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Self-Portrait Ending with the Last Flight of the Body

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Montesano: Self-Portrait Ending with the Last Flight of the Body

SELF-PORTRAIT ENDING WITH THE LAST FLIGHT OF THE BODY Keith Montesano

Nothing living smothered in the rolled hay bales: nothing
but the sweat I can't feel, back halfway off the tracks and motionless
among weeds. I can't feel my eyes but know they're moving, the body's
shot for blood roiling my veins, to keep the frost thawed
into a thin pool around me, my eyes clamoring for white light,
the swell of ambulance, a mouth speaking: *Don't move him, blacked out—*

and I respect these neighbors, though I wonder if I was drowning
would they pull me out, dive into the ravine, frightening the wrens
gliding its frozen edges, and if they know why summer's heat
broke from this sudden winter, impeding the stalled flights
of the stalled birds' songs. Now the music: string-swell and downpour
of timpani heartbeats through the soft skin of my temple:

music of symphonies, traveling through Greece: our eyes toward ruins
in Delphi, jokes of our bodies flying off cliffs, the heart attack
crippling your mother before you wailed in the Aegean, and the hail
shrouding us the day we fell in love . . . it's all blurring together. *My dove—*
how you wished I'd call you those names: *candescence, my blaze . . . soar
for me past weeds and the boxcars, past the burned, skeletal remains of houses*

into the singe of my skin. I'm saying this now under the last setting sun
hoping you hear me. Remember my dream of fallen angels in mansions
left to rot in the middle of fields? How they wished for simple climbs
toward higher rooms: up winding marble staircases, yearning to run a hand
through a lover's hair? But only phosphorescence: forsaken lives
in empty rooms. Now my motorcycle whirring near me turns to snow

drifting down on your lashes, while your body turns to ash after rain
and the news of my death. I won't see the man after me, or a half moon
with the paleness of your neck, the lake house and streams from fireworks,
salt spray in our eyes, the split-second whip of sand dune

assaulting our skin like wounds never closing, or one of us with cancer
pining for the other our entire lives. But unlike those angels, I will rise

to call you, crawl from my skin in this pure form of ascension:
graze your sweat by the curtain-flutter of an open window, a chill of ice
in your bones on the coldest winter, and catch you as you're fainting
from the sickness I can't fix, eyes I dream of as I die, with a dusk
burnishing itself for the end of my world: the empty house
without our bed, her crib, the pungency of our singular oils.