

Equivocal Activist & Others

Equivocal Activist

It's Friday. We pull out of the Paris climate accord
and I get my hair cut. Aretha sings in the background,
bridging the troubled water. I could lay me down,
but I doubt that would accomplish anything.

Still, I'm uncomfortable doing nothing,
an equivocal activist, pretty sure
I can't count on my teammates
running in all directions at once,
a handful of beebees dropped on stone.

The more I think about good
the more it morphs into myriad shades of less or more
like Henderson dynamiting the frogs
and unintentionally draining the pond.
I can see how restful it would be
to believe in the simple solution.

Instead, heavy footed,
I tread the earth, while the sun rises
and sets without comment
and the chickens, remorseless,
search out any protein around,
even if it happens to be the last Doloff cave spider,
and dragonflies ricochet above us
endlessly stitching
the snags in the sky
and I do what passes for the best I can.

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Beginning of an incomplete list

Worry prevents harm. You have to worry x7 minutes to prevent each bad thing from happening.

Thinking it will happen will jinx it. Thinking it won't happen will make it happen. If you tell another person it will happen, it definitely won't happen.

If you tell someone how much money you have, you will lose it all immediately.

You can't play the car radio when you're driving around looking for your lost kid.

If the sticky, erratic key turns easily, you're going to have a good day.

If you change the sheets, you get well faster.

If you have two flashlights, you'll have them forever. If you have one, it will lost constantly. (This also applies to scissors.)

Cancellation of insurance causes disaster specific to your policy.

Yelling makes the cake fall.

It's lucky to see a snake.

There is a complicated and ever changing set of items you shouldn't eat. Eating them causes cancer to start growing in your body. This can be stopped by not eating them.

Breast examination causes lumps.

It's a sin to eat super expensive food in a restaurant.

You have to change your earrings after something bad happens.

Right thinking makes seeds grow. Seeds know what right thinking is.

Seeing a beautiful bird is a good omen.

Visual contact with loved ones prevents harm.

The earthquake will happen when your loved ones are on the other side of the bridge.

You have to wash new clothes before you wear them.

If someone's dog rejects you it's because you are a fundamentally bad person.

Leaving home is fraught with insurmountable obstacles.

If God exists, he is not a woman.

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Cheese Ball

Whole factories are dedicated to this,
pillars of cheddar large enough
to bear a second story, and wire
that cuts the slabs. Machines
add the precise measure of port wine,
according to Michele Bean, Cheese Ball Expert.

The process takes a long time.
Great steel vats churn and burble,
a conveyer trundles nuts, paddles
spin the balls along till not a scintilla of cheese shows,
all glossed with nutty skin. This must
be a metaphor for something: children
moving through the school system,
or what happens when primitive tribes
encounter matches and carbon steel.

Maybe we're all just cheese balls,
starting from something simple, like milk,
pummeled and slashed
and adulterated and finally extruded
in a shape of use to someone
with a sense of humor
and an insatiable appetite.

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The Conservation of Matter

I follow the hump of the whale exhaling
as it heads for the Bering Sea. I want to see it, and see it again,

closer. Or branches in a storm, their exuberant dance
with the wind. Even rain on a New York street,

cigarette butts in the gutter, taxis splattering. I can't get enough of it.
You say: *When we die we cease to exist. Everything else*

is illusion. But what about that law of physics:
the conservation of matter? How water changes to

steam or ice—mass plus energy
equal to the first wet splash.

And this hard-won companionship, smelted
in a blaze of day after day—surely something endures.

Slowly, light turns the bay slate blue.
Night departs. Morning reappears.

The dead look out from their accustomed photos,
stopped in time, but not altogether silent.

The last whiff of the whale's breath
transforms into ocean, air.

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Sleepwalking

Each night sleep asserts its mysterious imperative
as the mind ceases to brace itself
against its own undoing, against what lurks in the back
of the dark, the bad luck
and cryptic privilege
of human being: water protein marrow fat, those
convolutes of DNA that say
bleary blue bright brown iris
say barrel legs willow stalks, hair that never grays
or drifts off, the dickey or unflappable heart,
the canny fingers and tricky intelligence
I rely on
because what else have I got?

And even though it doesn't feel like I am merely plasma
in a permeable membrane interacting with air and water
and prejudice and language into which mist
I find myself plunked,
occasionally I glimpse
that it's true, everything fluid,
everything affecting everything else
so that the racist rants of the attacker in Portland
infuse a gritty particulate into the common air,
cold bone fragments make it hard to breathe,
many small knives press against the very flesh of my very neck,
and everywhere clamor, the scrabble for or against
and I am smack in the middle of it:
rage, righteousness, acts later analyzed and repudiated,
but here and now
before sleep comes to claim me
with its car wrecks and crumbling teeth, I acknowledge
that I understand nothing,
not on any team
and on every team at once, connected,
for better and worse
to everything.