

WITH DINNER

With dinner
which I liked because my friend liked it
and I liked my friend
it became obvious in the very
ranks of eyes and the rows of teeth
that I was dining with traitors who were
up to something. Red walls
and foggy windows, cold air floating over
candles and the mirror — Fire is always asleep
in the depraved, after all, and
I'd forgotten to put my napkin on my lap —
Alarmed, I talked about
the exciting movements of my day.
I only ate, and slept, and read,
and ran around, but I did those things
with exceptional vigor. The TV in the next room
on full volume smothered conversation,
a pair of reporters chained to a desk
pointing at each other, rotating in their chairs
nude as in horror films, faces radiant . . .
I almost forgot where I was. I
needed one of the lamps to illuminate
the room and blinked. It suddenly

is a previous day
(something I ate?) and I'm sitting in shadow
on the steps of the dark library. Whispers —
Conversations like a knife in an empty room.
I'd seen it a million times. I'm watching it
now, or was: Distracting commentaries
keep us occupied under that hot piñata
imagining what candies could be inside
while its radiations secretly permeate us
idiots. Me, or anyone, descending the steps
to wade in the sidewalk crowd waist deep
the way a person might squint at the sky
and laugh, belt under the water's lip, then
catch a fish and step out of the river
onto a rock the way a person in a diamond coat
can pass unobstructed into a club that sucks
the brains out of bodies the way those bodies then enter
an ambulance rinsed with moonlight. If I was ever

at the dinner table, ever by the dark library,
I've sunk away. I'm unemployed
and broke. Closing in on those rows of teeth
in their red harbors grinning like the murders
reporters rehearse in any city . . . against my will . . .

But in those days it really wasn't so bad.
It wasn't even distressing to wake up
with a different number of body parts.
In certain puddles on rainy afternoons you'd find
all possible colors curling slow, every puddle
was precious, welcoming, reaching out to invest
in you. All it took was alcohol to extinguish
any day like the luster of a distant planet.
Provocative poses on the asphalt of parking lots
and four-way intersections protected you.
Then came that corrupted nutrition
with dinner.

*

It's night — A quiet hour
and police officers. Dinner is over.
Something I ate settles heavily,
there's a patch of somewhere else growing like a joke
in the corners of things I look at.
Blood spurting through holes in the night
captured on surveillance cameras, insomnia
unfurling its aurora over silent neighborhoods.
Their cameras on the corners kidnap us, kidnap
the light breeze, the whole scene,
a committee of vultures with acid reflux.

I don't know how it happened I don't know
how it happens to anyone.
They left me my shoelaces, a stranger
on their side took up the whole bench.
I sat on the floor. Earlier at the inquisition
I'd been instructed to levitate
but couldn't. After they came for the stranger
I took their place on the bench, reminiscing of dinner
back when I didn't hear myself. A framed photograph
was what I wanted on the stone wall ; some decorations ;

instead only graffiti, scratches like entries
in a communal diary. “ Welcome to hell ”
for example and “ I don’t know
how I feel about this ” and
“ The floor is too cold ” and “ your new name is
Nothing ” and “ Do your hear that sound our Caskets
clapping their hands ” and even “ Look at us
they make nations out of our hunger ” It’s too much
it makes me dizzy

Someone finds me on my side. I gaze
up the gaping nostrils of this person, this gray escort
who’s arrived, I hope, to take me
to a better life. I leave behind
a note: Dear displacing harms,
hey harms goodbye
I travel now with strangers and orphans
with lunatics with convicts with ballerinas
with drops of blood, I travel
with a couple specks of sunlight
I travel where they tell me to
their dinner

INDIVIDUATION

Drying off. Disasters pass and leave deep marks
as if they never happened. You hear in your head
the phrase, “ In any case I’m alone, they’re

coming for me. ” Something to that effect.
“ In any case. ” The context is gone.
Drying off distances pass by and leave you

staring at a dirt road, years ago, far away.
Children in the dead tree swinging their feet.
Dogs, itching at flies, scratch their fur off in patches.

Distances drying off on the horizon’s conveyor belt,
coasts call out as they pass you there kept company
by the simplicity of having no origin, watching

the coasts diminish, replaced by oceans, then islands
in turn, islands roasting in the sun, passing over
their shores ignore them. Drying off

distances come and go. Until you’re entirely in one,
recovering in a windowless van with someone else,
themselves too disintegrating in the titillating dusk.

Until you revive again in the fog in a town square
where murderers lounge, bragging about the pains
in their penises. Drying off. Distances pick you up

and put you down. Insisting on invisible borders,
the distant glimpsable islands. It’s becoming evident
that death is inevitable, but hard to come by unless

you’re avoiding it. My body takes up space but that’s not
reason enough for it to exist. Consider: There’s
nothing for me. In distances only the searing towers of

evil, I must also realize that someone was abducted
by the authorities and I’m alone and it’s possible
they’re coming for me, too. It makes me realize

but maybe it’s not the world’s fault, that all of this
is only playthings with no one to play with them.
Knowing this, what now

REVOLVING DOORS

First day off the boat
standing on pavement dark under
paper shoes I took in the air where the sea
meets the city and the air was rancid.
I tripped over a body on
the sidewalk, inert. I knew one person here
but not their name, address, or phone number
so I wondered maybe that was them.
Here you never see the police but always
you hear them on their way: It was
all new to me, I took it all in

and the sound of gulls glutting
the unrelenting wind. This razorsharp vision
an organized assortment of humans showing off
mostly their diseases — What is it that with them
perches on stoops, on roofs, in the voices.
A mass of masticating alien faces. None of them
want to know you. And you don't have a car.
It lacerates to hotfoot the avenues

over and over. The violating light
of these days, of the freezing cold nights
of trees at the edges of forests
that heckle trains — It goes on and on —
It dissolves — and then — “ They took him!
they took him! ” Someone disrupts
the white noise, wheeling along
on a hospital gurney, with no legs
screaming. “ Bastards! ” She gorges herself
on this atmosphere prepared specially
by other people for other people.

Street signs spin toward me and away.
There's even the sidewalk. I don't know
what belongs, thinking “ If only
I could imagine all this
as comical, the various scenes
and the sharp cold gates — but fake rain
invented by the government
has stained the streets pink
and I'm done for. ” Aching all over
I suck a brick wall under angled shadow
with my eyes. The roar of the ocean in the air
fades and people spill through revolving doors

PUBLIC SERVICE

In the square this afternoon loud with sun
the mayor holds a press conference,
 the mayor denouncing
the velvet rebels who lick their butts in agony.
The mayor gets carried off mid-sentence
by the crowd picking its cannibal
pulses. I watch them go
feeling shy and as the crowd-sounds fade
I head the other way, through our yawning city
sealing off, past sewers spewing innards
into yards, into alleys. It's the cemeteries
from which the odor of cooking wafts.
The next day at the station, nothing.

No conductors, no trains. The station is silent. No mariners
anywhere, no boats: The docks are empty too. The stockyards
meanwhile suspiciously flowing over.

Not able, then, to get to work
or even to leave the city
I can't get to work so that's done. The tracks
that bristling electric used to carry
through space, one time
and another time, me through space,
are now rusted over and
by passing citizens spat on. As if maybe they're faking it.
The stagnant water
between the rails
stank.

An assassin appeared.
When all that can fit condenses
in a sweeping glance across the deserted
train station, the silence of the docks, St Christopher
Street, a tree whose huge roots upset
the sidewalk — when all that remains
in the mist and the smoke at the docks
is a trapeze artist practicing on a disturbed rat,
the assassin appears.

A street with cracked pavement looking very romantic,
dead houses strung up alongside, this is where first

I glimpsed the assassin. There'd been rumors,
people whispering, "I saw it, I *think* I saw it
among the lilies, or the roses — of course
when I looked again it was gone —
and none of the roses, in fact, were bent, though I did find
one broken lily . . . It's true I might have snapped it myself . . ."
Along that romantic street so desolate
that I thought I was crazy. I thought I was locked in a vault.
I heard songs way down in my throat.
Just then, looking lost, the mayor
in a tutu turned the corner onto this romantic street
of cracks and dead weeds.
Pandering he arrived. Grunting, grunting.
The street at nine o'clock, hurry,
the street is tiny!

I hid behind a trash can. He was saying to himself: "It's
done. The moon
is cross-eyed. It's gigantic and round
and it mesmerizes this whole building," he paused to look up
at one abandoned house, "and I am a misery that has a belly.
The moon, the moon." And his problems
that can't be tended to,
that sadly can't be told here,
and that street's problems —
the pain,
the pain,
so many little pains! —
stood abandoned
in the blackening blue of the air.
Not able to pay rent
not having a job anymore, not having
anything, I spent the last
of my pennies hiring the assassin.
And I left the poor street, very serious
at nine.

TV POEM: TELEVISIONS AND THEIR HUMANS

1. TELEVISIONS, THEY ONLY WAIT FOR ME

The ocean is famous, it's been on television, it only
has been on the television because
it helps us grow; television is informative.
For example, I was wondering if I was rotten
and it stares at me and makes me feel
insane. My old friend would look at me
trying to figure out whether I was crazy:
But for the televisions everything is the same
from the opposite side, where we are,
and that's how we can escape. It doesn't mean
whatever it is,
but I still don't like to go near them, even though
I already did, in the sad world and its
televisions, they only wait for me.

2. WHEN THEY GOT MY HEAD AND BANGED IT

And yet one hesitates at the brink of big things
like watching a TV with no brain;
imagine how I'll get out of here
to be real. I say to
you, you are the darkness, and want me to be too.
It's pretty insane how much
my head is in my hands, and my hands,
which my head is in, are in my lap.
I mean I'm doubled over and seized by
a sight I can't look away from,
I can't even move my eyes I'm so depressed.
As the linoleum laughed
I cried to think how we'd disrupted such a perfect
static; where the knife, my own hands,
and the earth itself cried *boohoo*
darkly Only I don't know
anything. Then they got my head and banged it

3. TV SCREAM

So however many universes
There are and that you stumble through
So many things are poisonous and
So much happens. So many cameras, here
and you, who I have not seen in a while,
ended sleeping under
the television, which
is so big, and probably
in the employ
of megacorporations. So then
does your TV have skin
like me. Do the things that live in it
come and go at a whim, only
when people try to tell each other anything.
Later on everything is forgotten so nothing
may as well have not existed.
Asleep in the darkness of blood
we are equals, all equal under the TV scream.

4. A HUMAN WITHOUT TELEVISION

The scene is no longer changing
as if to say we
happened, is that why
No one believes a word I say
because I said something other than
having a body that feels the cold,
I mean nothing external, nothing
to shake or convulse by.
How does a human
even remember
for example, what it's done, and strut about
its sorry state; but also have something to say.
How strange that we can meet each other, anyone
(even us)
in this world and all the others.
Even us mortal enemies
the knife lying harmless, undesired
between us. It was all over. It was all
we wanted, was for it to be over.

5. NOW I AM SO AFRAID!

I was talking until after I was talking.
I did not see you there old friend and didn't care
what I was going to tell you and
I was still so young, barely sixteen.
Filled with other worlds
which I take with me everywhere.
Was I standing on the shore?
My artificial eyes watched
dark trees.
I was terrified of being empty.
I know you all exist,
I could walk into the waves and see
the sad and awful thing about all of our lives
I could walk into the static and see
always silence. My
terrible world of darkness, at which
I'm sorry I got so drunk. But
remember how it is out in the world

How there is a street at night under
empty yellow lights
and if I turn into an alley there will be
a stray cat
and it will look at me with glinting
eyes and there
are whispers coming out of its
eyes. I can't
imagine how I'll get out of here.
The cat is too crazy with emotion,
so am I.
The dark street
shakes us off.
Those other humans in the dark are
in other dark trees, dark apartments,
and someone is always behind all windows
watching.