

ROAR

A good party is a fishbowl
on the high shelf. Hungry
tom cat pacing the pine floor below.

You have to remember to open your eyes. Have to remember the walls
are still there. You can use the glass
to pull the pruning tips of your
fingers tight again.

This room is a stock pot. Hear the clicking
clicking, clicking. The whoosh.
Everything is warm. The air hangs on our shoulders. Presses. Flattens. Kneads.
Relax. Relax.

Everyone here is blush, & bashful. Everyone is gilded paper dolls
skin stretched thin by
lapis & opal & emeralds. Everyone's a satin teddy bear. Bedroom tearstained—mommy sutures
on the foot. Across the throat.
Right down their bellies.

It's too hot here—too hot.
Everyone here is gorgeous
no one here is ok. The air thickens, sour smoke
& pheromones
fill lungs like sweatshirt cotton,
silent smiles fall to the floor.

The room is a barbecue pit—smoked thighs,
spare ribs, briskets, bellies, wings. Meat.
Are you the herb or the brine? The acid or the incisors? Gristle & tendon & bloodline.

Everyone here is small plate
shareable. Full of dirty, double dipped, quick
piss—unwashed finger marks. Everyone here tastes like unbrushed teeth &
cowboy killer mourning breath.
Everyone here is gorgeous.
& no one is ok.

AUBADE FROM THE COAST

I read once that time & gravity have
an inverse relationship. Don't confuse
this for magnetism. The 2 sides of every coin
are opposites. Forever.

But it makes sense that when you compress
The calcium & marrow &
muscles of your fingers into a fist--the daylight
goes skittering behind the horizon.
Clock hands chase their tails. It's almost cute.

But I guess that's what makes the butterfly
beautiful. In the end, it ends. There's no
returning to the warm gooey center
of its chrysalis. There are limits to milkweed
& honeysuckle.

But, I'm not saying this is a cocoon, or that I
am in any way a king. I'm saying I like
the light & the heat--the ghost story in me
feels at home by your campfire.

But when I look in the mirror I see a lighthouse.
& it's always raining.
& I lose track of which way the tides are
going. I just sit here with the rocks
& the rotting rib cages
of shipwrecks, singing my stupid little song,
stay away stay away stay away

But when the film comes back from the
darkroom. Those same fingers, clenched fist
from before,
are a crab claw--clamped on the top bulb
of an hourglass. Did I tell you how I read about
time & gravity being the opposites that don't attract?

But what if I'm strong enough to break this glass--
spill a million galaxies worth of seconds
across the ground and make a beach right
here?

AUBADE IN THE MIST ENDING IN A PRACTICAL LESSON ON THE SURFACE TENSION OF
WATER

After Hanif Abdurraqib

There's a rule in stories that says, if you
put a gun on the table in the beginning--it
has to go off before the end. Here,
we can start in the middle. In this ramshackle house they call friends.

The first rule of a footrace--take off running after
the gun goes off. This is that middle
of the pint melodrama, where they try to convince you every ending is a
beautiful beginning. The last sentence closed
with a period.
The next beginning with illuminated filigree, open & hungry
like a venus flytrap.

I didn't think you'd run so fast. Never thought I'd taste
the dust kicked up in your wake & wish
for the texture of sludge clogging my throat. You know,
with enough mud & sun & time
I can make bricks?

& those bricks
will build a house that I will call me. While the person
frying eggs in the kitchen, isn't you.
I'll take a walk along the beach.

Do you want to know what kind of gun was on the table?
It's small & cold & fits
in almost any pocket. It can shoot 5 times before
giving out. It's never killed a man.

I point it at the sun. I count to 5.
There is no coughing. No thunder clouds. The puffins stay in their nests.

Instead, I skip a stone into the tideline. It
takes off like a flying saucer & I
turn before the crash landing.
Did it sound like a gunshot,
to you?

LITANY OF THE BEST WAYS TO BE OK WITH EVERYTHING

After Jamaal May

Look--what's this in my hand? Playing card
ace of clubs. Shed snakeskin--broken
condom, book of matches. It's empty now. See
what it says here? *I wish I knew you
before
you ripened.*

Fold it over.
Now it says:
Can you tell me how it feels to be a flower?

Fold it again, pop of black powder spark &
whisper of smoke, it's
gone now.

Once upon a time, I met someone who said
she should have been born
an ocean. Said, she was sick of the
ash & soot in her feathers. Sick of the
stale air up here, sick of the greasy showers, sick
of the cold
eggs & potatoes & onions.

Imagine, swallowing a
star
every night for dinner.
Giving it back to the world every morning. I told her

in a past life I was veal.
Served as sweetbreads to monsters with green skin
& no mouths. In a past life I needed to be
deep fried to be enjoyed. In a past life I fell from the branch, tart &
ready to be reduced. To be compote.

Look--what's this behind your ear? Gummy
bear, piece of candy
cherry cough drop. The garnish at the
bottom of your cocktail.

Once upon a time, in a past life,
I would tie
myself into knots. Thinking there's something
settling about sailboats on a smooth ocean
at sunset; & something
sexy about a stem tied between
your teeth.

WATER MOCCASIN

After Silas Denver Melvin

The first time I walked on water
each step
felt like building a sandcastle
on a slack tide—there's a full moon tonight.

That is to say I'm sitting here in
a litter box packing clumps of
ammonia & cat shit into a
cracked hourglass. That is to
say—this too can't last. Did you

hear the one about the old man &
his bologna sandwiches? Sat at the kitchen table, chatting to his potato chips, side
of pasta salad. He says, *this too
can't last*. A boy sits at a small bent legged
card table, he giggles, he

rattles his pockets. He asks his bologna
sandwich, *do you have
the time?* That is to say, a boy
makes himself into a rattlesnake. Turns
every hourglass on its side, & laughs.

That
is to say, a boy
makes a sand castle on
a slack tide, under a full moon, counts the seconds in his pockets &
thinks to himself, I
can make miracles.