

Buddha Reveals the Apocalypse to the Cowboy

God is not the author of confusion.

—I Corinthians 14:33

The harness comes tight up under the throat, whistle caught the way the desert tightens a howl in hot dust without air, the single hairs on your arm at night the pages in the book that will write itself in your grave, your bones turning with the embryo still caught, a peculiar failure of the body that makes sages weep, no mesh for the night

of death to keep the maggots away, no gathering of prayers in the loom that moves the veil between here and there, the gate where bodhisattvas sit to counsel the desperate, their song something you take as fool's gold, roiling last chances, throwing them back to the mixing bowl sitting somewhere in the continuum of space and time.

Your father was his grandfather, the man on the running board of the 1940 Chevrolet, when America dreamed its highways, the connection that bound us to desert fruit, as you built your own ultimatums, no way to see the engine of what drove you to speak holy names as convenience, no sense of samadhi, no sense of lying down to let wrong write itself on the heart's tablet, exorcise this thing in you, a mutated ambition, you the son of the morning light.

Evening Lounge

after the painting by Brent Lynch

The humid nights are best and worst, best
because the birds sing at two in the morning when
you cannot get back into the other world, worst
because it is the moist heat that makes the skin supple,
makes you want to rub against someone else, a woman,
and there is nothing but the long list of lost chances,
things you could have said, perhaps the simple question
of *will you sleep with me* so that it is not just you
and this shell of a home, this place where it feels
the walls are another layer of my skin, and that is neither
best or worst. It is the holding of the dead stink,
the memories that wash over me, holding them back.

It is the utter singleness of being the only person
here, the way the thoughts think themselves down to
accepting that this is really just me here wondering who I am,
just me here wondering why I am awake at two,
which trigger it was, knowing all the time all too well
the way the war of life is connected to the nervous system
of the world, the ganglia of our shared horrors, either
mine so large, or so people tell me, and here it seems
to be the membrane between the skin of my bones
and the skin of this home, the absorbing shock of space
that gives when the memories burn their way in or
out of me. I would lie here wondering how to tell her
I am wrestling with the angel, wrestling with memories
in the crevices and cracks of my body, of how I feel
right now, what it felt like then, in those times, and I am
glad she is not here, and I wish she were here, and she
has no name because this is some woman I do not know.

I practice in the silence of my thoughts the different pitch
and rhythm of how I might ask *will you sleep with me*,
afraid of what to say should she say *yes* and this decade

of my monkish life should lie open and I have to say why
I am sitting on the edge of bed, why I have woke her from
the sweet smile I assume she has when I assume her horror
is smaller than mine.

The Path

Without my umbrella I forget the rain, welcome
each drop to forget me. The stones take more time
to know, their separate grooves and slopes,
different slanting into the light, one face for the moon,
one face for the clouds. In the wetness I hear
honeysuckles tipping over at the edges, a frog
jumping to reach the higher grass, lost somehow.
At the end I put my hand out to touch what love left
for me the last time I came searching, alone.

With the umbrella I stumble, too lonesome
for the way water soaks into the skin in the thunder,
listening for the sound of the eagles circling
above the lost children of wild pigs or what can be
caught and carried in the talon. My hands are
not free, too busy with trying to keep the cover
on my head. The stones have another meditation,
a kind of counting to music. Touch me, they say,
and a thousand stone paths will make their way to me.

Once in the night when it was dry, when the pretty
rain of mountain springtime was suspended,
I walked this path to the dream of where we live.

The Ten Thousand

The rain comes late, draws the afternoon into darkness,
no light where there should be light, no way to be but drenched
until it curves down over your lips. The taste of every living thing
is in the rain drop the way all things open their eyes inside
a single bloom in the garden that is now hushed in a robe.

Whatever you feel about it, whether you live for it or pray
for the rains to die, the water joins with all of us, tendon, bone,
artery, vein, saliva, everything that melts and goes hard, escapes
as air. The water brings a reunion for a moment with what we know
each time we breathe ourselves here or are forced to breathe.

If I write without color it is to obey the gray way rain brings
the past to us. The ten thousand are one giant palace with a room
for remembering, where you must stand alone, touch and believe
while it seems you are touching nothing and have gone all mad
in this life, this gift. We are sitting on a rock in the thick falling

of water, purple lilies are growing in the sun's ocean shadow,
sheep with golden wool are flying in the trees, a patient monkey
is bandaging a wounded blade of grass, the garden is a mesa,
seeds are mountain caves, the moon has gone infinite, made
two of its own selves for each of our palms. Now we have faces.

A Dream of Emptiness

The ecstasy of being eaten is more than the fear
in the teased air between pine needles and red lilacs
where we take turns shooting through the thin circles
made on the edge of the hawk's wings, the tiny space
it cannot come back to except to arc up again,
navigate, draw once more the line from her eye

to a place where we have no escape. It is the way
the heat pumps the whole mountain until it is drunk
with sun, so full of it that its stone heart melts
to make its own waters trickle down the slopes
to gather in the gullies, softening the ground
for the snakes who have lost their envy of dragons.

It is the teeth, sometimes the sweet juice of the mouth,
the belly flesh of the jaws, the eyes falling back
into themselves with relief from hunger. We think
ourselves invisible but still the lure of going in
is greater than the fear of never coming out, so we give
ourselves to the joy of change. Time always ignites

again, even from the great time of nothing that spat
the world from *the long sleep*, that too a hunger
like this way we ache to know desire lives in the eye.

Tsunami

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Do not rush to know the difference as that will be a door too large for those who rush. Take instead the slow touch of bamboo. Come each morning to the same tree and rub it slowly the way you would rub a limb of your own. Know that you may lose it to a surgeon's knife and touch every thin line. Feel the color of a single shaft of the thing the way you would find the smallest places on a finger. Put your lips against the leaves the way you would kiss the hair on your own arms. Embrace it with all of you and promise to keep the farmer's axe away. Promise to shoo away the poison air of the cities. Ask the earth to bless it with children that are bamboo. Come at night and wait for the bamboo to sing in the wind, wait until the song comes, until hunger makes you angry. Think of the lines of bamboo, how they shoot up and then bend with their accomplishment. This may take more years than you have, or you may press the bamboo into a heartless fear of its own beauty. If so, start again, more slowly this time. After each step, pray for the children who went back into the sea without enough time to learn the songs of bamboo, or to remember.

Leaves

The lines that make you are infinite, but I count them every day to hear the stories you carry. These are not secrets but records, things we should know but ignore. If I commit the sin of tearing you from the tree, I find another world inside the torn vein, another lifetime of counting the records of who walked here before, of what lovers lay here holding each other through wars and starvation.

Some days I stand here until I lose focus and travel, drifting off out of the moment, too full of it, and my legs are now like trees, mindless but vigilant, held into the earth by the rules of debt, what we owe to nature for trying to tear ourselves away. I drift and the pleasure of touch comes again, layers of green in the mountainside a tickling in my palms.

The pleasure is that of being lost here in the crowd of trunks and pulp, the ground thick with the death of you, sinking under my feet as I go, touching one and another, linking myself through until the place where I entered is gone. When I am afraid, my breath is caught in my throat. When I am not afraid, I lift both hands up under a bunch of you to find the way the world felt on the first day.