

## Man Moth

You call at 4am  
looking for someone,  
finding me.  
Yet my sleep-thickened skull  
doesn't let in the realization  
that I'm the someone you're looking for.  
We forget to exchange names  
as though the intimate folds of night  
have jettisoned us past our status as strangers.

“Do you know what time it is?”  
I ask, not upset, just tired.  
“No,” you say.  
The word splinters into awkward silence,  
waiting for Vaseline  
to grease us back  
into smoother skin.

Maybe you need to hear that I hear  
the pain edged in your silence,  
that I didn't mean to be  
its bearer.

I fumble for an apology,  
a key that won't turn in the door  
without another hand  
to coax it into relenting  
its flat denial of my entry

like the I'm-sorry's  
we say too often to ourselves  
and not to the people  
who have no idea we need  
their forgiveness.

Please forgive the edge of my sword,  
I meant only to knight you,  
but I see I have drawn blood.

Imagine, we mourn the death of a moth,  
even when it is we ourselves  
who have crushed its ordinary wings.  
No longer capable of flight,  
all that remains  
is its body-dust imprint

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against the glass.

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I will brush the dust  
into the indentations of my fingerprint  
if only this would soothe you  
into believing that I will remember you  
not as ordinary,  
but as a vibrant, trembling being,  
one whose like  
will never pass this way again,

that I would not relinquish you  
to someone else  
who slept through your crisis call  
and is no more qualified than I  
to respond to someone in need,

that it is late  
and I know how lonely 4ams can be.  
If I inhale long enough,  
can I take back those words  
that sent us spinning to the precipice  
of awkwardness?  
“Tell me,”  
I would like the opportunity to say,  
sending this man moth back to you.

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## **An Attempted Thank You**

I ring your doorbell.  
Your dogs' crazed yelps respond  
and I hear you yell at them, "Relax!"  
I smile at this little ceremony as you open the door  
and I hand you your gift.

"What is this for?" you ask as you take it.  
"Just because," I respond,  
not willing to say, "It's because I think you're great."

The first thing you notice  
is the creaminess of the parchment.  
"Where did you find this?" you ask.  
"I made it myself," not speaking of the long hours  
shaking the pulp and leaves onto a frame,  
then compressing it between layers of cloth  
until it adhered together  
and how it turned out all gloopy the first few times.

You carefully slit open the paper  
to reveal  
a framed photo of a clump of dark weeds  
growing in a field.  
And you don't know what to say.

I speak into the silence.  
"I like it because it doesn't seem  
like the sort of thing  
most people would notice,  
let alone take a picture of."

What I don't say is that it reminds me of you,  
not because I think you're underappreciated  
but because your kindness  
can never be appreciated enough.

I'm trying to say, "You're more important  
to me than you realize."  
But I get too caught up  
in the banality of the phrase.  
How can I repackage it  
so it doesn't sound like a demand?

I settle for,  
"I hope you like it,"

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but even this sounds too demanding,  
like I expect to see it  
hanging in a place of prominence.

Poets get too wrapped up in the packaging.  
When really it isn't about the parchment at all.  
Yes, I made it myself.  
But in the end, it's just paper.  
What matters are those overlooked weeds:  
The "I love you," you've said plain and simple  
without receiving anything in return.  
The "I love you," I want to say  
without expecting anything in return.

I want you to know  
that all the times  
you've continued to care  
for those whom no one else cares for,  
each time you sat with a loner at lunch  
that has been a gift to me.

Maybe if I tell you  
how you give of yourself  
each time you play intensely  
with your daughter,  
the way you bring me into your experience of reading  
with every new book  
and always greet passersby with a friendly hello,  
you would know that I see you  
as the remarkable being you are.

To you, these habits may just seem  
like the weeds of day-to-day living,  
but to me, they are memorable.  
Memorable enough to photograph.

## Keeping Watch

As day slips behind mountains on tiptoe  
and the distant blue beacon of the Walker Center  
in downtown Salt Lake  
blinks its cloudy forecast  
through a window too easy to break,  
my joey nestles in the pouch of my arm.  
She does not notice the blinking light  
nor the crack in the glass,  
threatening to grow bigger.

She will not be another Elizabeth Smart, snatched by predators  
through a broken window pane  
nor be threatened by the stillness that seeps  
into bodies too long unheld.

I serve as her platoon mate,  
keeping watch for snipers who wait in the dark  
so she doesn't have to.  
She will never hear gun fire,  
only the calming break of waves,  
as an electronic turtle simulates the sea.

I can still see the slivers of blue  
through her gently pressed eyelids.  
Her feet prod me to make sure  
I am at her side,  
knees worn from intrepid exploring,  
and toes curled as if clinging  
to invisible tree branches.

Just now, she whimpers  
and I soothe her with a stroke across her arm.  
Her chest rises and falls  
and rises again, each breath reinforcing  
her arrival as the apex of my life.  
Her breath steadies into sleep,  
wrapping every jeweled moment between now and her birth  
into an unbreakable ligament of peace.

I wait for years to cure words  
for her to tell of moonbeams washing the day  
from the back of her eyelids.  
Sleep without fear, little one.  
I will keep watch till then.

Barrier

## Holes With a Few Roses Tossed In

I like to think very much

about what would happen if I break out of my shell,  
allow my rib cage to recede back into my chest  
where it would embrace a slumbering heart  
instead of leaving it exposed to idly prodding fingers.

If I pretend I don't know there is a gap  
between Adam's and God's fingertips  
on the Sistine Chapel,  
small but infinite,  
but not as static as I had imagined.  
Perhaps someday they will touch.

Instead of waiting for someone with penetrating vision  
to discern that I need an invitation,  
I walk up and link arms in an electrified circle  
whose circuit would be incomplete without my pulse.  
I would like it very much if someone were to just smile at me  
across the circle,  
silently recognizing he was glad I joined.

I would no longer kneel by the side of empty holes,  
staring into their unfilled grey.  
I would fill them in  
and tread softly atop the dirt  
so they wouldn't cave.

and I would think about the acres of pulses I have yet to touch  
and recognize that each pulse which had conjoined with my own  
is still a part of my heart beat;  
I have no need to bury them  
for their memory is not yet dead.

If I could think like that, perhaps there would no longer be holes to fill.

Barrier

## Barrier

Laughter stumbles across my threshold.  
I want to know the joke, so I can laugh too.  
But he's too drunk to see my reflection  
though the lights inside are blazing and the only  
thing outside is darkness. I switch off the light  
and peep out the window  
as though I'm peeping in, violating someone's sanctum  
when really, I'm looking at my own yard.

What I see is darkness  
and a throng of college kids, tossing beer cans into  
my yard, one pissing on my lawn.  
The laughter crashes raucous around  
me, every racist one-liner leaving me  
tamping down dynamite, the jokes I can't even parse  
because the minds that sling them are such unknown. I

explode outside, waving my phone camera wildly as if it could capture  
anything more than a blur in the yawning  
darkness. If getting drunk, smoking, and having  
sex is what it means to belong,  
I'll fail the captcha test.

Belonging to me is being with people who care about something beyond  
themselves, past the tabloid headlines and postscript weather greetings. Belonging is bypassing  
the utterances of your larynx to dissect the entrails of a musical  
arch or stand up for someone wrongly accused, argue over character  
development or orgasm over the sex patterns of insects. Anything as long as it vibrates directly  
from your heart strings.

But somehow, I'm left laughing loudly in movie theaters when no one else  
is laughing and sitting in a pool of silence when the party lifts  
into mirth because I didn't catch what was said.  
No one likes to translate a joke.

So I hunker down beneath my *Catcher in the Rye*, using it as a shield to defend my claimed territory  
so I can hold a steady view. The aperture isn't wide enough  
to capture anything beyond my arms crossed against  
my braless chest. Someone plays *Dancing On My Own*. I'm about to break  
out with "Let's take another drink. Cause it will give me time to think," But realize  
I've never heard this song before as everyone else sings along.

You sit down next to me.  
"Hello. How are you?" I chirp, not knowing what comes next.  
I glance at your feet to see if they're pointing towards me or the door.

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You ask me if I've dropped something on the floor. I won't tell  
you I'm looking for signs of discomfort  
from a social skills book I read.  
But maybe I should.  
Maybe it would make you laugh.  
Maybe I'm too scared to look foolish and should  
    jump up and dance even though my breasts would smack together.  
We're all feminists, right?

It seems that plane of glass  
is always with me,  
with the interior lights turned up too high.  
All they see is my hunched-over profile, my neck muscles taut, the frown perched on my forehead.  
I try to see better by switching off the light,  
but then no one can see me at all.