars connected on wire

vibrating at low frequency or else shook

by a wind the body, floating
in darkness, couldn't feel.

The Batholith

And even these are colored by sunlight made to sparkle
as fool's gold in the stream, nothing gilded enough to stay

unbroken shines. Rocks meet the meadow at the stream,
a tree's roots have bridged the pool so the water flowing

beneath is milled and funneled out its barked base
smooth as a tooth. Fingering dunes in the current collect

pebbles and hold, sand made into waves, the space
between two bodies a body, second selves nourished by

stones in the grip of the trees fallen over, as if the stones
provide the vanilla and jigsaw bark of the ponderosa, texture

compressed, capacity to move rippled and chilled
through scouring rushes that rise like patches of jade

sea snakes between boulders in a stand of trees and then
a single tree curving from the mountainside, a bonsai held

by a cracked sea of rocks as if the mountain, once a great wall
warn into loosening, gave the crumbling shape of it cause.

Light Mining

Silver summer leaves
the silver lake, schooling

flash of fish above wind
pushing water across water,

silk on the clothesline--
underthings, breath. Yesterday

the lake a mist into sky,
water from cooled water capable

as clouds. Mercury is
glowing, the children digging

drawers into drifts are
cavemakers mining

translucence as they reach
the snowflakes' collapse,

the iridescent flashes foundation
we build sky on.

In Crevice Blue

In the water the spring coursing waterfall toward lake
 puddles foam and turbulence, water over
 rock and spraying, turning against falling
into itself, into ice blue beneath white froth
churned then disappeared. The motion propels two pines
into swaying mist refracted
 blue reappearing green, light
of the stream held released. On this winter the
silenced. In crevice light trapped. A fault. Hairline

blue fracture. Overcast. Thin, radiant reservoir of blue

underneath a stream a pelican
 in these parts once,

 a flicker.

And flight beyond the stilled
body's surface steam stopped under snow
shaken and falling, forming

tracks under blue-green pines chimney our eyes.
The sky breaks into needles

of blue light, new altitude ocean. Evening

seablue, clouds receding into the exact shape of a tree,
risen, blue of the tides.

Cicada Cycle

Generous rain darkening afternoon depleted come
August's dry dirt beneath the dirt,

the bird whetting air
in search of seeds. Odd cycle of
release, the weeds, the flowers look like before they bloom,

the father and the boy. Short pause drops
occupy. No hold to touch

a leaf glistened, no steady climb. Dew on fingernails
a crescent, our hands night's corridor, even
graciousness pains, see, the arugula

too leggy, let in more greenhouse by sawing off above.
Up from the dead love voices, asks

for echoes in arms heavy digging in
the drought. A doubt beak breaks

kernels of, set onto lush lawn, square concrete
where the boys sip in shade long-limbed, his voice coffee in

their voices, tenor restated in morning steam,
swallow. Hand
no longer yours as much as it once felt.

The gestures come
thin air, dirt lined climb, overturning in
breakthrough. You recall what might have

never happened. As recently as tomorrow: small
crappie-filled reservoir, the cut to release

the empty fingers find reaching,

no longer is it possible to distinguish
the natural from the tampered. Magpie

hopping on the fence toward another
hidden magpie. Communion between

the living a reminder only the dead survive.

The Starving Bed

The imprint left on the tissue.
On the vinyl bed

a corner of this country
plastered over and hooked,

a pulled rope raising a broken
leg or net. Pull us up. The body

length mirror is a school
of million mackerel

spinning, lines lateral and electric,

sensitive to the neon blue that methane
disperses. The medicine is at fault,

hospital, the giant kelp beds come detached,
ecosystems beyond the suburbs

protected by trigger fish. At night

the surgeons rise from the depth.

Luminescent lingerie for sale.

Ourselves folding into ourselves

until the imprint is engulfed and skin
and scales are sparkle weight.

The diner booth is inflated
when one person sits the other

rises, milkshakes imported,
waitresses and waiters

wear red hats that blink as they exit, enter
the swinging doors, wipe the glasses

underneath the marble counter.
The menu an impromptu

buffet, the chefs are egg,

sperm and butter. Cardboard
reef, number ten can crushed. Forget

that your grandparents mixed
these bricks, oxidize copper pots, scratch

that green blue until you gill.

Turns for gulls picking parasites from
your cracks, assuming a dogfish shape

to rub wainscoting against your back.

Swim up seamount into cellars, damp spaces,
and with what familiarity can you hold the mold?

Something is stroking you
and you can't tell if it hurts.

Can you remember if it is better

to see them first? When the prep cook cracks
down the stairs you notice first the disturbance

in water-- an uncomfortable place to hide,
crouched between the syringes and the cereal.

The soup is a salve.
The trench's great

irrigators send hot water
into the nozzle for coffee.

Doctor, my fingers are
freezing, the view from this window

is rain and this sugar pill
delicious bathysphere, their bait

attached and glowing, doors
this deep transparent, red eyes

waiting to send the opening
signal. It is as if cilia push you through.

Water in the Baobab

In the hollows.

In the hollows, spit.

Water in state sized
aquifers and shrinking.

In copper, diamond,
bricks. Banks.

Briefcase clasped:

leather, teeth.

Seeping through the caulk in the cellar.

Feathers of geese in the Berkeley Pit.

Breast, bidding,
filet, champagne.

Water warming the lake.
Cargo bays full.

Horizontaling the runway.

Bed, pulse,
ledger.

Cistern

Cistern brimming.

sockets, smoke.

Release

First was ice floating.
Poor squares made lighter by slow drift

frozen underneath stored light, bits of ice released

buoyed from the mass
following the winding speed away.

I did not leave the bridge
followed the river slow and in that concentration
dark water over ice

glow of one jagged side not yet felt against

the dark, I was returned. Wind wet against my skin,
I strafed its metal.

Knowing the names
I attempted alula
erratic stones frozen

would not be enough
slowed erratic ablation
into rock. Muster

shimmering in the cave. Heat deposited kame.

Midday tapetum
resonating

iceblink bass.
Precocial notes

releasing into rookery dazzling blue

in silvers. Ocellus, sky in flight,

the layered air

felt twice. And what is quiet
to the eye, not darkness,

night, but colorless still
color, flat on ice

a dark red leaf veins to noise,

red berries bunched and

shaking winter
gray away from you.
Against the porous
stream bank

frozen as a lung, a dipper's thin feet. Here

is flight unlocked of it's direction:

water freezing conical onto purple vines dipping
into water, weighing down further, the current

pushing them to swing,
they rub from the stream, glass bells muffling the smallest of

current's chime.
Second body, doubled time.

Sound motion patterns, my fingers
to tap, to measure time as

flow and flight, ice so thin it is

invisible, a brown paper stalk stilled on its surface. Touch a pink
spotted rock half in and exposed, pocket of water rippling

below, smoke moving through light,

space trained.

Untrain into ice speed and release.

As if the frozen could fly-- birds

might mistake it. Heron glittering. Siege
across sky morning unsamed

which ice collects green,

adds to its second
and third

unreproducible sound.
Lichen ice shatters. Shines.

When silver feathers

Rock Jumping

Clear path to a bird un-
moving, cloud path, wrist

pressure. The elbow crease,
horizon, no line of

distance between one bone
another, no ligament or

easy hinge, classroom skeleton,
no jump between

cliff and air, tissue and tissue-
papered kite. The sea

awaits the dive, boy-skinned

the ankles wait, the asking

measure between rock unmoving
but edged by ocean,

height. Tassels
of breeze, a wave on

the sand the heat
rising: speck of a body

stalled in salt translation.

Blind Miner Blind Soldier

Gone white, iris, the last failing.
Humus, warm flange of skin,

a blind miner a blind
soldier sitting shoulder
to curved shoulder, walking cane
and pipe. Optic stop-down

thickening opacity, walls to which
the body has clung and inches.

The miner reaches to touch
the soldier's sloping back,

chill in the heat of the mine.
Deep metal corridors, cyanide leaching.
In the moonlit dunes no echo. Speech
inside this silence outside begins

the mouth. When our eyes cannot coerce
the clues, a compensation. And you are

required to complete the silences when there is
no body to be seen: smell of smoke, negative

burn shows a hand slow against
thinned hair, opening formed
and framed by the lens blurred darker

than a syringe's pull, blood
onto dirt.

Not bats after insect dusk,
crows released into

gentle cumulous, shadow kite.

Conscripted, the ear buzz-filled:
constant fluorescent glare. We chip

madly at veins, fire blindly
into the night. Water dripping

copper pipe.
Are the askers still living?

Miner, we have placed you
Soldier, we are serving you

Blind miner blind soldier
sitting on a bench against a brick wall

billboard painted. Rock Island.

Thanksgiving down to the river,
leaves on the patch of khaki grass,

a few still clung to the branches.

We ran and they rose,

stalled in the sky,

skipped stones until the surface

puddled like rain. We left our
parents, smell of smoke in the stoves.

Listen, the porcelain basin
accrues night's sulfur stain.

We Land

Although we have never

Although you don't know me, I am writing to you about compass and construction

We haul metal bridges that unfold to cross

I first felt approach in the night's moisture. In the morning, damp on the canvas,
sand. I smelled Euphrates

Two years ago the car could not find traction, 360, 540. When I woke, snow
for the first time in weeks

Weather, speak to us in our sleep

"It is like surfing, but very slowly."

Sitta Zubayda transforms from sixteen sides to eight and back because of the
muqarnas, pierced to let in spots of light

Day stars

In a cemetery. We kept our packs on

The sky about to. Shadows. Thick
shadows the sky, the palms, the tiled
domes of mosques, domes on
squitches, lobed arches

mirrors

heavy

aerodynamic

The city on fire
The city on fire on the river
Ash in the sky
The city in the sky
People in the river

People go behind sandstone walls and then do not

Are you safe in Brooklyn? Are you safe with the sconces tucked into the architecture?

“The light rearranges itself. I whisper to the holes”

I no longer wish for villages of either. How to undisappear

And remain. Witness. I would not save this fire. Speak to the sponsors

With what body can I

Pigeons fluttering up as dark, the bleached sky, collapsed dome of the caravanserai

“Under the smoke, dust all over his mouth, laughing with
white teeth.”

Waiting: Near/For the Nightclub

Line: What is formed. Velvet rope released and held as an opening. What inches forward outside the nightclub. Contrail. Perhaps later, one or two in the bathroom.

Square: Blue dumpster. Cardboard broken down around it. Milk carton. Steam grate. No Parking sign hung on the brick alley wall. Her pocket full of cigarette butts.

Gray stained sock:
Would you like to add it to your shopping cart?

Tribune's Tempo section:
Would you like to add it to your shopping cart?

Noodles in Styrofoam:
Would you like to add it to your shopping cart?

Rectangle: Stuffed wallet. Cell phone. Check book. Well cut jaw. Bricks we count instead of noticing. Sleek eyeglasses. Italian flat-toed shoes.

Line: Unraveled hem. Grime stained into her palm.

Line:

Triangle:

When My Teeth

fall out scatter,
toss them into the sidewalk grates and

they'll press up bumps that crack. Scatter my nails, collapse
asphalt, spread weeds with white hairs

that grow into orange crinkled paper

flowers. When my shoes spell out poppy in their cursive. When my teeth

fall out scatter them into the shields sky presses upon. Do not scream

gravity, say strange resistance then

plummet. Say one of us is missing and

satellites collect and drift. Cloud white against blue tonsiled sky. This

is why it is moral to hedge your bets if
betting at all. Four teeth returned when five

shot high. Five roots when tossed. Twenty percent cloud
when mightily flung. One after another rooted and

pushing upwards sluglike, but compassed I shatter.

“Yesterday, yesterday I asked my eyes
when will we see each other again?” -Neruda

When the foundation falters under
blue aluminum strain.

Floor shirt-
patterned, dusted glass beneath dessert

pieced. Portrait
making unseen shimmer. See,

sheetrock smooth our statues left shelled.
What will frame this

sound when it happens? Occurrence
layered, stacked stationary, strategies

stacked. Sedition against saltless
hardtack, hollows

fullness spied by
the sightless. When I falter.

“Where can a blind man live
who is pursued by bees?” -Neruda

The ceiling fan switch left stirring, shifting
radio to static. Porcelain cup on the table missing.

Scratched Sunday, noted objects carried off. Buzzing
beneath mattress, warning shots with cigarette and boot heel.

Blindness multiplied by money-blindness equals books hollowed.
Combs drywall. Persist. White painted hive-box of a house.

“If I have died and don’t know it
of whom do I ask the time?” – Neruda

Pocket watch ticks felt-softened. Sealed. Seam-
sewn smeared blush and saline. A perfume the jacket
holds in the cabin wardrobe near the veranda,

fractions divisible by cuffs cigar-stained, lighter trouser-
held and hanging from hanger. The only visible

machinations the ship lowered in the lock in the wall-
papered hallways. Empty rooms furniture leather
footsteps, fluorescent sails out the portholes.

“In the end, won’t death
be an endless kitchen?” -Neruda

Stainless steel never needing sharpening. Smooth slice
into packaging, granite counters. Pounds

tenderize. Ratio pounds cups empty
ounces. Rolling pin dusted flour prevents

sticking, strainers separate noodle, broth caramel-
colored deep in the bowl. Course following

course removed. Plates sprayed, stacked
steaming. Silverware scrapes, chairs push on

flooring smoothed. Dining filled with endless,
helpless hunger.

“And with which numbers does the ant
subtract its dead soldiers?” -Neruda

When doctors talk a scalpel can't cut through,
smoke branching a sternum, the hollow dragonfly

of a collarbone. The maybes in the operation a

hummingbird, blue thread unraveling from a tug.

Hands translucent under grime, physics desert clinging
to hair beneath wrists and eyes. Last evening night-

beveled gemstone. Morning-gauze. Fire-blanketing

dilation scratches until breath swallowed teeth
and almost. This bird fours through flame.

“How do the oranges divide up
sunlight in the orange tree?” –Neruda

In pyrex measuring cups and a mirror tilted over the counter
so the audience may watch.

With a whisk, while lawn mowers weave the lanai.

Half and half foamed in until the mixture thickens. Part
vermouth swirled and flung. Some soured. Neighbors Sunday-

dressed. Anodized mailbox poles neon weed-eater line, the driveway

a mirror of heat, the pickup unloaded and reloaded, 2X12's
retracted. Specks

splattered onto the white coat and hat, a splash of triple
sec for succulence. Glazed and clay-fired

mugs imported, filled, sprinkle-
garnished, spoons dusted with what

has been cut and entered
through the window unseen.

The Tube

You said perhaps I should not
have brought it inside. Should not have
placed it between the couch and
the kelim. Like a cat returning
its kill. Then we are silent and we watch
for movement. No sunlight dark enough
for this. I scratch my other hand,
almost hear your breath about to speak.
When you speak about. Unsure as a bird
in the dining room. Lines on the face
as if something were squeezing
too tight. Perhaps the hottest day.
Sleepless in the unfilled hellos of
sleep. Nothing stirred. No arm or leg to
touch. White lines on the skin of
the hand dry as scales. I saw it
and I thought it might grow. Or else
something might because of it. We are
not speaking about the thick curled
string between us and that
end table, not touching it with our
eyes. Nothing is moving any more
than us. What of mine is moving when
I watch? Your throat lined and must
be hanging, a darkness colored if
lit, tiniest light, the pieces of
what you have consumed that
remain. Shall I remove it outside
where it might be flagged and
eaten? The sound will not return to
what has made it. Something thinning
underwater, blood, a ribbon.

The Doric Columns

Some of the trees have split, dead leaves fall into concave joints between branches forming nests. Some trees are as straight and thin as the legs of birds. There is

sand in the holes in the bark and the air smells like a silo. The trees are dead, or struggling, which means the leaves in wooden bowls have nestled still-life

for years. Light passes through them. They shake in the breeze as if connected to branches but will not fall again, collected in that tight spot in the crotch

of the trees that do not creak, do not create a concussion of sound like a woodpecker hunting for grubs in the sand in the bark. No rigid thump, no silence between, only

silence in the cornmeal air surrounding a circle of eight Doric columns tapered as a discovered bone, a femur drawn on a map of anatomy. The columns

surround no statue or living thing, just more of the green and tan grass that looks trodden, as if in perpetual early spring or late fall or else under the footsteps of

visitors, perhaps the ones who placed these columns to circle something now unseen except to them and the trees and the more trees beyond this ring, trees also

quiet, a rustle, an owl that turns its head completely around, impossible to see its eyes in its concentric eyes, its stare from each tan and black feather as if the owl were some

apparatus of the tree, some eye or tongue to translate the rattling stream into unveiling, to say although the fish are not yet spawning the stream is turning into itself,

a return it too must make. Something is breaking, although no one wants to say it. There is a light that is making its way to this place for the first time. When the owl

flies we do not see but understand the way a spider spreads silk to collect condensation, the way the owl spits up hair and bone and abandons it, skeletons of mice ending up

on a mantle surrounded by stones and photographs, while in adjacent rooms perpetual strangers thump nests into each other, swirl their legs backwards, hard maps of bones.

First Attempt at the Hill. Butte, 1869

Built a windlass. Bucket
half a whiskey keg. Every day

I put in the rounds of powder and blast,
rickety flame. Lung squeeze. Ether
my errorless resolve.

I do not know what day it is. No one visits me
but to laugh. You are my night now. I will not
let them down. They say my name is, drink
my whiskey and, this

is ours when released. You

deposit yourself in muscle, sponge. You
hardening the repeat of my slow hummed song.

Wish to live. Where the value of the lead
might increase unloaded as deep. You hold

my pick, shovel, moil. This unseen

soil showing returns. Palsy shake,
our bodies
decaying alchemical
into worth the dirt holds.
Stay with me.

Short sprint through sleep. Unused
shack, whiskey, water, medicine

when I cough.
Am making space for you.

Tea kettle left to boil
too long, how much ore
swallowed? My tongue
and teeth uniformed. Not enough
to smelter. Summer swamp.
What do you speak to this
skinny shaft when I sleep?
How deep does it wish to be?
I've said thin air but has
my prayer been wrong saint?
The first hole dug with antler,
candles no longer. I burn
faces in the flickering blackness
cupric, climb and descend.

Each tree I cut
I need but makes
your depth less.
Sharpening the
pick, each
hammer crash
echoing out of you
and know now you are
hardened. Sunlight
on me forms dirt
into rock. Are you
filling yourself
in? The days
I spend on the
surface are lost.

Would you betray me, air?
Wish to push the vein further down?
Would you thin, cause this cracked timber
to collapse, return me to placers?

What small steam against the sky.
What small sky through my fingers.

David's Painting

“Oh, the overflowing jumble, the displacements, the bloody sun, the deep sea filled with tilted sailboats. Theme upon theme, till you could lose yourself in it. To be human, to be ancient naïve and nothing, and yet happy. It is good to be so for once, as an exception, a holiday.” -Paul Klee Diaries II Entry 392

The light through the bathroom window onto David's painting looks like the light in the painting, shading sea beneath wooden red-sided boats tied by long ropes to anchor. And the voices outside become children off the edge of the canvas, running and

yelling along the painting's stone walkway, ripe peach colored, forming the edge of the sea, the same peach color as the man swimming between it and the tethered boats, around him concentric circles from smooth kicking, then smooth green water stretching

under the boats, under the rope and the single floating plant and out. It is warm because of the light, because blue insides of boats are shining. The swimmer is encased by warm green sea, the sunlight on his back and shoulders. It is good too that you are listening to this ancient

displacement of water, this happiness. But how can we know the meaning of the expressions on the two faces, the person standing and the one sitting in the nearest brightly colored boat? Their dark faces back-lit or else obscured so we are unable to see eyes and eye-brows, the curve of the mouth as they

observe the swimming man. An exception, on holiday? One has on a yellow shirt and the other white and maroon. Their dark faces faceless. The sun is warm and it is sinking behind Blue Mountain behind Kelly Island's thin aspens beginning to ripen, beginning their longer shine through the days.

And when I pull down the canvas and bring it to you, you ask about the faces, you recite while you sit up: *necks wound round and round with string; black, naked women with necks wound round and round with wire like the necks of light bulbs.*

I don't know where they keep their dog food. In the cabinet next to where we've been piling up the mail and the newspapers, where yesterday I read that Montana ranks third in the country in new arrivals. Bozeman predicts it will have a population of 200,000 soon the same

sandwich shops and coffee chains and I admit sometimes I want to key those windows, walking home late at night, wanting just enough of the unexpected to shake me, like having to ask a stranger at the station: *Pardon, hangi autobus Cappadocia gidecek.* I admit to not remembering the faces exactly, the face

of the deli guy who recommended the six year old gouda, a moustache, I think, a side part. Try the kunifez there, the best in Ankara. I had just had my picture taken by Bob while I crouched inside a giant clay pot from sometime B.C. that sat under an oak tree next to a marble statue with no head. Are these all we remember,

the photos and the paintings, the stories we tell so that others repeat them as their own? The two people standing in the boat look amused at the peach colored man swimming. Perhaps it is not as warm as I thought. Perhaps the man's arms are curled up to his chest and face to keep warm because he

had to swim in the green water no matter what the temperature. The two are watching him, relaxed. And the man is expressionless himself. He looks harmless and brave enough to swim next to the boats, an amusing transgression for anyone except those used to the comfort of consistency. *Merhaba, nasilsiniz?*

Merhaba nasilsiniz? Does it matter where we are? The pines are greening faster than the larches up the mountain, burnt match-sticks of trees remaining on the ridge from last summer when smoke pressed down on your valley, houses evacuated, houses sprayed with fire extinguishing foam and then gone. They stayed

with friends and waited for news of wind shifts, as now the citrus sun is darkening. There are strips of lavender behind boat-shaped clouds, strips of violet above those and the light blue is receding to the East and the sky appears flat, a plane below which shadows on dead grass lengthen. And disappear when the sun disappears.

A planet's steady reflection the brightest star before
the stars. And the light in the painting is darkening
too and the day there is disappearing below us at this exact
time. The weather is cooling, if only a little. The two people

leaving their boats for their dinners, the sea's surface cooled
by air. No one is swimming there beneath the cloudless
sky, the water darker now, closer to brown with short waves of
color like the young Blue Grosbeak stitched and labeled

on the hand towel on the hoop below the painting returned.
You continue on, saying maybe it is not Mexico or Honduras,
maybe Morocco or Egypt and what does that change? What
makes the water green then brown waded blue? Wherever he is,

I like the man swimming in the green sunlight in the water,
sunlight on faces on aspens on Clark Fork and magpie and
ferruginous hawk and taxi and rake and *I was saying it to stop
the sensation of falling off the round, turning world into*

*cold, blue-black space. But I felt: you are an I, you are an
Elizabeth, you are one of them.* You are the swimmer and
the two in the boat and the woman who makes a warm cove
out of her body and pigment and pigments combined and you are

the weight of the expressions unexpressed, the faces you leave
blank and the blank face you offer, the brushstrokes reformed by
new stroke as you take the light from windows and other
unexpected sources, an intruder into every aspen-lined path and every

blue-green sea into which you dive, where there is no longer any real
evidence of faith amongst us, alone, surrounded by what is the same as
us. When the landscape ends, no action small enough and it will
end forever. When the neighbors are evicted they will not return.

Voice and Worth

Bare as space
returned untrained.

So I trained it

into ice speed and released
calving squeaks.

And the frozen flew,

birds mistook it.

Heron around crystal
glittering. A siege

across sky
morning samed. No heat

to melt more smooth this
uncategorized flight.

Which part of me to amplify?

Everything then
was all it contained.

I made a low sound, a pluck

my legs needed to stay warm.

Born late, I relied on
directions use to the dark.

My open hand weighing
ashes, the click of a lock

opening, cool air cocooning bridges,
brass lever depressed.

The first was ice floating on
water. Poor squares made lighter

by slow drift. When I learned
light might be

captured and stored:
bits of ice released,

buoyed up from that mass, stored light

following the winding speed away.

I left the bridge, leaned over,

followed ice in the river slow,
and in that concentrated stare,

dark water over illuminated ice,

between, I was returned

to darkness, now a new absence,
silence. Go inside.

After

Unexpected figures appear between
branches. Not the couple

walking home across the wide
open park night shadows,

faces indistinguishable, fingernails

scratching fingers and the wide city
just behind the trees,

the moon not moonlight but

streetlight and distant, where strangers
vertical, chandelier the focused

wishing of this darkness.

Those haunted by multiples, frightened

by the quick movements unfigured wishes
make. Between branches from the corners of

eyes and then every enclosure. Remember
what the camera

says: the foreground is valued. The tall friend not

the tallest, the tannest says summer or absence
of flash. Say this look is captured

by one projected light,
what paces behind the photograph,

what fog of the articulated
touch or eye-catch? Your room, your telephone,

its voice taillights past.
A red line, an acceleration,

a corner, the just disappeared
owl-scratching distance.

Lantern in Barium

Your back muscles reeds
between blades. I push away
and they snap loosened,

fibrous. Your skin pools silver thick. If I could
reach in against, through
shine covered would my hand realign? Your ribs separate

into geometric progressions in light,
a vein in your dragonfly skidder. The water not moving
except in sound

or something flapping
like current. A fitted
sheet, tarp ripped almost loose. Been weeks

since I've seen
anything but yellow
on black. Everything not pushed into

you. The green on silver. Fingers scrape
toward return. Luster a reflection too
much light makes, luster's only smoothed appearance.

I hang the light on a hook.
I know so many things I am willing to give up on. I am
prepared to dismiss every elastic, but I cannot crawl through

your eyelids' red web to be admitted as boneless and
spun. I do not want to be shown undersides,
rust issuing through seasonal tides.

If you see maple sky unsticking in strands do you
want the transformation covered in ice and smoking?
When cataracts cloud me in, first the leaves

then push the windows up, paint-seal split.
Harmony the opening. And when I disappear
completely, rally, the pupil is immense.

The Map

Smoke or breath in the eye, curved as earth
hands their mouths

pull slow a chimney sends
blue is only worth the eyeing
into
dry black sky
alive

the map draws a line

square lights the spotted gray horse
rectangular lights disappearing into fog the map is

growing.

Flame in the fist is the butane

a woman waiting smoke
rising the fire over Coeur D'Alene
sunset refracted in mist

from mouthed
hands
deep in the speed on the periphery
pockets the blinking of the cornfield rows

moves to one side then

back and her spot the geese escape the ditch

on the map between the road
and the winter tree a hand in an x-ray
shifting

“The Starving Bed” is for Nathan Bartel.

“Release” is in memory of Eric Dolphy. It is for Nick Macri.

“We Land” quotes twice from Sarah Manguso and once from Carl Sandburg.

The Neruda sequence owes its genesis to Addie Palin.

[“If I Have Died...”] is for my Grandpa Gehring.

“The Doric Columns” owes much to Briget Pegeen Kelly.

“First Attempt at the Hill” contains information and language from the book Copper Camp, Riverbend Publishing.

“David’s Painting” is based on a painting by David Wilson. It is indebted to Casey Charles and David Wilson. It contains lines from Bishop’s “In the Waiting Room.” It is for Laura.

“Lantern in Barium” is for Brian Watson

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