

The Depopulate

1

The nesting dove's blasé chirr
was too much
like the distant dawn
sirens and the power surges
continued. Our love
was an open window
before winter was
over, a gape-mouthed window
through which domelike air
and dentist's drilling drifted.
We were the karaoke, kids
and soundtracks in all the poems.
All the poems were cute.
File drawers of forgotten drafts
curled on themselves, perfect
somniaambulisms,
but we could not
unlock them.
Recurringly, nestingly,
we dreamed
we borrowed each others'
pigeon people masks
once we had
chiseled riddles
into boulders
on the mountains
with our names.
Then oh those names.

Our days were too many words,
and our nights like tail lights
spearing back at us
through every slow inch of the sluicing
highway. Every other traveler
peered through the wash
to make out the mileage markers,
But in our cab
what could be swallowed
what could be smeared,
what could be sparked
was. As far as it could
be trusted, the world revealed
its intentions instantly
or the suspense
was a too long a bus ride
of withdrawal symptoms.
Jetties gasped, preserved,
as waves' pummeling persevered.
We hobbled to shape
and to shore, flashed,
and were freed from
making much of great distances,
which anyways always devoured
disturbingly as we approached.
The topologists' types
of structures numbered just two
and the bulk of all else
was mere variation.
The pages turned crisply,
the chatter the hum
ate up.

The season had its fly hanging open.
The shadows clung to the leaves
like the picnic we had planned
and writhed on the ground
like the perwalk we had come to know.
Between these, we walked
in a contentment so complete
God couldn't tell
which of us was losing out.
You gave me a book of opposites,
but the opposite of opposite
gaped, a plastic mirror glued to the page.
Millennia passed. So, too, life itself.
Thinking became increasingly common
that viewed humans as systems
through which information flowed.
The detritus dancing in the light
swayed while the world cut
its engines, and the only sounds
the apparatuses attached
to each person emitted.
The days held out
their incomplete illuminations
as though they were more
than receding rows of aluminum sheds.
We took refuge in the old words,
those fluted pillars
now scattered like columns
of machine-chewed pennies
after a poker game,
saying we were praying,
taking breaths, giving none.

The steady rain did more
than fall, and often
the diversity of living things
crashed like a drawer full
of old keys. Vapors
labored, liquids squished,
rug burn marked rebirths.
We loved so much so hard,
that time's blur took form
in our vacation photos,
the clock's continuity
and the cruelty of the creator
weathered into the towers' bricks,
such identical strata dispiriting
us independently and in total.
The easiest way to look busy
was to be busy, and we were
beside ourselves. No obligations,
no intimations, but lots of applications.
Surprise and satisfaction
came in waves, ever
and never concurrently.
Waters went slack
twice a day still.
Rain evaporated
before it reached earth.
As we slept, only instruments
could detect a life.

When the weather wearied,
we abandoned our encampments
for the panoramic solarium's
verisimilitude and canned tunes.
The wintered flags flagged,
flaccid even in the cold wind.
Our interminable families,
recipients of so many
noncommittal postcards,
sat in the cafés with their stories
rubber-banded together,
waiting in their pledge
drive promotional gear
for a public radio host's ghost.
Our nanas enumerated
the worst things
like the killer bees
Cousin Karen said attacked her
and Cousin John, stinging
even through their eyelids
though God's mercy saved them
from His assassination attempt.
We rolled our eyes,
knowing the worst things
were really the writers
who would reference the bees
so reverently.
Everything lifted our cackles
in those patsy and pariah days
as soon as it was hoisted
to the lewd dais of being
in the world,
or so it seemed.

We made a circle
to go into to see
how we would do.
When our veins finally dilated
the film ran out.
Lakes bore light
and horizons respired,
but the death
of superstition
left us petrified.
Sky-smiths hammered masks
for suns who flew
too high and drowned,
but our sun planned to peter out.
Once sleep relinquished us,
our rooms fit like dead skin.
Our thoughts plunked and ripples
shimmied our skiff toward hungry seas.
Or thoughts were guardrails
striped with paint scrapes and
glittering with scattered plastics
and bits of beveled lenses.
All the antennae,
even the great suicide
magnets, went dark.
Surgeries lost sustain.
Voided, we scratched
Let Us Come Home
into trees and transoms
until we waned,
our story arc typical
of the blossoming
of every shroud in a pyre.

What a slapstick gem
to have lived.
The building was not quite
demolished when we entered it.
Also, we were not altogether crushed
when the ceiling, floor, and staircase
collapsed. Then we had one friend
who made an art form
of remembering us
to everyone
as two whose passions
perished that day.
One more blank alley
wall had a building
projected onto it.
Our public arguments
were like a metaphor
for dune mapping,
a slurry swirl of words,
a glinting spectacle,
a pantomime of blame.
Our revisions and refrains,
those sorely circled blocks,
held us, at least, in time.

When we discovered
the tomb
we imagined that
the music
the ten maidens
made, entombed
alive, waiting
for the air to change,
surrounding
their dead queen,
changed the air,
as all music does,
physically,
but wondered
whisperingly
to what conclusion
the shuddering
tones brimmed:
on a meaningful unison
or an addled, drowsy fade.
An ambitious silence
gathered
between us
as it must have
between them,
uninspiring each
one by one,
one by one by one,
one by one by one by one,
till one, holding a note,
a desiccated pitch,
an ireful intention,
disordered mind
through the last
measure
after the last.

Day circled night
until they gobbled
up our globe,
promising to eclipse
the obvious, but catching cliché.
We were everything
he was and of which
she was made,
both narcotically distracting,
and it was pure seduction
to attend his sighs,
an unearthing to witness
her sobs. We bathed,
spent galaxies clustered
in soap scum and humdrum.
The brightening
we thought revealed
the original heart
was stolen, we were sure,
from our own campfire.
We lived well.
We paled
with the very thought
of ourselves while
they who played us
in the reenactments
were shadowy, crystal
necklace folk.
Any game got strange.
Wind caught paper,
paper caught wind,
but soon let
each other go again.

There there
were too many ways
to begin. To begin,
all roads led into one:
indecipherable, impassible.
Fragmentation was the passion
of the era, but we got loops and knots.
Registration was free and easy,
safe and secure, but little more.
A firework sizzled in erotic abandon
and the cascade exposed
even the cynics as us.
When we held the moment,
it flicked about like a cricket
trapped in our cupped hands.
There was only one story:
when the matter became,
became conscious,
undressed itself, and laughed that
it would cease to be.
Whether this was a setup
or a punchline depressives debated.
Whatever it was,
it had to be restarted
every few miles.
So, with only Volume One
of the Great Ideas –
Angel to Love – to go on
we set the domino
sculpture in motion
on the sandy cement floor
of the artist's private library
now a museum, shrine even
in the desert town
we had been human cargo
in the buggy rigs
to get to
for so long.
So long was so long.