

BEWILDERNESS

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Black
Lawrence
Press

for Camellia

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*It'll get so quiet when this record ends
You can hear the first hour of the world
You can hear the willow branches touch the waves
Write our names beside our Darlings' hearts
And write our names besides no one's hearts*
—Jason Molina

*What on earth is meant by the words in paradise
is in paradise meant by the words on earth.*
—Mary Ruefle

How About Telling Us What It Am?

In this garden party, in this flux
like a multitude of spun diamonds
sharpening clay, this dream of a highway

inclines through such windows,
such shattering matters then this mattering
shatters: the day now clear, now darkening

as if one is rising from the floor of a glass lake
and a swarm of concrete pours in. A tremor
in my coffee, iron table with one bad leg

next a mirror, my face a tremor trembling
like Rothko's curtains in the chapel
where a t-shirt suffering from advertising

wears a man kneeling to meditate. Is it
air conditioning or breathing? Is something
about to be revealed? Moments like these

the unidentifiable emerges begging mercy,
estranging the arrangements. The complicating
facility with language is not unlike

the failure to possess allure while trying
to hitch a ride in the rain, when your pants
are in the ditch, an empty bottle in your hand.

In the painting in my apartment, empty bottles
obscure the shapely cloud in the background
and I am not the bottles. It was done by an ex

never completely ex, maybe an answer
in the subtext but the tape is so old
the answers in the machine bleed into each

other, making it difficult to meet the obligations
you never meet the obligations.

What you think of as ravishing sky is

but also a dangerous questionnaire. *Could you
tell us why you're right for the job
and what you'd do if one of your charges*

*suddenly a) bursts into flames
or b) professes love?* We've arrived where
it's passé to sew one's own clothes,

the cymbals cracking and in the fissure
that which suffuseth us. Had I only known
what it ain't, only captured what is

and let go, my hands a crucible but it's like
trying to move an iron press up stairs
when you don't have an iron press,

this attempt to discern and manage the forces,
to marshal the gorgeous,
to not fuck up.

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Alternative History Club

In those days, we never knew.
Restless heat charged through
the pores of the air,
real and unreal butcher knives out
and lawyers everywhere
and report cards everywhere
like blunt scalpels. We called us
exhilarators and exhilaratrices
when the power to produce lift-off
warranted. The rest we reduced
to play-by-play personnel
or colorless commentators.
Envy was the infallible guide
but moonlighted as a weakness
beneath us. What wasn't
beneath us in those days?
Then, more words were known.
They went on at length
while we listened, shivering in the glow
while they cut swaths enough
in the apparent to make us blush,
as if from the heat of overheard prayers
as dawn turned from deep dark
to embarrassed day, sparks arrayed
on the walkway like wedding rice.
Realities grew around us like stalks of corn
while we bent to jugs. The dial
grew ashamed of its static.
When I came to this world
it meant something different—now

all the celebrators are shaven from view,
preparing their instruments to combat
a staggering metastasis. We were going
to the heart of the great satire, plucking
the twined bindings into music.

We lay pincerred and snagged
in the squirreled *oeuvre*, found wanting
in vignettes that cared little for the likes of us.

The score was great and terrible.

We almost loved everything.

Understudiesville

After one four year blink
there's no estranging overhaul,
but understudies rush to the fore
playing characters you recognize
and no longer know.

They wear cars with differing scars
slightly leftward, the soles of their shoes
have more heel, faces the wrong shape.
Sunglasses more saber-like, handshakes
more complex. Everywhere's a cold
war. Alliances emerge and sour,
enemies nod. You can't finish
your drink quickly enough
to avoid watching them rush
into the same modest catastrophes,
wriggling on thorny consequences
that only resemble performances
you once labored to perfectly play.
The drink with the same name
is so different you think you must be
wearing a badge, you feel your pockets
for a stub and another player
sneers across your path
with eyes like molten chancres.
Same waifish distraction
crossing the wake of spring motorcycles,
different ruined afternoon. Same
exhausted house, different animal
chained to a steel stake in the front yard.
Still the sense that one string yanked wrong

could collapse the entire set.
At any second you feel them ready
to break, gusting into laughter, chain reaction
cueing a return to the first act,
which you variously remember
as a taste, a blizzard, a warp, a slash
which broke some hidden seal
and let all this light in. It took you
all the decades nestled in a half hour,
but then you could feel the field
pulse, like fever you couldn't
bring yourself to believe
would ever end.

Child Recruit

Morning's a bramble invaded by crimson blossoms
and I am an airplane.

Peripheral vision's a muted bark
and I walk into trellis after thorny trellis
with pots and pans tangled in my landing gear.

I take Veteran's Day off
to contemplate my future
and carve a tongue out of my blood
orange sorbet. The perfect time
to eat blood orange sorbet
is not now in the chilly now
but compared to target practice
it is the perfect time to eat
blood orange sorbet with a freezing spoon
that sticks to my lip. My fatigues
fatigue my march toward the shooting range
and I feel my landing gear give beneath me
so I am on my belly in the dirt.

There is not enough air below my wings.

I am a very bad airplane and can only
play dangerous, unwinnable games
with the other anxiety machines.

One by one or all in clumps

I am asked to phantom my mates,
to clean the merry-go-round of others.

I have special goggles that let me see into
the heart of things. My wings grow sticky.

My blood orange sorbet refuses to melt
as it serpentine down my throat.

The sky won't come anywhere near me.