

## Louisiana iris

A purple choir sprouts up from the mud along the banks of the bayou,  
leaning towards the sun like worshippers, or lovers, or both.

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*... , ... , morning moon, touch me*

the way feathery raindrops touch the surface of the bayou

—penetrating?—no, absorbed into water-nirvana,  
the raindrophood of the individual

memorialized in the ripple alone, that after a centimeter's expansion  
chances upon the wake of another drop

—and another—and another—gracefully losing themselves  
to the social distortions of their cloudfallen neighbors,

like ants in an orgy or teens in a mosh pit. The fire ants were merciless  
that day we tromped barefoot through a rainsoaked field

and danced in the raging heat of thirty-foot tall pyres  
—a burning that echoed for weeks in the red thorns on my itching feet

and echoes till now at the base of my sternum in moments  
when the memoryreel plays back your warmly-flickering smile.

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The sky blued then greyed nearly to the shade of the spindling beards  
on the branches, swaying on a westward wind toward some other coast.

The orange-tipped geese, the green-capped ducks, the snowy egrets  
and the sky-toned ripples in the water:

these, your descendants in the lineage of my eye's truest comforts.  
But chronology is nothing now. The timeline of these six months past

has collapsed into the earth like a sinkhole in the heart  
of an untame jungle, green parrots and ceiba trees

sorted in some self-similar chaos that calendar weeks can't hold  
in their harsh gridlines. Each passing day like each fiber

of Spanish moss, *Tillandsia usneoides*, branching from ancestral fibers  
that branch from earlier days that branch from the limbs

of a live oak tree that has lived through thirty generations  
of humankind. Do you remember Palenque?

The red queen in the mercurial sarcophagus  
and sharing her death chamber, an 11 year old boy, a woman

30 years young, bound in servitude in life and death and death  
and life everlasting but when the red queen dies the matriarchy

dies with her. Her son ascends the throne. His daughter does not.  
Sequence is nothing now. Time spirals inward

like a snail shell found on the shore of the bayou where I picked  
blackberries for the pie I laid on your doorstep

a week after your birthday had come and gone.  
Time spills and pools into cracks in the sidewalk

like cheap beer, Pabst tall boys falling from our yielding grips  
in the moment we first kissed in the moment after you said

we could never be and pressed your forehead into my collar bone  
and cried.

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I learned your topography, you learned mine and our sweat mingled  
like old friends or new lovers or turbulent waters surging

between two grassy banks. They say turbulence  
is nature's greatest mystery, illumined as visibly by Van Gogh's madness

as Mandelbrot's atlas of the Julia set. *And oh, the flowering feeling  
just to know somehow you are near, the slowly souring feeling*

*that any second you may suddenly—*  
too suddenly—your smile would wilt into a grey despair

and even as I lay in bed pressed against you, a crack would form  
in the earth between us and to a faraway continent you'd drift.

The ocean rose up in your eyes, a fear of the person you saw  
in the mirrorglass shards of our shared memories,

the glare of some innocence together we lost. And his face.  
You saw him looking back at you through my gaze,

sad and betrayed and unsurprised. In my irises you read  
a spotted-blue question: when you left him,

had you abandoned yourself? Where was that time-stamped node  
when you looked down two forking one-ways in an untame city,

down one you saw bliss and agony and down the other, bliss  
and agony, and you dropped your beer and kissed me,

tears pooling into the cracks beneath your eye sockets—"I'm fucked"—  
then kissed me. Joy-rockets and sinking rocks of guilt,

a tangling of the wires: our love shared its womb  
with a poison twin. Our love is a fertile ghost.

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I never told you about my shapeshifting hermaphrodite muse.  
She came to me in college when I was reading the greeks and though

he was but a fig leaf of my imagination, a shrugging faith spun her  
into a corporeal spirit, stitched him together from fibers of dreams

to fill the void at an atheist's alter. Maybe I always needed someone to devote to.  
May be it's too easy to mistake beauty for truth. You told me once

you hardly recognize yourself in my songs, that I sculpted  
your memory into a myth. It was the day before the night I first accepted

that your heart's whispers weren't a perfect echo of my own.  
That night whose only surviving echoes are those stillborn words

trilling from your lips, those wire-barbed words brushed in a soft light  
in my living room in the old house by Bayou St. John. You told me,

I don't love you, rewind, I don't love you, rewind, I don't feel it anymore  
when we kiss fast forward and we're standing outside my car in downtown LA.

You're about to walk away and it will be the last time I ever see you.  
You say...said...something I can't remember anymore. A torn-out page.

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Now the sky has turned hot and blue and the earth has circled the sun.  
The irises are in bloom again. The sky is wet and blue.

It's only part true what they say about absence. Fondness turns  
to desperation. Desperation to numbness. Numbness

to forgetting. You're standing under a waterfall wearing a swimsuit  
the color of your eyes. You're snorkeling beside the fin of a whale shark.

You're writing poetry on the circuitry of a lightning bolt. You're musing  
on how a bike wheel spinning on its side might be used

to measure the wind. You're warbling Bulgarian angel songs  
in old cathedrals and abandoned powerplants. You're barking

drunken sailor shanties from the bow of a canoe. You are as you were.  
It's been three years since I wrote the first line of this poem.

I've seen the seasons blur past like a freeway median and you've done  
what we're all designed to do: you've forgotten. In your cells

floats a record of every timeless second we spun, but your heart  
has forgotten me. And here I am, pricking at the scar tissue,

rebellious against the fog. There was a time when I saw your absence  
in every mirror, when every thought of you burned like dead leaves

and my only path to extinguishment was to crystallize our story  
into a stone, a museum relic I can hold in my hand

and turn and view from every angle, looking for a streak of truth.  
Truth is, this album was never about you or me or us or truth.

Just that stone, green and translucent like your irises, full-blooded  
with branching veins of sunlight. It's been four years since I wrote

the first line of this poem. It's time to be done with it. The world's  
changing faster than satellites in orbit and every fresh headline

is a punch to the ribs. Bloodstains are blooming like roses on the asphalt  
and I'm still writing a poem named after a flower. It's time

to let the past decay. Let the carcass feed the forest floor.  
Truth is you don't sing my thoughts so often anymore.

Your arc flash tore me open to the heart's potential energies,  
and as the wreckage cleared, I began to detect love's spectral frequencies

more frequently in the hearts of others, and I learned that love and lightning  
are not entirely the same thing. I've accepted that your life and mine

are traveling along two inconsonant arcs. My core has cooled  
to a quiet warmth in the moments when my memory replays

that day you sang in the marigny opera house and I sat three rows  
behind the lover you'd yet to leave. Back when our first kiss

was only an echo of the future. Your last notes rang,  
I slipped out the back and as fast as a bike's black rubber could shift me

I arrived at the banks of Bayou St. John. The Louisiana irises  
were just beginning to bloom. Through flooded eyes I listened

to them sing the earliest movements in their symphony to the sun.  
I returned to the irises every afternoon for two weeks

and transposed their violet-hued harmonies into black-tinted verses  
pulsing with your name. Now that four and a half years have past,

all that remains from that first draft are the first line and the last.  
It began with a chorus of flowers and it ended in a charcoal sketch

of the moment that our moment will fade from my heart's memory:  
A translucent body of a man withers into itself in a sunny window's light,

his bones transfigured by decades of chaotic motion, rocking gently on the waves  
of an old oak rocking chair, reliving daydreams too ancient

to distinguish from days.