

Lunette 22

Before they cut me open, they put me under,
 set their clamps and lances to the mercies
overhead, where my body lay oblivious,
 without discernable guardian or guest.
I was a soul in exile. No pain, no voice,
 no kindling of my days before to light
the place—if you can call a sleep that deep
 a place. I could have died, for all I know.
Make any personal refuge dark enough,
 it ceases to be personal and dark.
A world in name alone and therefore nameless.
 Whatever angel of the underworld
laid me there, it led later to the cold
 tile at the base of my commode,
where I curled all night and waited for death
 to pass. It did. And then, it did again.
And though I left my floor to join the others,
 for months, I felt the slow sad withdrawal
of medicines whose afterlife is poison.
 Who am I to host this stranger. Who,
replies the stairwell with its downward curl.

Lunette 23

A crevice pricks your pupil with a flower,
 dips its pen. Any stone will tell you.
Fear is contagious. It writes prescriptions,
 elegies, tweets, sad infectious jokes,
conspiracy blogs and invitations
 to the rally. Mobs and true believers
know. Each is bigger in the other.
 Or is it smaller. Or is it, I have no side
in the matter, long as it is mine.
 Fear says, time to get organized, then
it scatters all your data. Look around.
 A little of you in everything these days.
A wounded bison comes down off the wall
 of the cave to sniff your firepit,
then he names you, and when you wake, nothing,
 and you know the beast is out there.
You hear him moan. You hear a sky pour
 down on you a whole house of rain,
and you want to ask the rock why, why
 bother to wake from these materials,
but the world is that much farther away.

Lunette 24

Call the moon tonight a monocle
 screwed into the eye of a great jeweler
who turns a tiny diamond in his tweezer.
 Call the gem a soul, her name the name
a mother gives you, so you might think
 of precious stones long after they glide
in felt-lined drawers. Just like a mother
 to teach you to be more, more, as she
gets ever smaller, frightened and alone.
 In the end, the fear of nothing took her,
the fear of disappointing one she loved,
 and then, no one, tell me what is worse,
what version of hereafter. Does a dream
 ink the ledger where none of it matters.
Call every pale lunette the glass of milk
 you need to sleep. Or the bedside lamp
with its insomnia of puzzles, its clock
 and box of music waiting for the hour.
There, there, it whispers, so many forms
 of emptiness, of jewelers, mothers, gods
with tiny angels turning in their tweezers.

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Lunette 25

Once, I broke into a fever and died.
Not all of me, but some, me here, words
out there, looking for a bed to lie in.
I floated above my body like a moon.
I was two, one emerging from the other
who, after our exhausted hour, fell
back into my bones like a gasp of air.
It helped. The brokenness that heals.
What is a moon if not a battered object
still, although it falls and falls in halos,
its face dipped slowly into the sunlight
that melts over and over into darkness.
What if not the hypnotist who coaxes
out whatever frail and crescent nature
only to give it back to the great unknown.
I met a talky stranger on the last bus home.
He must have been damaged. I listened.
I listened. I tried. I was no one to him.
And a little of all. Mending, I told myself,
is conversation. And so I opened the wings
of a book in my lap as if to say, hello.

Lunette 26

As a kid, I had an 8 ball that answered
 when I called. I shook it when I asked
a question as if to add a little chaos.
 I helped, I thought. It made me feel a part.
I closed my eyes to talk as if the ball
 were music and lights out brought us closer.
Tell me, what happens when we die, I asked,
 and the ball replied, *without a doubt*,
or never, or check back later or some of us
 need to be tightened, others loosened.
I was learning how to be a prophet,
 a con, a skeptic, a hexagonal prism
drawn up from the obscurities of water.
 When I see a lunette inside a tower,
I see my messenger in an upward gesture.
 Never the answer that made me try again.
Or the modicum of faith I put in words.
 It was the beauty of their origin,
how they floated out of utter darkness
 like a face that presses its cheek flat
against the cold glass, anxious to be seen.

Lunette 27

When the moon left earth, it gave us room.
 It gave us refugees the color of snow
in stone still valleys whose rivers froze,
 whose clouds grazed the crevices of ice.
Silence turned into a whisper, a rumor,
 a hiss of gas. Everything smelled clean.
Like a hospital where no one comes
 or goes, no one claims the basket of jewels.
A man could tear a moon from the chest
 of another, and the canyon would not care.
The tyrant would take to his mountain home,
 posing for cameras, always looking down.
But here we are, at the foot of a river
 cold enough to climb. Here, the god
of the memorial, its black rock face
 larger than any pageantry of soldiers
whose prospects make them nervous as the stars.
 We have come to the grave of starlight,
where the great constellations break down
 like confessors and scenery in the movies.
However bitter and confused. We look up.

Lunette 28

You have come to a bend in the water
 where the bodies in the wilderness
feed the poplars, these innocents
 who light the kitchens of the sleepless.
What do they know of the general's order
 to bury the crime, to plant these survivors
on the grave of the government camp.
 So what you see is propaganda.
It feels personal, which it cannot be,
 and the better to shoulder the task ahead,
to excavate the ground. What is worse,
 disturbing the peace or falling deeper in.
To work a killing field, you need a river
 in your veins, a mountain to move, slow
against the long pull and pale suspicion
 it is wrong. What is this sanctity
we bestow on those who do not care.
 What this ghost we fan from our faces
as we bear down, taking up each prize,
 however small, each autumn that falls
in the hole, and you, who lift it, start again.

Lunette 29

It feels criminal, to turn from the world,
but your worries do no one any favors,
so you take a day, a year. You take
to the wilderness where a fox
trots into the white, stops, raises its ears—
someone to listen close without listening
to your problems. You and I are small,
closer now to the emptiness
our anthems fill with voices, graces, gods.
Here and there the bones of a creature
who died without dread or signature,
above the powder, beneath the pines.
Beauty is cold. It lays it ice against
our brokenness. Which is why I played
a song for my father, deep asleep,
who woke up two months later, and no,
he remembered nothing, like the snow.
I played to a wilderness, a nameless
listener, an animal or nothing at all.
I cannot tell you who I was back then.
I played to the mist that makes us faceless.

Incursions of Light 21

A bit of wilderness in each square foot of a room.
The flower of a lamp with its bee of light.
Vines that feed a nocturnal screen.
The lion emblazed across a book of verse.
The *anima* in *animal* opens its eye
like a tunnel under school. Music,
these days, in the coffee shop, car,
supermarket, so it's easier to miss it,
but tonight, the surplus in a radio howls
the better reasons to live on. The sea
of dark around cities retreats from shore,
but the islands listen, and in their sleep
flood, and those who cannot see this drown.

Incursions of Light 22

An anxious friend told me dark days get darker
when you see the strings that hold people up.
Yes, I said, and I thought of a famous painting,
its barren field, bodies propped up with stilts,
as if the landscape's emptiness revealed as much.
But if you get close, you see, in each eye, a well
whose tunnel goes on and on, without arrival: odd
how exposed one feels at the threshold of the unknown.
To be seen as unseen, thereby worthy of the gaze.
In each, the oil and char of a chiaroscuro pigment
that launched a thousand angels, candles, plums.
You could stare for hours and feel both more and less
alone. You could thank the friend, the well, the portrait
of one more day, alive, that gave you nights like this.

Incursions of Light 23

The *devil's tone* found its way back home
to places of worship, less an emblem of lust
alone, than the deeper obscurities of desire,
the fulcrum of a more expectant nature, fit
to lift a heavy load. Call it death, bitterness,
exaltation. The need for resolution leaves
no part of you untouched. It knows you.
And you learn to trust. The hymn astride
the colonnade tells you, hold on. I have you.
It lends its beams to the sick and confused.
It has no faith, only the will to have one.
If it opens a wound, it must. If it cracks
a window to the lot outside intensive care.
If the crow calls out, *over here, over here*.

Incursions of Light 24

When the chorus returns,
and Linda Thompson sings
I'm walking on a wire, and her husband sings
 beneath her,
 the voices feel as one no less alone.
 High above our greatest dread,
 the cry of *I* as a duet.

And you know they will not last in that other life,
though it sounds that way now,
minimal, breakable, intimate, defiant.
Too many spells to break, she sings,
as her husband's angles of ascension
on guitar feather the wound. Me too,
says the I in the mouth of the one who suffers.

Incursions of Light 25

I too turn, the way perfection turns
to the mother of good intensions and self-loathing.
My cat's a little monster. Love that cat.
Inferiority does not figure in a creature
like that. But me, I have, I'm told,
the common cold of existential disorders.
I hear a door chirping, *work, work*.
Maybe my dad, somewhere, is watching.
He who could not rest inside his body.
Aristotle taught me, perfection might
please a dad like that, but chances are, he would
see the flaw somewhere. He would get
an idea from God knows where and vanish
into the work song of here, now, forever.