

Turning Back

-A zuithitsu

I stumble upon a question in my notebook: *Is this real? Is this really happening?*

No explanation. What the hell is *this*? An ending? A beginning? I can't remember, can't imagine what *it* is.

In a world where reality's mixed and mediated,
it's hard to say. Hard to know
what's real.

Go back to start. Roll again.

Sometimes there are glimmers of something nascent,
beginning to breathe, but the pages are full
of seagrass too, snarls of thought
that had their moment and passed.

If you try to rest in open water, you never know what your feet will land on. Eels writhing or the
slime of seagrass, beds and beds of it that you must swim above to return to shore? It is slipping
away even as you swim towards it.

Seagrass: the only flowering plant that can live underwater, says the Internet. Syntax snared and
hare-brained, as if I was scrawling something in the car while listening to the radio while
speeding home while drafting a poem.

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Yes, moonlight can, in fact, bleach clothes left out on the grass overnight. That night, I fell for
the moon's candor.

Writing, I'm always chasing after the first time, like trying to recreate the first vision of Van
Gogh's ultramarine night skies. Why ultramarine? I look it up. See Marian blue, the color
painters used to evoke the Virgin Mary. See Lapis lazuli, a stone from Afghanistan more precious
than gold.

Bluest night:
the spring peepers refuse to go mum.
Ultramarine points back to mere, back to sea, back to mother.

Dawn's Misplaced its Sun Again Haibun

in the smog, while a plane takes off to who knows where. On the sidewalk, a delivery bot, on the job, blinks its rudimentary eyes at me. Obstacle, it seems to think of me, though I'm also an outsider. What ghost laborer in Venezuela or the Philippines helped to process and label its data system? Somewhere else, AI is hell. Here, among the zombie apartments, we can pick our poison, and the downtown is honest about what it is. Down to the bone, the duplexes stacked above do not apologize for their busted-up windows, porous as the sky. I meet them open-eyed. A man draped in a blue blanket, his world mashed into a bag at his feet, dreams below giant Samsung screens that re-play clips of football games and makeup commercials. In the land of the free, each street decrees that we can buy our way out of desire. Graffitied birds and basketball players evaporate in the thickening fog. A ritual these mornings: dodging the buzzes and beeps in my pocket, our country's news, as loquacious as ever, for as long as I can. A breeze picks up car exhaust, and my phone sings its pastoral of labor outsourced to the lower hemispheres. I give up and read another day's scandals. In brief: if you're willing to trust the turn in the wind, you can make a church of money. That night, after a full day of poetry readings and craft talks, I grab Taiwanese noodles at

Pine and Crane on Grand Ave.
A hummingbird, unlikely
match, flashes in the haze.

Commuter at Dusk

Shadowed indigo at twilight, the mountains
disgorge ciphered patterns into the sky. Silhouettes
streak across the air. Unsummoned, the phrase *A still*—

Volcano—appears in my mind then dissolves.
Ashes? Arrows? No, beings stretch,
lengthen. Syncopated wingbeats cut

across a shadowland that some call
home, some call flyway, some call regime.
My eyes self-correct and wild geese

take shape, role playing at nothing but the tricks
the human eye makes of them. Some unheard roll
call summons them, and goose by goose,

the sky's stitched back to western New York
February skies, and I'm heading home.
The radio, low-toned, slips from static

back to voluble again, and the news cycle
gives context to this lonesome state.
These long nights, I'm so easily ill-

at-ease; a white-hot froth rocks inside
me. Far off, bats flicker into morse
code formations, dots and dashes, short-

hand transmissions. Three dots, three dashes, three—.
When they turn direction past the telephone
lines, I accelerate, fly parallel with them

until my body follows their lead,
re-learns that it is as mammal as my cat,
well-fed, who once dissembled a song-

bird like a music box. What summons you
home? For the first people, it could have been
the sight of migrating birds, pointing to a land

perhaps cast not just in ice. When I arrive home, I know
my cat will turn her soft belly to me, and my lover
will turn off the six o'clock news. Our bodies

are not trick questions, not to each other.
We have wandered lost in winter's white-outs
before, but tomorrow we'll wake to each other.

On Eros & the Peregrine Falcon

On the ground, stilled,
I'm puffed feathers,
a snapshot of beak
and poise or hunch-
back plucking meat from bone.

Above:

Earth glides by with ruins and rabbits and runaways. Wind, steer me
where you will, knowing what I've savored, what I've cast
off in your name. Weather, course through me, attest to my nerve,
my hollow bones. Thermals, carry me off like a newlywed to currents
that translate my body to stream-lined rapture. For an instant, I forget
myself, and I am undone, a song of speed and ozone. When the wind
shivers through me, licking my wings,
it bursts to pieces everything but this.

Tobler's First Law Sonnet

Had I no vertebrate, no binocular vision or rituals
of sustenance—my wife's open mouth,
a faint taste of honey gumming up my lips—
what axioms of survival would I have?
Not all right angles are equal. The whole's not
greater than the part. Imagine that former life opening
up like a plane landing mistakenly on the run-
way. Some days I can almost remember how it felt
to have forewings and a thorax, how to navigate by the clock
of my antennae. I remember the dash
of that life. I miss its pageantry but not its loneliness.
I missed her in an airport once, stranger in a sea
of bodies, asymptote to me, off by a few degrees.
When we met, I made my body a conservatory.