

PROFANE HALO

I have been trying to find sea glass
less beautiful. I drive for miles, something certain

states of mind make easy: heartbreak
rendered harsher by contingency, how close

you can imagine yourself to not leaving. I bring a jar
and feel embarrassed—glass to put the glass in, broken

and whole, it's best to let things
coexist without weighing them down with

restricted futurity. To hold
what will most likely become of you

(or the jar), seal it shut like a curse. What
to say about the blunted edges, but that

the ocean forgives being the receptacle of so much
want and waste, or should I reverse the order? One

opens onto the other, how I find myself
pleased with the process that makes my line of discovery

possible. I remove the blunt glass selectively,
only the pieces I find most attractive,

which is to say, I miss the role they play as blight, as error
or intrusion. I am also the one who recounts eagerly

scenes from novels about the American frontier
where the intrepid venture into a blizzard

simply to feed their animals—how
the clothesline becomes every longing,

stretching forth despite the knowledge
of the destination's nearness, the barn's

warmth emanating—how you imagine
you might fall without someone to make

a tether out of you. Later, on the drive
to the laundromat to get the sand out,

I will let the playlist automate, the speed
automate, the profane halo of purple

splashed across the horizon visible
in the rearview. This is how we all

come home to the idea that what glows for us
most vividly is merely a scene of recognition

and it might be incurable.

from the End Notes to *MAKING IT LOOK SIMPLE*

Already a theme: that I am incapable of looking upside down at anything. That the image reverses itself without permission. These are my remaining tools: what I know about arranging props in order of the time they must appear on stage: whistle, ribbon, envelope, indecision. There is a relationship under pressure of something undisclosed. The tide of it comes in and goes out and, at its lowest, the guilty party thinks he can dig a tunnel out of the room with a piece of paper, but it turns out a piece of paper is less like a shovel and more like a lightning strike. With regards to seeing upside down, the flash of brightness we witness does not move from cloud to ground but vice versa. Negative electricity forms a path and the ground rushes to meet it. This takes one-millionth of a second so I can see why you would argue it doesn't matter. But then again you have certainly found yourself wondering how the future always seems to emerge from behind you. You've wondered that, haven't you?

IN THE ROOM FOR ANXIOUS OBJECTS

after Eva Kot'átková

all the books are about bodies. It took
so long to trick myself
into being in the airport, hands
in my lap. I count out my luck:

I am going on vacation and today
it is not painful to stand
how I have been asked to. I am not
conjuring the days I have had to say,

things are not as they appear,
a fact that is fleeting. At times,
I make this body look
easily held, like the liquid

in a snow globe,
how it makes the white
fall softly. A sign tells me
even this is suspicious

to security now, that
it too can't go over
three ounces. The number
of prophecy: *Third time's*

the charm. I mean I won't be afraid
of takeoff and landing. What
a pleasure to be lifted, to visit
another sky with clouds

like a screensaver. How
miraculous to see—what to call
the opposite of undersides? In the room
for anxious objects, a pair

of scissors too large
for this paper snowflake, its holes
enormous. And the sign
at the airport is saying to me, *Please*

*make your model universe
smaller. It is saying,
be reasonable. But I'm feeling
lucky; I don't listen.*

EMERGENT BEHAVIOR

When my blood results landed in some bad ranges, I got an email:
you have winesap veins, it may well have said, or, *what*
have you been drinking? I keened on the carpet, my heart
pumping bad news around. I was made
of more pain than memory, for a time. I was the bear
who smashed the bird feeder hoping for honey at its center. I mean
I looked angry, and yes, my paws felt enormous,
but they were only capable of swallowing themselves.
To hold a ferocity you cannot channel requires a metaphor
I'm still stitching out of toxic materials like the anti-freeze
in your trunk that reads: *cannot be made non-poisonous*.
I repaired to my taste for ruining, dimpling the skin
of an apple with my fingernails and dreaming it was
the capitalist agenda. Nothing like the body
to teach you that there is no unused material. I waited
four months for a specialist whose first job was to confirm it:
my immune cells no longer recognize my joints as me.
Nothing is cheap, I thought while he talked. I dreamt
of the velvet of a horse's throat, running through a pine forest,
the burnished color of fallen needles. I didn't
hold my breath, but asked to leave, even as my cells
carried their vendetta with me out the door.

INSTINCTS ARE MISLEADING

Even I was surprised at myself
doing my own dirty work:

not answering the phone even though
I saw it ringing & later
trying to communicate
the sense that I am not
asking for anything really
while asking for something.

We have all become extended
even though it seems like there
are so many activities that take
very little energy to enjoy. Dancing

has a low carbon footprint
as does trying on all your clothes
and looking at the sky
(though it took some doing
to learn when the special phenomena
would be happening).

(A friend hatches a monarch
but the monarch does
most of the work.) Out West,

the guide says mother bears bring
their cubs near the road to keep them
from the males. They are there
because we are there & we are there
because they are there: even
wonderment a kind of adaptation.

APOCALYPSE/UTOPIA XIV

When I asked where the story was going, she told me
there would be a cave and I thought, *so full already,*
this tale, the bottom gives way, or how could I know
so little about action? The day empties as it opens;
the heart skips stones on the river, poorly, holding
its breath. In failing to begin, I erase the path
that must have led into the field and am hidden,
swallowed by the green unfolding. I open
and close my hands, portals to this world and
some other—it wouldn't help if I named it, so I'll
offer this analogy: how any crisis seems to conjure
days out of a plot that was straining against each
second, or when you stand up quickly, how time
suddenly spirals down and away, a draining.

KATIE WILLINGHAM

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