

Drift, Fence

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Approved

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of stylized, cursive letters that appear to be 'GCE', written over a horizontal line.

Gabrielle Calvocoressi, Thesis Advisor

Drift, Fence

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For Shadow, Strike, Hiss, Bailey, Nelly, Henry, Sam, Lee, Antigra, Tajo,
Marson, Indira, Speedy, Trickster, and (what was I thinking) Brad. Who taught
me to watch carefully, without speaking.

Dichotomous Key

1. Motile: 2
1. Sessile: 6
 2. Leaves usually clinching, with spines. Must bite to move—Venus fly clamp (see “fly paper”)
 2. Leaves usually without telling anyone: 3
3. Feet are tied in boots, live alone and kick streamwater. Lay perpendicular to the earth one day: 4
3. Feet are fragile and pointed like a crab’s. Lives as a ghost above the waist—White-tailed Seer (see “Natural Queenhood”)
 4. Dorsal surface is hairy, 4-6 times as ugly as he seems—American Toed (see “Stub”)
 4. Smooth epidermis. Endearingly mellow, even when significantly disturbed: 5
5. Eyes alert, ambling gait. Gets twine caught in shell—Florida Plod Turtle (see “Hugh Parkyn, first casualty of the Civil War”)
5. Outer nuance dries in wind. Coloration drab—Oddvark (see “the last thoughts of edward crone”)
 6. Only becoming sessile in adulthood. Sports elaborate bristles: 7
 6. Though torpid, retains diversity through its variety of mineral pulses: 8
7. Fossorial. Spends entire juvenile stage digging. Attaches upon reaching bedrock—Tarnosed mole (see “Well of course you’re trapped”)
7. Also attaches to bedrock but disperses through aerial locomotion—Solar hoatzin (see “Thrush Music”)
 8. Can be held in by a fence—Wellbender (see “Ephemeral Pools”)
 8. Will drift—Planktorn (see “By a Lake”)

I.

Ash Kettle Pond

Everything is iron red
with clay, embers swimming
below my outline and I am buoyed
beneath trees like dead rosemary twigs.

Masses of small movements branch up,
up, fighting for space on my back, shifting
stains in water.

While a man beneath me
crashes his rod
against a skin-stretched drum, screaming

for endless forms
most beautiful
and most wonderful to pour
terrified, from the water.

Rogue

Dumb luck, ontogeny
to make me a lake-fish,
proud otter in a pinch,
two spinach leaves
for hands. Dusk ropes

dredge in glacial light,
pump coral bits
into my stomach.
I am warm

and unbalanced.
My head is far too big.
I am a vessel
of vibrant spiders
spreading red and blue webs,
trapped in laps
of sea salt.

Walking through the Fish Hall at night, on a dare

My eyes pass over the walls
I plastered with black and red eels
in Sunday school

while everyone else drew goldfish that kept
their smiles even as Simon Peter
hailed them up.

This is surely where the devil waits to lure me,
to yank me from my boat down to the rapture
of the deep; maybe

Jesus walked on water but I know
the devil dives to Neptune depths in the form
of a colossal squid.

Violin plinks spike the silence
like the stab of a migraine
in off-beat staccato,

and every noise is a finger
along the baseboards, knuckling
for a soul to slip below.

I want to run, but maybe something waits
for me ahead, something more real
than walls and construction paper

and I should face it collected
in a rigid march— better
to be brave about it

than to sprint headlong into
widow string, even
if I close my eyes.

With the Ophthalmologist

It was the first
time I saw

my eyes disagree.
In the left: a lamp,

a chair, my father
tinkering with dials.

In the right
a float of swamp creatures.

He held my chin
and asked about letters

I could not see.
Did not ask

about the swamp creatures
paddling through my retina,

how they spilled
out the front of my brain.

It is far better one, to see
and two, to wonder.

Stoplights

Late summer breaks like golden number two pencils,
shuffles clouds of erasers, brings rain like dust
that settles on stale plants.

The hallways are tunnels of noise—
the sharp echo of teachers' heels
slowing the pace
of smaller shoes.

The windows reveal
a landscape of buses, scrubby pines.

Nothing past 10 am is sharp.
The men unbutton their shirts, the women slip
off their shoes,
the dog waits
by the intake for the air conditioning
breathing slowly through the house.

Outside, the insects keep
slow-calling one another
on evenings where we sink together
down red clay holes.
Lightning bugs squat
on leaves, tired
from the weight
of their enormous lanterns.
Tell me it is necessary to end autumnal
in flames of yellow, orange, and red
rather than fade
away in lighter shades
of how we started.

Mirage

And when you die,
where will the blood go?
Will it crust the walls
of veins and arteries,

coating each rubbering tube
in crimson sand grains?
Will it drip
down to gather in your spine

in a pool for beetles to slit
and spill— viscous blip
in the graveyard feeding
the scratches
of lumbering lives?

Or will it only dissipate?
Phase out of your body
in little hazes
taking longer in the deeper parts

to deposit a dark smear
on the roof of your coffin
that you will stare at blankly.

Pheromone Trails

The woman with the dog
wearing a sandy shirt
is yanked in the diagonal of smells

pushing out from the sea.
And it was quite enough pulling
as she tugs him straight

already her children double back *Mommy,*
up there is the turtle that bit me.

Shorebird lines cross-hatch close
but with distance they are brush strokes
dipped in velvet,

wiping away the east. Venus
runs its evening course
dropping after the sun,

bringing mist
to cover tidal pools.

And here I sit
bleeding a hole in the page.

Scooping bees from the pool

Sight woozes into the familiar
experience of shattered glass.

The abdomen start their pulse
sliding rings of chitin up
and back, revealing a point—
the one thing they can say.

Stop.

I am nervous, as I hoped.

Heads align in one direction
while an overhead sun sizzles
exoskeletons of mica. Hum together,

an unsticking
of wings from dorsums.

Preparing: out come the proboscises, dark
needles tap

chlorine droplets on my skin. Forelimbs
comb water from lion-cub heads.

Antennae are pulled straight
as they swivel
their segments, though

not to address me
or even each other,
but to better hear
a ceremony. Whispers
to find direction.
Lift four wings, hover
briefly, go.

II.

Natural Queenhood

leaves dark treads
from the den,
retractions from light.
She reels
through local haunts
through reed and leaf
fleet, and running.

Trails drool under feather, preens
a dart to mark a place.
An unteeming. An

untaming that knows
deer will kneel
when torn by arrowheads.
Does not care to read
the leer through clouds
turning overhead.

A Priesthood

The only people these fish ever see
are wrapped in regulator tubes, buoyancy-
controlled, tanked up

to pass between worlds
so they can sink deep enough
that nitrogen runs through their veins

and bubbles out sometimes
in a sickness called *the bends*
for the way its victims twist their bodies
like dancers paused in routine;

so they can smear the sun
with every out-gurgle
of gas from their mouths, so every meter

they descend their dials click down
and they are separated from the sky

that is only water now, only
a sheet of paper held close to the eye;

so they are separated from their places
that breathe dust in and out,
that pulse in electricity

(which itself is fluid and has a path) separated
from colors—red, then orange, then yellow

strained out until
the water is only vast bluegreen;

so when they cut themselves
on a barnacle they bleed out a grass stain,

root and unfold as an offering
and they become cold—still

they orient themselves down, or up, or sideways
in the wet outer space direction that takes them

further from sounds,
camera flashes
street corners

into the crush of a space
of reflective glint;

revealing their masks,
so they can hear only immersion

bubbles fleeing from sinking mouths—
so they are like priests
going into the Holy of Holies
without bells on their feet

and the boat driver waiting ages above
has no tether to pull them back;

so they keep gloved hands crossed in front
to keep from dragging through gloom
like incense, and now they are gone

out past the last atmosphere, but down
away from stars, moons
so no hurricane or change in day

or season could be noticed;
so they are alone in the deep

and quiet; so they kick off their flippers
close their eyes and recite together

so they can feel the narcosis
that is the rapture
of the deep

of the weightless and suspended,
of open darkness
in three dimensions,

as they begin to fall,
pick up speed;

so they can stream outer eyes
against saline;

so they can imagine
the movement sending
chills up from the toes,

enormous scales,
from a body preparing;

so their calculations
and computers do nothing
to tell them the miles they feel below

so that one among them draws
shapes he leaves
behind with a gloved hand
as gravity

excited, draws them closer to its
eternal goal and one

by one they put hands against their waist
right hand released, to drop

their weights and now they are stuck
in their chosen limbo;

so they can squeeze out their faults
in this place that is a bonfire without light,

so shapes swirl,
pause

draw in.

Chasing Father

The ball is a knot of sea-rope
we blast, slide tackle trips
of naked ankles,
seaside and beachside in his wake
steady down the beach. He doesn't
look back.

The ball is abrasive, sun-spotted
cartoon princes reddening my left foot.
My brother's right we find
fluid movement
in a spray of sand,
of bodies' flex and spring.

The ball is uniform in spin
it catches, nothing changes
its direction. He turns around, thinks
we're too far back to see him
fills powerful and wrinkled lungs with air, hands
on skin on a head.

The ball is sanding, rubber
revealing its original shape in moonlight
to muscles cracking harmless open-
handed chest shots, shin kicks,
clinch and hook, grapevine, bridge,
punt and scamper after it.

The ball rises, drops like ammunition
from a shot tower, my brother
volleys expertly the ball nipping air
the rise of backspin
and he is back with us
taking

the ball the other way. Though
we're on him quick, we slip
a tight perpendicular, all ball.
Five and a half decades long-distance running
and his strength just comes
from bones that break.

The ball is exfoliating, lopsided
amble loosening joints
not used to quick changes of direction,
finding it in curves, nuance
of stretched loyalty and we can't
push him off

the ball, which is dark under the moon
is condensation from a fired rifle.
Jet black and pulsing stars erupt
in sweat, cutting rivulets in his form
diamond, third brother jet plane and two
steam trails not keeping pace.

Hugh Parkyn, First Casualty of the Civil War

He trips,
lands in the sand and prick
of longleaf pine needles and turkey oak.
Spits grit from his mouth, curses.
Small slips of the sun

start him back up
to his knees. Where he feel the slenderest tug—
attached to his hand, a foot
of nature's warning colors;
red, yellow, and black-banded string
of candy drawn

from a slit in the rusty piling
of pine needles. He swings
his clock-hand
into the brush tries
to shake it off, pulls
on the tail, pries its lips
with a thumbnail.

So the little snake
with its fierce confidence
bites down mightily,
slides ancient liquid through capillaries
into the paired briars embedded
in his palm now
stopping the attack

at the minuteness of it all:
life raging against a change of place
like it might just fall apart
in the iridescence. New spill
of colored beads
sparkling under the sun.

In the dream

they are swimming
out, the boy stretch-legged
kicking through ocean
sliding down the slope
 of a wave,
the girl's skin against the water.

They get to the bottom
where their pubic hair is long,
covered in mud-streaks
 in the woods.

Their hands, scissors
that trim and cut,
walk confident
steps out of the valley.

Woman pulling kids out, up
 shared between hands

their waistlines
wrinkling, arms full
of smaller arms to dive. Legs

for a long
 radial
breaststroke kick.
Then, zooming out to landscape—
an enormity of children
falling

like a thousand froglets
out of the bags
of crumbling last people
 into green water, pairing
swimming out together.

By a Lake

Ripples from breath, a turtle dives
backwards into water, small waves
surround his point
of submergence. Squirrels twist
up trees tail-first,
and overhead clouds billow west.
Oaks pulse green into golden leaves,

and around me an unmarking
of hands. Lovers' carvings burst in sap. Nails
squeak from lakefront homes,
bury themselves into the dirt.
Dead trees erect themselves
from small pieces of rot,
enormous jigsaw pieces fit
and grow hard. On the lake,

jet skis are replaced
by fishing boats and canoes
and now water quickens,
recedes at the breaking
of a dam. People onshore are quieter,
are darker. Their voices make room
for puma screams; pumas
whose teeth grow with the cold,

the echo steps of a mastodon
into frost. The people retrace
their steps. Now, as before
animals stretch and squeeze the form:
deer become rats the lizard on the bark
grows stretch-necked, walks
to a new warmth! It trumpets,
spits pine needles back onto conifers.

Now even the moss begins
its march to meet the ocean
flooding me in fish and bugs,
sinking lower. I hear only
rock voices now, single cells
huddled around deep black cracks. Hold on

against the moon which grows larger,
returns to us
as we bumble toward bigger masses
undoing a complicated game of billiards.
Collision into one
space, between lips
small ripples, inhalation
of breath.

III.

Perfection

is a tall house in the sandhills,
a bedroom with a yellow bathroom

and an enormous tub
washed in warm tile.
There is a glass ceiling

and outside
a never-ending roll
of distant thunder.

Inside the hot water
of the tub,
the clean sheets
and the desk looking out
and above it all,

I sit and see through a screen:
wet branches,
ferns, deer shaking
damp from their eyes.

Drips of cloud-guarded detail,
quiet inhalations
through the nostrils.

I lay on the bed
and listen to the gray
run off of a membrane,

a voice wet with fur trying
to make me remember
how miserable it was
to live in such beauty.

In fact, monkeys for the most part are upwardly mobile creatures

Narrow-bodied black bugs

in place of his eyes.

Sporting

tails for balancing

in place of his eyes. Soldier

at the tree

run up the silence.

Perceive

her. Perceive her family's anxiousness

at the bombs.

Pop George

into a sack. Fly at the chest

in a rapid, fumbling way.

In the Harlow Lab

I no longer hate you
because I no longer see you,
because in your absence
these metal walls fracture

into geometry that comes
from a microscopy of thought,
from a wandering of spirit. So I see
whatever I feel, only,
and all I feel is cubes.

I've embraced the limitations
you've placed on my imagination—now
a gray monkey mother
is a good monkey mother,
better even if she's shiny.

You call this the pit of despair
because I am trapped in cold
and shake to keep time, hold
myself close. But what runs
vivid in my skull

you will not know,
not know I've discovered
the further I get
from your biscuits,
your hand the more I can chew
the threads still tying my head
to that shrivel of fur.

Passchendaele

I'll tell you again, it's worse on up ahead
the ungathering of tank squirming
chest stones becoming shoulder stones,
becoming head stones; and my muddy fingers
busy with the tugging.

Deep in the soil puckering my mouth
with splits, you fall with the roots I suckle
like jellyfish thread. Stew
in my bath. It's worse
on up ahead where you drop

your ear to the ground to hear
their tremendous humming.
Mouths that cannot cough me away,
confused last whispers
guided down instead of up. Because
it's worse to go back.

fly paper

tiny bones fracture

against poisonous chandeliers on impact

 a little pop that briefly

 shakes the paper

 quiet panic of appendages

 rustling the air

drying ugly crumbs on the mouth

of a giant raspberry-puckered appetite.

the last thoughts of edward crone

Somewhere a dog barks and will
because he is not a cat

because a strap sometimes tingles
his throat with electricity.

I mostly prefer to be
left alone in a space too

and then I make noises and throw rocks
and then I dream in color
sometimes

people scold me and I look
somewhere else or just alright

with me and my rocks, that are
just dirt clods really and don't hurt.

Well of course you're trapped.

What did you expect?

Layers, inversions, the way
snow flips a landscape
to air and muff

and footsteps. What else?

Something found, a series
of doors,
a detail missed.

You found—

an island
of flightless birds.
The woman's a bird,
the dog's a bird, the haze
of summer is the bird-god
of light, and Scott the painter
is a particularly ugly sort
of bird.

The heart of the island?

is hot and smells of guano,
because that's all it is
for a thousand feet
of burrowing

and at the bottom—

a retired street pony
stumbles around a track
looking for freshwater,
eyes white and unyielding .

IV.

Frost Wedging

Shivers skim across surface ice,
out and out like the steady roll
of mustard gas through the trenches;

falling with gravity
to twenty-three degrees of tilt,
long-drawn exhale
through the trees.

Catch

on dead spires
evergreen, in this giant's long-abandoned
bowl of soup.

Stillness does not bury death
so those swallowed faces,

snouts, and beaks float up
tap, tap, tap back a creak
towards thinner ice.

Genesis

Let those lone stalkers and stream
shifters keep their drudge
in the night. Still

your rumbling, the shiver of drops
to your passing. Don't
show us the color
such magic requires.

Leave us moon-shed, security
of the unseen

a bedroom of wire grass
where we can wake in quiet
and sink back into dark.

Leave us
one last pause
in your busy, whistling rain
here in the ocean that is also sky,
the familiarity

of brook-slosh, dreams.
What we both know
this place was first.

The crepe myrtle is fat with stinking red cardinals

I keep my eyes
beaded on you
bed on you
forced open
with metal instruments
for you wind
a wing against
your chest
with chicken wire
for you.
Or wait
cold bird
at the tree foot
for me to come
point my beak
close
it point
a smile
in my wood
mouth
whirl up
an inside scream
as I point
it see if
you startle
see if
you're in my head.

Nuchal

It's easier with snakes, whose faces
sit on the end of a bullwhip
that you can pop in one merciful swing
against the pavement;
faster than the far-off rumbling
of the next crushing wheels.

But this is the slow death of a hollow rock
whose snorkel-like nostrils are sticking
upside-down against lips, hanging

like a band-aid half loosed by pool water.
It's a yellow-bellied slider I tell
the officer wondering why my car is crooked,

why I ran down the shoulder to scoop it away
from the matador charge of another truck.

*I work in a lab that could use it for research:
cut it open, see what it's been eating,* I lie.
My lab does not want this broken turtle

and I do not want to give it an ethanol eternity
of staring at the back of a label it cannot read.

With an eye that's seen lost watches
stuck at the time of their demise,
a crawfish snake searching for prey,
whatever it is that stars look like
under brook ripples.

It fits neatly in a Frisbee and I drive home,
lay out a strip of aluminum foil on the lawn
and place it on top, for a burial of sorts—
to be taken away in bits by insects,
deep in the dark click of nests, a turtle.

In the Serpentarium

Having experienced death
you remain engaged in life

through the milking of reptiles
who have also crawled
through holes that drip

to stalactite tips;
a difference of magnetism
the others choose to ignore.
More than the irony

of collecting a dozen deaths
in a vial for making medicine,
you are collecting,
with your remaining fingers,
an illusion of camaraderie.

Ephemeral Pools (22)

The smallest type of flood
drowns spreads of grass blades, cleanly

in the shower-fill of tinkling drops,
whose breath is full of slime

and croaks resonate in a thousand vocal sacs
insisting: children, formed like retinas

in the drip of leaves,
catching green tips. Gathering

enough gravity to sting down a line
and add to the mix

of amphibian essence and fog
thick, like the bottom of a smaller sea,

thick in small inhalations, thick
as dinosaur skin and temporary dew

that steady tap of aquifers from below,
from above straws of sunlight

suck bubbles into sky
so this world recedes under cover

of leaf litter and quartz; into soil
unforming salamander segments

into dry beads only remolded
by a loosening ecdysis of mud.

Found Lab Meeting

they're coming in on

vectors

a spillover event from a reservoir species

I mean this is not my thing

but I see you go down the path of the

vector looking at migration____

ecology

some can survive freezing of their body water. try

and isolate that thought.

cells rupture when ice forms

can you quantify the movement?

well, it's a distribution of

tree-sized, leaf-sized____

V.

age of eclipse

We have become plants,
for everything we use runs on energy
from our aging sun through miles and miles

of blue mosaic panels.
Big cats still hunt in the remaining forest dark
and their prey kicks
and kicks
their eyes do not panic.
We have beaten the game of war
with the invention of an enormous bomb.

Beauty, too has been resolved in its full measure
through the creation of breed H6:003—
the highest standards of attractiveness
with selectable colors and sizes
of course. Some protein expressions

are on the Restricted List
such as those causing *murderous tendencies*
or, *unusual thought patterns* though,
it's rumored the back-alley geneticists
will make anyone you desire

with a vial-ful of cells
and a little elbow grease. Government (there's only one)
allows belief in magic
or religion if we choose, though
many among us lack the sequences
necessary for such aimless thought.

Writing for a grandmother I never met

because you exist in a fourth of me
and I don't know your boundaries.

Don't know the thump
of earth and daffodils
falling on a box,
a stone dropped
with a foreign name—
Lorraine Peterman Wiater
only remembered
by a man that is not my grandfather.

You do not haunt
any dreams of mine, but I
sometimes see an expression
I do not know in the mirror.

My every cell pumps in your energy
from bean-shaped, red organelles
only inherited
down the maternal line.

Your tracings within my head— wisp
curls lick and mix,

you are a stranger
that whispers in a voice
that floats a honeyed
flavor of my mother's sound,

your picture will never be
older than your daughter
now.

You, telling
your schizophrenic brother
the pond can be soup, too, you
painting in watercolor

you telling
me a story, harmonize
with your daughter:

her whispers leathering
yours only sparks,

flash-fade of a star
foreign, fleeting.

Stub

After the ox died
Paul shrunk into the North Woods,
crushed his axe between his hands

where he left twig-sized
splinters to fester and freeze.

And he'd chew at them,
nervous as the deer he stopped
cooking in favor of sweets
he'd steal from campers.

Once a year Paul would bathe
in the spring mud, scrape his naked

body with dead cedar branches.
Look at air, nothing.
Dirt, nothing. Pull the head off
a newborn robin,

nothing. Squinting sky-wide
eyes at the lake he'd grumble

into the water,
not rinsing the mud off
but lying supine

on the sand. He'd stare up at blue,
the ebb and flow of stars
for months before he'd peel

his crusty back off the lake, swallow
the gravel in his mouth,

mash some ferns against his groin
and wander further north
kicking branches off the pines.

Spring Poem

When sun eases green
from sleeping limbs
and bushels of furry
creatures stumble big-eyed
from their dens
the mycologist will slip
back into the tunnel,
bounce deeper
and deeper off luminescent
bodies of white
plates that thicken
and slant, immune
to natural laws
or at least unaware of them.
Pages of unctuous
observations rot
from cargo pants,
and his fingers
covered in spores. *By*
feeding on death
with their nets
and fruiting bodies
extended in gilled circles,
they are able
to raise it.

Thrush Music

I.

*We have twenty-five spots left
for students who wish to disappear.*

Twenty-five empty seats.
Twenty-five air conditioners
breathing through empty houses. Twenty-five
bags of oxygen
lifting twenty-five students
who wish
to disappear past
the exosphere.

*Meals will be simple. Passage
will be long
and quiet.*

Vespucci, Erikson, Shackleton
at least had waves. A tern,
thunderheads.
That's the problem with space,
that is, one drip
of blue
in a whole ocean
holds something to listen to.

*Radio communication will cease
upon landing.*
As if speaking
is what they will cling to
when the anvil drops
at the squeezing of an airlock out,
out.

More than words, motion.
The noise of naked thighs
sliding skin against skin
in a forest. Somewhere
to get beyond dust. To hear heat
bounce through foliage,
darken a face not contained
in a fishbowl.

*You may explore the planet,
make shelter, tend
to the greenhouse.
But please do not interfere
with the rovers.*

II.

Some among us claim this dirt
was our first home, that God planned
for colder life, but an asteroid
knocked us to a hotter rock
while still in our tiny forms.

That this is a return trip home,
that we were meant to breathe
carbon, take form from sand and wind,
to celebrate in radiation.

Now home has filled with shivering drifters,
and the windows are all knocked out.
The parents are long dead,
with stones out front to mark their graves.

God did not sprinkle us
on the wrong sphere. We were shoved off,
dust on a desperate lifeboat
by a captain going down with the ship.

III.

*

Sometimes we pretend the tracks we see are not our own. The moons
are oblong eggs digging into the sky.

*

Yesterday we heard Curiosity IX humming “Happy Birthday”
to itself.

Some nights we sit on our cubes, laugh
and make owl noises into the dark. Become quiet again.

*

There is nothing left to see, so we pretend. Make totem poles
from basalt, give them stray LEDs for eyes. Build temples

for the sound they make against the wind. Our children are orange, drink
to volcanoes. Are happy with us for leaving them here.

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