

# CONSOLATIONEER

*poems*

Marc McKee



Black  
Lawrence  
Press

*for Camellia*  
&  
*for Harry*

-

*In Memory Of*

*Tomaž Šalamun*  
*James Tate*  
*C.D. Wright*  
*John Asberry*

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# Line Segment

First we are dirt and then we are dirt,  
first we are the flash of light  
brushing a thigh as the reel skips  
white, the dense, charged atmosphere  
on the train, first we're the magnolias  
already starting to turn making the air  
drunk, one threshold or another  
staggered past, first we are the alley  
seeping into the skin, flammable breath,  
need twisted, barbed wire, bow.

First we are *The plane leaves in two*  
*hours*, a nod, first we are actualized notions  
as flames circle and sic the other tents,  
a stolen moment in the boiler room,  
thrown from sleep into skittish shelter,  
soup struck by lightning, an explosion, nothing  
if nothing can be said to be rapacious,  
first we are the whisper gliding down,  
some persons else, the purse out  
of reach, first the struggle with a strap,  
a deep breath, the center of an improbable  
infinity, first the letter, the letter in code,  
the rose on the piano, the hail making it  
impossible to leave the vestibule, first  
a whole room to cross or meadow,  
frozen puzzles separated by a laboratory,  
the bridges torched, the scorched earth,  
the holding each other up, first the place  
nobody can find us, first the breathless  
summit of a trellis or the busted taboo

or in the factory among the sparks and filings  
and sweat, a wisp of amazement, a fear  
like the cold tip of a knife teasing the spine,  
an excitement in a beaker, first a joke,  
inappropriate in a strange kitchen, first a string  
of stars dying. First we are not, which we  
again will come to be, a fact so fantastic  
we fly like disasters, emerging almost elegant  
in our urgency, a trail of falling honeysuckle  
and smoke in our wake.



*They bent toward me. The windows suddenly went blind with rain. The driver had fallen asleep and was snoring gently to the swaying of the bus. Outside the muddy light flickered to pale yellow, and far off there was thunder. The woman next to me leaned back and closed her eyes and then so did all the others as I sang to them in what was surely an ancient and holy tongue.*

—Tobias Wolff



# & I Don't Sleep, I Don't Sleep, I Don't Sleep Till It's Light

A beginning is always a middle pushing through the shape-shaped space  
bored never but with the pause because  
surely we are pursued, pursed, the cloaks we've left behind  
cut for blindfolds, the dogs in the distance scorned and starved,

their teeth nervous with the faint taste of our fled heels.

Bored with being scared, bored with not dying,  
the fetching dusk, the becoming sleep—O we are ravenous  
to get ahead of ourselves. O a story this is not

and a story it must be. If I had my way it would begin  
with a sweet, deep breath drawn slowly in generous peace.  
Then a quick exhalation of fire. Hello, space. The appearance of rest only  
while accumulating like a desperate, besotted turbine

that, suddenly set upon, rears high and livid and righteous  
and turns a beauty on them so terrible  
those relentless constabularies bearing down on us are babies again,  
reaching out, wanting us to touch their new hands.

# This Was During My Animal Rescue Phase

To be is to be made of glass  
that thins over the part that most wants a shield  
and so we wade through even a low boil  
in search of potential gentles  
it's easy to love. Like feral cats.  
Minus a vocabulary,  
anything is easier to love.  
A door is a buckle, a door is a leap.  
One fantasy is rabies.  
Another is rushing toward  
the burning shoulder of a bridge  
to save something that only wants out  
of what it can't understand  
while the other vehicles hurtle past  
like catapulted junkyards filled with orchestras  
practicing their minor chords.  
Inside you is a thawing tornado maybe  
and a raw fist knocking  
while you wear your nerves outside your shirt.  
You put one foot in front of one foot  
in front of one foot in front of one foot  
and they are screaming at you now,  
there is the peripheral stun of sirens  
but you are here,  
it is your animal rescue phase  
and you reach out to take the wild, terrified thing  
into your somehow certain hands.

# Your Restlessness Will Make You a Celebrated Flight Risk

Destruction cannot be separated from its allure.

The broken window is more beautiful, more real  
than the one only just still whole: behind it  
is a boy called Brooklyn. Here is Brooklyn's mother,

lanterns nearly snuffed, her glass full of something mean-making.

Above the glass table, glass shelves  
and on the glass shelves sentimental paperweights like tears  
fallen from an earless god. You know and don't know

what happens next. An accumulation flares in Brooklyn's  
spine gusts the chest count ten too

late!—his suddenly kinetic arm  
raunches the feeble cohesion of what's holding things up

then too much stillness

and still not enough.

I hate the feeling of wanting a time machine

overpowering the feeling of wanting tomorrow  
to yield its surprises. Fury is absolutely sure of itself  
but then you are pressing shattered glasswork

into the dirt behind the back porch:

a belt of stars, marks of an itinerant moment  
that will continue in you. Good morning, inscription. Good morning,  
wound. Has everything

still happened? Chasing softer air, one flies through  
barbed mists—You won't get there  
in time and you will always arrive  
without a second to lose:

because both are true, you are all the time running  
but listen: the door hinge  
sounds like a grievous violin. The wind  
touches the ground

then makes a faint song  
from the ex-window's fangs.

# Not Wheel Ripped Cream

We are goblet-poor  
on this overabundant conveyance,  
and this is my story of falling down  
the mountain which is everybody's story  
of falling down the mountain.  
Something happens you can't help.  
Trays upon trays are brought to your table  
with the names of things you want  
attached to things that have been  
mispronounced, overdressed, showered,  
underdone, and otherwise compromised.  
The ill locutions which try to sew us  
together make us walk funny  
and rise only with great effort.  
The woman sits perfectly still in the faux café  
refusing to look at her oxygen tank  
as it waits, sullen beneath a table  
a table away. Impossible task,  
but at the bottom of the mountain  
what choice do we have? We ascend  
to witness the littling of our bigness.  
From here you can nearly see  
the monorail blaze, industrial version  
of a rare gift too late in an ebbing affair,  
a poinsettia robed in dilapidating frost  
while students of the empire's slow fall  
shuffle through rows of packed boxes  
and people,  
dreaming of islands  
where water licks the beach

and exposes the stark, elegant bones  
of things that perished from life,  
rather than the more terrible  
of the constructions  
which labored to order it.

# Lately Indesolate

The yellow car de-hurries so rapid  
it appears to ripple and bunch

in the rearview mirror: such a silly yellow  
to be screaming that way,

followed after by wheelsmoke  
like a languorous countercloud, train

of a wedding gown. Nothing happens.  
Which is to say an awful lot very nearly

happens. It is morning. In the car  
everything is a movie where everything

everything stretches, suddenly you think  
*I keep a light bulb in the icebox—*

*I am ready but don't know for what—*  
Curiously, I am not upset

until nothing has gone wrong. Later  
I will spill a drop of tamarind sauce

onto my nice new shirt, it will be night,  
my necessity will seem more reliable

but now the floor drops  
out of the feeling that the day

will simply keep continuing on its  
silver-frayed-by-burgundy way

into blue noon. Everything might be  
over. The music is loud, too loud,

there is no music, it's hot, it's cold,  
terribly, you can't reach anything

then the finger, which means *Fuck you*  
which means *We are alive in here*

*and very afraid*, the world rushes  
back into you like a fuss, a snarl

in the long wires of a bridge  
still everything might be over

everything beginning its swift and sorry decline  
and this happens so often

this happens all the time  
and how funny, the left turn signal

is a signal, is an emerald  
trying to touch your shoulder.

# It Has Never Not Been Thus

Across the stovish intersection  
a dog barks like a staccato choir  
of sirens. It is night. A lemon scythe rises,  
then overwhelms its fulcrum,  
the plants camouflage themselves  
in parched ruin. The closer you get  
to the center, the more the center wanes  
like a satellite that's broken  
the phantom ligature of its orbit.  
Hope is a paper hat  
resting on the dresser upstairs  
as the tsunami starts to agitate itself,  
to speak into some slant mirror  
how much its mother never cared,  
how its father disappeared  
or soldered steel bands over the space  
in which it came of age.  
Belief does not exist like morning,  
like high pressure systems, like the shrug  
of trees. It's a spark thrown  
by the awkward lurch of your vessel  
into the gaping dark into which  
you steer your vessel. You have to  
let go sometimes, sometimes  
you have to hang on tightly  
to the nearest tree and feel debris  
write into your skin before moving on,  
accelerating in the direction  
of reporters. Yes, I have been touched.  
It's a beautiful night  
among the surviving leaves,  
I am happy to be here.

# Attack Attack

The imperfect products of the nation-state  
lose their pitching arms, are torn, kicked loose  
in fields of tan roil, the compasses dizzy

amid dreams and despairs  
of exostellar clockwork. They have faces  
and fall ungently. *There*. Bereft

of cinema. Salts bring them round  
briefly: notions and bodies, magnets  
for perforations: just think

of each alien real splitting the skin  
into a terrible gasp, think how long it takes  
surviving fragments to leach through

the bottom of a coffin, the close room  
we wear to the twilight of not being  
anymore present—one presumes

until weary and afraid. Sees through  
closed eyes a wine bottle slip from stunned  
fingers. Sees the sudden blitz of monsoon

coming down in the middle of sheer daylight,  
volley after volley of wine bottles  
shattering on the streets, on the cars,

beside the baby strollers, *please*, slicking  
the marquees. Carpet. Shards. Prayer.  
At the stoplight, between an open window

and the Wig-O-Rama on the corner  
shakes a pick-up whose bed  
is packed with outmoded wheelchairs

like collapsed accordions. Every available surface  
grows an eye. And then it is as if  
something red begins to speak.