

YEAR OF THE MURDER HORNET

year of the cloud of pollen that chased me to my car across the supermarket parking lot
year I was overpowered by flowering magnolia petals in a windstorm while walking home
year of the murder hornet and coronavirus and weather as a system that shaped each day
in a way that felt different from the past year during which you understood how the neighborhood
you grew up in shaped the way you say *friend* how the word *childhood* is the start of a sentence
that has no end until you aren't the one saying it anymore year of grown-ups with their gravity
making everything a question or a fragment depending on their personal weather whether
some of them were green or deep as trees of your imagining year when the way trees speak
with each other about each other was more essential than the shade they gave year to try to live
like trees upright yielding seeking sunlight and silent languages year I got a book in the mail
about housecleaning as a joke from another poet regarding a poem of mine about life being hard
and people's constant quest on the internet to make things easier year the cover of the book
read *Introducing Your Household Heroes: Regular Products with Multiple Abilities* how *multiple abilities*
sounded more like an affliction than a capacity year of nights I lost sleep year my mind cradled me

ESSAY ON GENTRIFICATION

for Tongo Eisen-Martin

Gentrification means I have arrived in a manner only half foreseen
as half of me claims culprit or lays claim to my neighborhoods and stoops
spanning shambles to the ramblings of my education meaning I know
all about espresso and the benefits of self-expression meaning I still
trip myself up in the face of fragility as reflex to tradition for a long line
of providing comfort constitutes survival prior to mine if property is still
an interest to protect it also interests me in other ways meaning I spend
my days sweeping the floor sometimes writing sometimes imagining a table
strewn with pheasant and clattering plates where a feast takes place in my absence
where plans for re-paving move forward without my input or my permission
as I envision the wave of a hand prompting someone to pass the bread
to someone who likes their wine cool their butter soft and lightly salted
someone akin to me who warms each pat with her breath a hint
of bitter ancestors on it

ESSAY ON POETICS OR EARLY MORNING TEXTING WITH ORLANDO

I'm having trouble writing
poetry he wrote trouble being a poetry writer

I don't know I said write notes of sound notes of mystery see what comes
geese flying brakes screeching boots crunching snow on a path I said Do you
recall the last time the light of shadow reflected off your skin? he asked
in the morning I said stretching in bed lowlight we exist he wrote because of light
as light he said sound is light's cousin I replied shadow has a sound of whispering
shadows vibrate like voices he wrote like bird bones are hollow btw I said sound
like wind I added wind moving he wrote against the fabric of skin feeling wind
the epitome of being in the moment we agreed breath is wind we agreed breath
is wind we said write it down I said see what the shadow gives our breath imitates
wind he wrote the crux of it us as wind messages in our ears long before
the ringing messages of purpose he said mystery of purpose I noted humility
of purpose or mystery fabric of soul he wrote hella aura yours he said lol poetics
of geography and self shadow of words on the page I typed in person he said
insomnia I said sorry
oh well we said soon

TREATISE ON MY MOUTH

Turns out I am *chargé d'affaires*
of my own mouth of my real speech
though I sometimes think I am just being
emotionally concise that my use
of constraint is not about protecting
my own interests but instead implies poetry
but we'll let your mouth
be the judge
of that I am sure there's a test or an app
I should probably ask my kids for whom my policy
is to never be
alarmist
but rather to appear as a witness to our lives
so that I can tell them what they were like
when they were little
to be a regular channel
of love is my intention for I am here to avoid
long-term conflict while propagating an accurate narrative
by means of my one and only mouth open for business
worthy of attention
I am ready
to answer all of your questions

BLUE

Blue is the mind in a state of *focused immediacy* blue is water
working against the body so it can get there
then there's the sky
in September open and azure as America least American Dream-*iest* of lands
on the face of the planet where like most I hoard the future and try not
to be afraid that a snag in the food chain will stop the *Steak-Umm's* corporation
from dispensing its daily wisdom via twitter
by *food* I mean supply
by *supply* I mean I've had enough inadvertent exposure
to *quarantine baking fails* and *celebrities sheltering-in* to last at least
the time it takes for grief to find its way back home which I know
from experience is not as long or brief as you might think
when's the last time
you heard a child describe the silence
in a room as the sound of someone crying I couldn't tell you
these days are indistinct but it happened
recently one friend said
Time no longer has meaning Today I cleaned my oven Wow I said
It really doesn't Wow

REGIME

eat a diet of night shades reverse climate change
avert colony collapse disorder defuse a bomb disguised as love
stew tomatoes for deep sleep and blood that's mineral rich
with new mysteries pump that blood like a fever dream
through your bittersweet heart and wait for your mind
to fortify against petulant businessmen celebrities
with special pajamas the peach-colored women
of Instagram be wary of optimists with Keto tips
and people who seek to be president munch a plate of jalapenos
and jimsom weed listen to those in love with curiosity
the moon and her many moods stay tuned to souls
that brood and also to poets who like finches in cages
sense the changes before they come

EMPIRE

History's always showing me men on boats and women in houses
but memory is a poet not an historian and I must be victor
of my own mind to tell my stories of conquest and demise
in which the soft fascination of watching waves while parsing marriage
is a movement towards perspective that still falls short
of a bolder effort
like a mother
naming her son *I am Empire* with no hint of irony at all
I confess
to a relative lack of courage as I put my intentions
down on paper put the paper in a bucket and let the paper
burn in my head fire mixed with thoughts mixed with words
so many variants of concern
and still no memory
worth preserving more than the sight of my first-born son
flipping his skateboard on a curb in New York
the whole history of his body in the world

MINORITY REPORT

"That's *my* break-up scene" the poet wrote and everything turned
to a near-perfect confection of confession and universal feeling
he was Irish or was he? does it matter that in a movie I saw
a group of young Irish men having been treated badly by England
liken themselves to Black Americans does it matter that I was skeptical
of this comparison despite my love of *The Dubliners* my longing
to see a thousand shades of green everything is relative these days
but still I try to find meaning
meaning if I was my children's first friend
then I hope one day they'll be my friends again meaning if love
is a dog from hell then trust is her rescued cousin the other day
I heard the term *conspirituality* which refers to the trend of luring people
towards conspiracy theories on the internet with the pretense
of spiritual practice *Aha* I remarked herein lies the history of man
too often and every day I am thinking about words like wind
my thoughts lift and carry themselves away how the ephemeral
is not soft but sharp when it comes to pangs a notion of mine
that now lives among the trees part of this a friend tells me
is about not being ready internally to reveal what the poem is about
Oh, you with your crystalline vision I say *Tell me about the other parts*

MYSTERIOUS WAYS

I'm imagining Jesus moving like the moon through corn fields wondering
myself into a thicket and reflecting on the nature of permission as I read about
John Berryman's letter to his landlord in which he complains about
his *screaming* Frigidaire

We all have our fridges to bear

the critic quips and I laugh out loud in my bed
nestled in amber lamp light where despite a heavy blanket I spend the night
tossing and turning to avoid squashing my busted toaster of a shoulder
as if all hope were contained in my right rotator cuff as if the ability to pivot
could be crushed by intermittent dreams spinning in half-sleep

I list positions I know: *physical political sexual*

my disposition my orientation my mission

in this life and next my mind leaps to a hospital in Jerusalem
where I heard there's a whole ward for people who believe they're Jesus

where clothed in white robes they move through midnight corridors

the walls like grail

it's morning now

and I'm hoping to get a letter from Mary who dispenses wisdom via snail mail

How do you know when something is finished? people often ask her

When I am done thinking about it she always says *But what if the thinking*

never ends? I write back *What then?*

CONSPIRACY THEORIES

My youngest son's first word was *light*

No problem his first expression

I was seven months pregnant with him when my father died

my dad who stumbled through life improbably kind

I like to think he and my son passed each other in the ether

of their creation and demise that the universe conspired

to give me a buddha at a time when I felt most alone

ten years later now I'm reading about a mall

called *American Dream* in East Rutherford, New Jersey

where you can stare shopping straight in the face if you dare

where every mirrored surface is a gut punch to the conscience

and you can dry your hands in a *Dyson* air blade without

looking up or hurting any trees

everything involves conspiracies it seems

once I was texting my youngest son

How are you, hon? I asked

Good he wrote back

when we were in Narragansett

we saw a rainbow cloud

*I'll show you a picture of it
and we saw a Nazi and a Ferrari*

*Wow I said my actual face
a laughing with horror emoji*

*Well I offered
It's Pride Day
so maybe the cloud
was God's way of telling
the Nazi off*

*Except God's not real my son later said
He's a story about a made-up friend*

(WO)MANSPLAINING

After I gave birth
to my first son my husband said something like
*Why isn't everybody always talking about this? I mean, what else
is there to talk about?* that is one way I came to understand why some
people talk all the time why some people speak very little
having babies
is also how I learned that the moment before anger is a moment
of need and that violence I carry life with me wherever I go
and whenever I speak I am talking about death

ESSAY ON BEAUTY OR BEHOLD A TRUE STORY

There once was a man who claimed he couldn't watch *Bonnie and Clyde*
because Faye Dunaway was too beautiful it's true beauty hurts
but it's seldom debilitating overrated maybe the way Meryl Streep
is *overrated* in the eyes of a man who doesn't find her beautiful enough
Fuck the bread
a writer's mother once said when her daughter couldn't find
a teaching job or yeast during a pandemic *The bread is over* she told her
dismissing life as we knew it in one fell swoop bread became language
to my mind no longer elastic in form all leavening lost
as bread became love to my heart a knot of kneading and need
another true story
is that I am a mother and a writer who knows about beauty and bread
about language and interruption I also know the mirror only tells part of the story
of a face *The eyes have it* they say but the eyes can only hold so much
the way a heart can be full and at the same time broken different chambers
of a single system split
the way Faye Dunaway kills beauty
by being the mother of it how we break bread to partake of it

ESSAY ON MERCY

It's all management before mercy for the suits at the rallies and for those
alone in the ICU not a single mask to reuse even for the mothers
grieving in advance is intense an anguish akin to combat which it's said
feels like the second before a car wreck only all the time
a single
prescient moment right before impact that tenses the body for eternity
bruises the psyche and rewrites the system to run solely on adrenaline
but mourning is not war
and Antigone was not her brother
she sought to bury Polynices because ritual is everything
so a warrior she became still mythology continues
to bewilder as if life doesn't train us for death
it all remains grim if we don't see small mercies in our midst
the lessons we might miss et cetera
once when I was young
kissing a boy I didn't love on a mattress in a floor-through
off 10th Avenue I had the feeling I was falling through time
it was then only then that life wasn't about saving things
at least not mine