

The stone is flat

You rub it like it were a discarded
scab of clay we'd found—from off this twirling
rock, but you are on the the rim of what is
known by touch when you mouth
the artful words of infants and then vanish
into that intestinal surf from which
all God's dreams will sprout first
as translucent fingers, then branch off into
thousands upon ten thousand hard-bodied
chittering crabs, each one with its face turned
inside—that is proteins unwound while scurrying
across the damp sand, or blossom into
a flood of same-bodied stalks that all they do is
eat up light and dirt and water and pollinate
messily with their many garish skins. Then
our tongues grow fat and we uproot
ourselves to stand like slobs play-acting, or
to vanish in the morning ice of a million years
ago or at the bottom of a Jack and Coke, for I am
drinking yesterday's Coke from a plastic bottle
pinched between my shaking fingers—and thinking of
my students—and Disney—and the 1950's—and the
end of America, and these names are like numbers
in an equation that starts and ends with nothing.

Where we came from still surrounds us—
where we're going is also this
place—and we're working to fill in all the
space between with our trash, while you
rub it like it were blood we'd found, but what
you're rubbing is not a thing. It's
a people, and who you are is not a
person, but a place within a place. What
happens when you leave?

The stone is flat.

The forbidden city

There will come a day when my wife and I
will be stripping the muscle from off a lamb's pliant
shank, but for right now the wall is white and
the air is white with smoke from the nearby chemical
factories, and all the trees are dead here, and—

you're sitting under a bare bulb eating
eggs while thinking literally nothing while
somewhere it's five years earlier and an
entire species acts as a single
symphonic entity. A functional
tapestry of colorful bodies, and

last month, you coughed
bent over, your hands on your
knees, till you'd vomited up all the yellow
phlegm you'd swallowed through your sleeping
hours and then the face in the mirror with its
scalp clearly visible through the thinning hair, and then

you put down what's left of your unfinished eggs, and—

it was then that you realized it's the people you've known
who are the ones you've failed. It is them
who are lost and you who've lost them in
among the furniture of your past. You walked
into rooms as if these were the rooms
of strangers, and you looked into
doorways that lead only to other doors and

past herds of stones and down to where
the children wake backwards into their fingers—
leaving ganglia unhoused to dwindle into
tiny balls. Their mouths gone small and thin, and
up above, beyond the twisting breeze, you could see
him there on the building's edge, like a hanging
doll and saying, *Here I am my brother here I am,*

and what you missed had to do with our hands
clenched in the dark, a stupid grin, and her hair-swaddled
face, but also that it'll always be two people, and that
there are two people is the tragedy, but sometimes
these two people are looking at each other, and
sometimes these two people are in the same body
at different times—in the sleep that
ties these five years together, a multitude have
invaded the uneven floors
of your dreams with their many angled hands
and what were three steps now extends round the

earth's curvature in lines and through
plains full of tiny cartoon foes sloshing
through chow in the dark, and you
are the scrawniest one and listening in
by yellow flagging writhes unconsciously
at the camp's edge while you work to make it
to that kid with the beard in his teeth over
there don't you see how he's
shrinking can't you see that—

and your words fly from off
your lips and at passing shapes while
your legs work thoughtlessly round and through themselves and
connect to the invisible wall contains all possible
actions through an endless interweaving of knots
while all the while you can see him, only
he's not himself, and you cry he
is not himself, but now

you're awake again and still tucked away
in China rather than here with me or the tourist
you were meant to be, who looks through the
trailer's open window while urinating, past
the cyprus bough, and at the Forbidden
City—who are always in search of something innocent
to defile with your spume of words—who once spent an
evening watching bright green bodies
with their faces on the inside as they ran
past the heart-shaped leaves of plants.

These insect species are just one among the many
other creatures peaking out from behind the curtains
that frame the theater of my fantasy in this suburb of
Na-koja-abad. These pairs of royal citizens will
embrace incestuously once within the confines
of the infinitely expanding rear seating
compartment of my brain. For these are the friendliest of
amphibians, and the mud on my cheeks
as I grin in my desperate way back at
the camera is full of them, when it should be
their soft feet are experimenting with the back
of my hand, and that I've released the
arrow in my thoughts, but where is it?

Sounds while walking home

A transistor radio hangs from one of these branches
are a more egalitarian candelabra than the Tree of Life
—through which can be heard Chinese opera while
a man hammers a post with soft precision into
the ground, and the rooster on the street above me
and to my left is very insistent. The incline between
us is made up of many crooked in-turning steps and
gardens of elaborate leaf mosaics threaded with white
pollution and various knee-high concrete
cylinder walls, while I pad across this
blank page of ground in the dark

Every alley I pass is full of something. From
floodlights to bamboo scaffolding to living things
playing volleyball, but in my home it'll be smoke,
I'll be drunk and still wearing the blood-red
oxford I'm required to wear

The path's also dotted with chirps and broken globes
of head-sized light, and behind me is laughter and the
school where I work, as well as the contents of the universe, arts
and sciences incoherently jumbled in a madly elaborate
series of rooms, atria, and divisions. To the right are
kitchens and her cream-colored skirt and aluminum
this and plastic that, but it was her back I saw at top speed
earlier, or she was speaking in rapid-fire mandarin while I
rolled my eyes, crouched in the river and pretended, but now
the bugs are everywhere, and an irradiating brain fills the sky

There will come a day when I'll be sitting in a hotel
room in Oregon and writing this while my two
pineal eyes are looking at themselves through the mirror
of the past—or do you find my faith in the many-
dimensional nature of humankind to be a contrived fallacy

Then I'm middle-aged and asleep on someone else's floor or
entrails inside the same blank page. I will have found
a way out by then, because I don't want to be anywhere at all
while the path we're on swerves magically at and back
through days that once were done—and reaches up
to hands we thought were gone—but all you and I see is
straight ahead with upset stomachs and into our future
happiness—that months will turn to years after I
have passed the metal tray of rice by the front door, climbed
the stairs to my apartment and shut myself in
to wait for this cyclical calender to shift
to fit this elaborate subterfuge

That what we know is not

That what sits behind my smile is
still another skin entwined in hair that
hides another skin within and another
skin. Until we've made so many leaves
of ourselves that our hands are not our
hands, and our lips're strung across
the constellations, but I can't look
at this creature any longer because
my skull is no punctured gem

So instead I act badly—weeping
into the cavity of my palm, and act
as if I am better than everyone else

Oh, human form divine

I'm offended by the immaculate clothes of others
and their noble goals. People who have yet to search
out below the surface of the fifth wall between
me and the undulating shroud
of critters we call home

What I want is instead to exist in
an impossible place and eat up
all the other smaller impossible places

For this thread of sound I'm
speaking is like a door to my
favorite partial truths. A tiny
room and full of tiny things—like
half a word and ingrown snails curling
further back upon themselves to work in and
through these lobes that lead us round
and out into the unreal spaces and on
and past this atmosphere until I am an
individual speck in the blinding dark. But
then this silence echoes other sounds and
there is a crack in the apparatus, and
I am back—in that tiny room
and its many partial truths

What we know is not so brutal when found asleep
in its bed of mist and quilt of mounted vegetation
but when it wakes perhaps to
eat me up, who will I be then

Anatomically touching

We breathe strings of hopeful words
will hold our hands down to
the bottom of their hole. Perhaps

someday one could thread its
thought within the sparrow, but only
as a pretty sound means angles and
the habit of flying when many of
you think of this as something functions
like a cog, as opposed to the speaking friend
it was in the foolishly naïve
fairytales of the past, its head

unbuttoned and eyes twinkling
dumb—quick to work through the
fingers of the wind with a handful
of other sparrows. But I
wasn't talking about sparrows. I was

talking about anxieties made tight
under the covers, to then be spun into
something like an electric clot you unravel
in the night—a witchcraft of thumping legs
clenched in the face of this language of
vowels, and the sort of thing shows us as the
unfinished beasts we are as we twist together
selfishly. Our bodies trail off into the surrounding
shadows and our teeth smell. Or when you shut

your eyes because there are many
layers of eyes on top your own, and she's
leaving you again, and your face is full of
orifices, and it's already years later, and you've
already given up on promises you never said
out loud. And she's in the doorway with a
damp smile, because I gave nothing and would
take nothing in return, for my thoughts

will only flower into shapes once you've vanished
into sleep, and your hopes will erupt into a
piteous sound after I have left your well-manicured
home, except for that this man who walks away is just
an ass who hugs his head in the shower, and the words
that fueled his escape have now hidden in the trees

Once I ignored a sparrow as it made its way up my
arm chirping and later the thing went stiff in a box