

24.4°S 38.6°W

MARE HUMORUM

Underweather abuts the blue chair of the Pacific where the Emperor of the Moon pulls his hair. The galaxy casts its reflection. She straggles by dress undone— the quiver just any empty basket.

There is no myth to the mind unraveling.

The world is a mirror and memory birds bank and swell as the sea gains the hard ground. Listen— in this cold Empire the voices in your head are bird song and the shovelers pitching mud.

There the mind keeps its ice, no matter no matter no matter.

13.9°N 7.8°E

SEA OF VAPOR III

The clouds blow in the from the West. The flung hatchling squirms on the rocky shore. The rich man paints the leisured sky and keeps the horizon low where the poor wade ashore.

There are fifty-two blues— most we'll never see. List what comes to mind— cornflower, indigo, flax, ultramarine— and what gets left out? The rich man daubs Prussian blue for the unfurling flags. The poor go ink black in the deep shadows. And the shearwaters, giving their backs to a masking blue-gray, sing their lonely songs when the moon hides her face.

15.0°S 27.4°W

THE MARE COGNITUM II

To doubt is to enter our dystopic— is the oven on? Is the door locked? How different you from I. This night of pulling rope and the terrors, always the black door. The beam of light curdling your voice, stuck there a whimper. I slosh through the reeds, but not you. No. You pantomime again and try to unlock the car door. That's the true fear, isn't it? It's me. It's not the air or its lack. *Welcome to the moon*, I say and you laugh, but I can hear its shallowness and the words drop into craters as you call the police and you call them over and over and over.

And when they ask, I'll say *there was nothing to be done* and *no*. Just that over and over and over, *no*.

22.7°S 32.8° W

ALL THE PHOTOGRAPHS SHINE

In the bomb pits life expands, yellow coils into the narrows, lights blinking and safety cages ratcheted— insistent, but no sway there, only the pick axe, the mystery of your doings, and buckets of what?

Tailings.

The little glitter that robs your eye, the little thing you curve to protect.

Everything above is hoarding boxes, clutter, and the drawn curtain when mail is delivered to the others who lived here years before your current war.

10.0°S 23.1°W

THE MARE COGNITUM IV

Perhaps dystopia just an absence of humor— a friendless society locked together, where even the insane shy away from the suicides. The failure evident. There's a pucker of scar where the young man's mouth once was, here's wide berth in the hallway, all the meal trays left untouched.

Clutching her purse his mother complained bitterly of the service in the hotel and kept trying to change her reservation. One day, when we visited she had fresh bruises, restrained for a transfer or procedure she could not remember. And these were her days, still dressed for business. She'd sit with us where we could hedge privacy to go over again and again finances to the nursing home brochures we brought. Care she did not see a need for. She talked about returning to her apartment with her husband, though she could not remember where it was or that he too was hospitalized. She was savvy enough to know there was no other way out but to play along, to add up the numbers. She still had that sense about her. That she could outwit us. When the others roamed by mad, bandaged and drugged, she'd cover her scribbling. Those hallways— these days, the nights, this terrible loop.

This isn't a poem. It's just prose.

There were no metaphors left for us in Harborview.

20.3°N 23.8°E

A QUALITATIVE SEPARATION

Then it came to pass the ranunculus strangled the hyacinth,
its tempered bells, a purple stain.

It came to pass what was tended went wilding.

The star-feared asters bloomed with twining rose, the lilies toppled
by falling quince, pungent scent burning the weeping grass.

It came to pass the molding leaves ramped against the hostas,
their formerly bluing spikes, deglazing the dark bends of shade.

This is how the garden unraveled— the blue gate, nothing against
the pressing rudbeckia, so trenchant in yellow, so black the center.

19.6°S 30.5°W

THE MARE COGNITUM I

What do we know of rising water?

A black floor.

When do we know it?

Too late.

KNOX GARDNER

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