

The Busy and the Pursuing

Origin

Every city has a scaffolding, a blue wood prism
borne on the backs of bars riddled with flu germs
and fingerprints. This is the jungle
for city kids to swing through, a runway
for parades of roaches. This is everything.

This is the grime of progress at its purest,
chewed gum and heart that sizzles
over skyline. This starts here, under street-roofs
with the roaches and their yellow shells
like hard hats. New York isn't sorry

for inconvenience, light pollution outdoing the stars,
because the constellations have already been named
and the rooms, the source of this haze,
are housing the namers.

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Infection

"They slipped briskly into an intimacy from which they would never recover" - F. Scott Fitzgerald, This Side of Paradise

Unlike all common intimacies, a strange
hand's subway pole brush, coins puddling
into grocery palms with ridges still warm,
eyes that latch, seeing a lone
glove on the street and wearing it home,
grateful for some wool
to thaw the frosted thoughts.

For the rest of existence, we will shiver
like fevered trees shaking off dew.
It was that easy, that quick.

These encounters are terminal. These are the judgements
unreserved. These belch into the skin
and weigh it down behind the knees,
below the eyes. These webs spread
and stay for always. These are toxic,
every line and dime coated in grime
that cannot be scrubbed or steamed out.

Every life is a track of no's
and yes's, a map of deliverance.
that we will not elect to unremember.
Our temperatures will only rise, only swelter
over stone, our words and our sounds
trailing smiles and cement.

Only this "yes" and the space
it used to fill, the mold poured and left to harden.
Only this pinpoint, this place
we will forever trace in human hands,
only this route, our universal coordinates, our crease.

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Autopsy

A lock of Lincoln's hair sold for eighty-one thousand.

What will they want next?

My treasures: toenails, toothbrush, pen,
vocal chords, book spines, clock faces, cups,
calves, marrows, cells
spread and pinned and borne before
posterity.

This house, divided,
can be yours in pieces. Claim one,
quickly, so that even when I perish
from the earth, somebody will possess
me, press me
near and whisper "*mine.*"

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Engine Ode

I dream electric and even in my sleep bow to the buzz.
With a sharpened scalpel, the mind commands,
can splice, like human genes, the continent.
We hunger for surgeons, language operators,
the suprasternal notch, thrummer, beater,
tambourine of heart that splits
each collarbone (this is worship), large and deep
enough for a swallow (of wine) to sing.

At fifteen, I dreamed in stone.
The days sprawled on sandy lawns,
lay in wait of rain,
spread massive feathered wings,
like cygnets that do not touch in flight.
No airborne creature can be bound.
There were no collisions.
Gulfs divided the days. I would press
one palm to Yesterday, one
to Tomorrow, a figure suspended.
I waded into each night,
basked in every deep blue pool.

Tomorrow spills
across the dinner table, soaking the carpets.
Yesterday flings herself into my lap,
demanding kisses and crossing, tossing
one stockinged calf over an opposite knee.
Tomorrow has miasmatic halitosis.
Yesterday prefers a chardonnay, Tomorrow cold gin,
their twiny legs hooked together.
All the days want to speak at once and do.

I dream electric. I want
to unwind Today's intestines,
to send the trains, distill
and taste essence.

Within every cat is a small, purring engine.
Beneath my chin, I trace the small hollow.
My human throat rumbles on its own.

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Requiem

“I am one of those who will go on doing till all doings are at an end.” - Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Each cool morning must have run out of doings,
the Viennese stones beneath him warbling,
papers heated in a frenzy for fingers
and the scratching quest of quill,

doings rolling around his wooden floor like dice
with rounded corners. Uncommitted,
he could have lived at a window
where the streets trembled in buttery light
and mid-afternoon scribbles.
Knots hardened in his muscles and notes.

“Today, I will,” he may have promised: he would chuckle,
sneeze, scamper through a tavern, rest both elbows
on a table, learn something by heart, prove,
wake, conduct, bite from a steamy strudel,
bathe, untangle, straighten the wild spine,
set eyes and fingers upon at least six different shawls,
a symphony of doing.

How strange it must have been to dawn
on the day of his very last doing.
At last, a gleaming concerto whispered from him,
cutlery and candles shining in evening splendor beside soups,
folded napkins, and the silence of space to be filled.
Or maybe just a sigh, the doings
having finally all been done,
leaving future composers without
feats, melodies, or even a rest.