

“The Magnitude of Ants” & Other Poems

The Magnitude of Ants	2
Tinder	3
Behind Closed Doors	5
The Approaching Curve	7
Point Zero	8
Transit	10

The Magnitude of Ants

The ant bleeds sunlight
onto my fingers
trembling like a person
when honest or cracked.

I had never seen gold
unspool from a carapace,
pool the concrete in fire.
Had to bend, touch
the honey-hot blood
jet-trail of a blind
sneaker whistling away,
Formicidae homicide
legacy, sole and
concrete atoms bonding
like nuclear fusion
Nature caught
in human gravity
lover's fission, a crosshair
fabled to fade into Earth's
sidewalk memory

until I arrived
the bard
witness bearer
to an atrocity so small
Richter won't
record it.

The skin melts off my hands.
Earth releases raindrops
in reverence.

Far away, the sneaker steps
on a second ant, smiling.

Tinder

A rectangular star in a dark room
smudged with thumbprints
flickers from one fake smile to the next.
Professional con-artists filter out insecurities
with right angles and dirty mirrors.

Misspelled one-liners
and cereal box philosophies
form grains of sand in a vast digital desert
where thirst beats down
from a sun of stupidity.

Reality is a rare oasis,
and intelligence is the last drop of water
dripping from a scorched canteen.
Connections blink across city blocks
neurons firing in a dog's brain.

Throngs of them gather in beer-soaked
rooms after hour waits,
wordless words squiggling out
from droning mouths.
Loud music roars, compensating

for silent thoughts, a nicotine fog
enshrouding bland personalities.
All of it serves one singular purpose
so devoid of meaning
it could be us.

Some of them speak without speaking
laugh without laughing,
pretending to love.
It leads them to sunken mattresses worn with years of searching
where disappointment sighs with every frantic creak of the bed frame.

Fucking leaves so little room for creation
unless it's procreation.
May as well hit 'pass' on a search for meaning
or maybe just pass it down
to the next generation of fuckers.

Behind Closed Doors

Stepping off the yellow bus,
 seeing the house snarl between two picket fences,
 wrinkles us beyond our size-six sneakers.
 We don't want the sidewalk to end,
 count our steps to the porridge bowl.
 sunlight shivers behind fingered blinds
 the exposed shelter of our lives.

We push through the plasterboard portal,
 enter the monster's mouth, brace for
 impact, but the empty rooms hold their breath,
 like the wolf watching Blood
 skip past the daisies.

At four, the shadows gather, summoned
 by TV mutters, afternoon cartoon chants.
 At five, we stuff snacks in bedroom cracks,
 Cheetos and soda become
 chalk, holy water, a crucifix,
 yet the car always crawls up the driveway.

In armored cafeterias, our friends tell of camping.
 Road trips in cars perfumed with quiet comfort,
 calm voices, whole fam-

-ilies, while we remember
 staring at the guard rail, wanting to
 punch through. Soar to a better silence
 than our weekends.

We learn early that closets contain no
Baba yaga.
 Demons don't lurk under beds,
 they sew on human faces,
 dance before Sunday football games.

When we see the devil clenched in their fingers,
 unvalving a glass of tap water becomes a sacrifice,
 dehydration a long-lost rapture.

Something curls in our stomach.
 We creep by like tiny prisoners, hoping not to be

noticed. We always are: their blue eyes blacken,
their wrinkled mouths cock cannonballs
lubricated with whiskey, trauma-dipped
words, fists, late-night claws slipped under

pajamas batter our fairy-tale castles wobbling
flimsily behind bedroom doors, shouting, and

years. The wolves were always inside, blowing
at the ramparts.

Somehow, it's worse when they howl at each other:
We would rather the storm dismantle our frail
sandcastles, knew

we could always start over.

When we are born anew,
knowledge saves us from summoning old sin:
We keep our throats parched, don't roar, wrap
ourselves in rain-proof coats; we paint the
walls yellow, cushion the guardrails with
calm.

Yet even now, when we have built better castles,
Fortified them with care and guidance
counselors, something tightens in us when we
see our children stepping off the bus,
looking toward home.

The Approaching Curve

On the drive to Lake Havasu a boy's mother buys
 six beer bottles at the gas station, guzzles them like
 gas, like paint lines devoured in 75 miles per hour
 and skids away in a roar of sulfur while the boy stares.

The stepfather sighs like the world is still intact,
 pats his shoulder and lifts him up the U-Haul step.
 They give chase, watch mother
 drift lane lines, race the sunset, nearly win as it
 dies below the horizon, blood-splattered warrior
 gasping to survive the night's strong forces
 like battles the boy would wage before bedtime
 But

now
 the boy
 has
 lost
 the war.

He doesn't know this yet, just feels a weight grip
 his chest like a break-locked tire skidding into the

guardrail. It takes hours to find her. By that time
 she has bought, said goodbye to eight more beers,
 Shouted their sour bubbles into stepfather's face,
 about-faced, and stumbled off into the black
 bushes quivering along the highway like the
 boobs stepfather showed the boy in his phone earlier.
 said: "These are what it means to be a man."

Now, as the stepfather stares into the dark bush gash,
 the boy pats his shoulder, takes a deep breath,
 and steps through after her.

Point Zero

Here are four ways the court spells mistake:

1. \$2,500 FINE, PAID TO THE STATE OF ARIZONA.
(We barely make rent?)
2. INTERLOCK IGNITION DEVICE - 90 DAYS.
(How do we pick up our friends?)
3. SUSPENSION OF LICENSE - 365 DAYS.
(I'll drive you to work.)
4. 30 DAY STAY IN TENT CITY - WORK RELEASE.
(We'll make this work.)

A sentence is deafening
Like the ring of a judge's hammer.
Sit down, buckle up, loop this rope tightly around your neck.
Does it fit nicely?

or choke.

I'll admit, I was blinded by your rope already tied.

Here are four ways to spell shit:

1. FOUR KIDS
2. ONE DYING MOTHER
3. NO DEGREE
4. ONE ABSENT HUSBAND

Fifty-thousand in child support is a hefty sum to run from.

At least we saved money every year on Father's Day.

Visitation Day, is an easier Holiday.

Too bad we couldn't save gas

Driving Allison to the psychopath in Kingman.

(I would want a drink too)

Although, I wish you would have waited

Longer than halfway-home

You wouldn't have slept in handcuffs

(I wouldn't have unlocked you in six months)

I don't know how you couldn't feel the rope

Searing your skin.

Arizona is famous for blisters, after all

And a seat drenched in Fireball,

Is on fire

Like a blazing red light
Ran by a drunk driver.

Like you.
But it was only a point-zero-nine, you said,
One hand kneading your forehead.

Zero Nine. That does not matter.
Nine Zero. Do you think that matters?
Tell Manny's mom when he didn't come home
That Saturday night
After rolling out the skatepark's gate.
Or Alec's mom
When she lowered him into his grave.

Do you need a ride?
No thanks, I can drive.
Why spend ten bucks on an Uber
When ten years is cheaper.

Life's no fun when everyone pays.
AA meetings were prescribed but we needed different A's:

1. Anti-anxiety
2. Anti-depressant.

Let morphine bubble up, sweep you down the river
So you don't notice the rapids, dragging you under.
I know why our mouths are open: We drink

To drown, out
the homeless shelter, the dark days
when Dad pawned the wedding ring.

Drowning is desire, but
There is no sound louder than
Keys turning in ignitions
and the keyholes of empty houses
as Manny and Alec's moms
unlock their doors.

