



Feeling, as clouds
empty into
a month and then some

K. Twyla Park

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In the dark, I see the effluence of everything. I wake up as an acrobat,
midair, when there is nothing to say,
and the world has stopped.

I believe I die every night in my sleep,
open eyes to a new universe. I am terrified one day I will blink the sun
away,
alone, to no breathing but my own. A question, always:
why can't my silent words build a home, a fortress, build
safety. Nothing is secure. In any universe
my inner voice is louder than my mouth,
tongue the cherry color of hot metal, sounds of a burnt forest
in a windstorm. I hold the map and the map is gone – I hold the corner,
I palm the tear. Frayed paper. A feather. There are wings on everyone's
back,
we are voyaging on a current that doesn't know
why it flows or freezes. Sometimes I feel
I might be growing. My heart moves
from being cold to being unguessed.

A flower drifting in a bud vase
rustles a memory.

The weight of a velvet bag of marbles drifts through my hand
from twenty years ago. The cat's eyes smoke out
from glass balls on a living room floor
into a front porch filled with the smell of spilled beer,
an old friend's freshly lit Lucky Strike; vanilla cigarillos are buried
in the ice cream playing across a lover's lips. The lights are strobing
between blurred halogens screaming on a dark road
and old neon glowing on Main. The streets are the same,
the buildings change like the length of grass
along the interstate. I drive past the church I grew out of
like the single red dress I ever felt attractive in. I am not the devil,
nor am I Prometheus, but when I see the dark wash over the late
afternoon sky,
I want to turn, tell you,
I believe it is just waiting for stars.

I've seen it. I'm coming.

Traveling, as currents

Most nights, I stand on the shore of the riverbank I inherited. I reconcile the sand and the roses, the smoothness of skulls and pebbles forever rolling down hill. I am on intimate terms with curves. I have lived with them forever. I sleep with them. I hold one, unused, delicately behind my teeth. I stare at the ground, the ripples, watch the moon in the movement. She knows curves more seductive than mine, more severe than the river. I want to be her, have the force to move the whole ocean. I am here to meet your shadow, to cradle this landscape together in our understanding arms. I want to make a circle. A circle is complete.

Beneath our perfume, the water whispers;
you meet my quivering with waves,
a steady pulse. Our kisses rustle away
into exile together.

Anchorite

What is the difference
between a saint
and a hermit? You cannot say belief –
imagine hands purpled
with age, scarred by fire, nailbeds
full of sand and flood. And alive. How
would anyone live inside the earth
and not know a higher power?

Refracting

I wake up
naked. Clear.
I am not yet mosaic.

My breath is cradled
between the sky and my lungs. It is smooth -
I drink deep. I am a balloon.

Somewhere, a magician draws a sword,
drives it
through the engineering of these walls.

I am just assisting
in possibility.
I am already invisible.

When I return I will be a prism,
a silent agent
tiling light from somewhere else.

Shaving

I catch my legs like I catch my breath -
sharp, on the sofa. I am satin
beneath a forest. I am
mapping the spaces between
settling dust and sunbeams
flowing under an afternoon shadow.

The water runs. It always does,
when the tap is turned
and the world is spinning.

I come, an empty flower, to the ocean.
A hollow to float or fill. I don't know
for certain. I believe
floating is something the dead do
when souls are no longer
connected to architecture.

I am here to smooth things out.
A razor rests more easily
on a porcelain edge
than an inhale rests against its steel.

I am wading. The waves hold me
more gently than a priest palms an infant.
I slide open-eyed beneath the surface.
I am waiting to be crushed,
to let my substance expand.

The words I am not speaking
circle the drain
like they circle my teeth. They are just gone,
the way I imagine souls depart. Sliding
smoothly over everything.

Old smoke still clings to me

We stole your grandmother's matchboxes,
a stockpile large enough for another war.
Red, white, and blue. You: testing each strike strip,
dark or flare. Strike anywhere.
Denim shorts. Lighting a flame with your teeth,
putting out the fire with your mouth.
A sweatshirt zipper. In the basement, we scraped
phosphorus on phosphorus until every box was dead.
Ash. No matter how wet the summer sky was,
we were burnt. Here: butterflies. A memory. Smoke
falling out of your red lips, you told me I could kiss you
if I swallowed a flame. Flowers. I would have swallowed the sun.
Please, anywhere. I couldn't feel my mouth for a week.

I am a caterpillar

An Atlas moth was found
in Washington. It is dead now,
but before, it was something else.
When everything grows too big to hold,
I become a cocoon. I dream of being
a dress, a blanket, something for a body -
an orgasm, perhaps,
or a coffin. A chariot. A needle. A museum.
I am a framework,
open space, everyone else moves
within. A window. Whenever I am broken, I feel
I'm on the cusp of something. The edge
of being myself. Someday
they will remove my scaffolding,
let me be nothing
but a collection of arches. A cathedral
held tightly in the shutter of a lover's lens.

Electrode

I'm remembering the assumption
I held in my heart. A grenade.

One day I exploded
down a subwoofer, and I found
the thump and hiss of every song
is not the same. Electronic pulse,
a pacemaker. On a cold road
I broke a hot sweat, got bound up
in the sidechaining – how the world attaches
effect to cue, how a machine gun will get louder
when a trigger tells it to –

It sounds like a brain,
how they say it's supposed to work:
signal, response.

Parentheses

Listening to Sigur Rós again,
again eight tracks building a blank space
like the dreams of our parents,
where I can still do anything:
breathe in a turtleneck, have nightmares,
hold a razor, hold a kitchen knife,
have hazy afternoon sex, astral project,
feel something primordial in my gait -
the way the stars spin. In this quiet space
where no sound travels, I am listening
to the sounds of hope
in my haunted breathing, a swallowed memory
reminding me there are so many ways to touch
the blank paper,
yourself,
another person. Another person.

Painting, with salt water

I love you. You don't walk away
when I am screaming, or holding in a flood cry,
naked, tongue stripped bare. This whole world
is the Tower of Babel,
and heaven is unattainable. Shaking, I wonder
who can climb a rainbow like this? The angels
are riding with God, like Care Bears in a cloud car,
the bodies are buried under every footstep,
and here I am, still
just wanting to be seen. How is it mad
to be strong, to know, to rebel? I pray
to saints who are not my mother's
for some peace. Saint Ice Cream. Saint Wikipedia.
Saint Youtube. Saint Therapist the Tenth.
Nobody hears me, because no one speaks plainly,
especially to me. You hand me my earplugs,
place your small hand as wide as you can
on the crumbled arch of my spine, and I ask you
how on earth can any god hear my prayers
over all this noise, his radio turned up? You help me
stand, help me lay down, place your ear
on the altar of my flushed cheek, so close to my mouth.
You translate the tongues of my silent quakes,
so close, so close. You tell me you hear me,
you look right at me.
It is the most sacred of blessings.

Mom ran her finger across the mantle, but

I'll tell you what it means to clean house,
turn the music to ten and dust. It means tea leaves
in the sink, bleached white,
the smell dissipating through the pine. Mystic forest
of a house, your body moving through it.

Later, in the fresh sheets you will see
the spotless surface of your nightstand, the dark
will be a little brighter, and in the middle of the night,
in the spotless mirror you will see
it was the empty space inside you that was cleansed.

Inside our starter house

We are trying to enjoy the final morning
in this place - a sensible stretch.
Eddies of our most intimate bones stir. Ignoring the dawn,
she asks me, "Are you happy?" And I hate this question
but I say, "Yes." I try to project the sound and confidence,
but feel guilty not elaborating my way into the truth,
that I'm worried, that I should remind her
about my panic attacks increasing all week,
that when I've been on the bathroom tile
I've cried about her putting so much distance
between her and her mother who is dying
a little faster than anyone would like, that I love her
in a way I've never loved anyone, that I can't take my eyes off
her breathing, that I worry she will leave, that I am moved
every second of every day to celebrate her
the way she celebrates me. "Are you happy?" "Yes."
But I never feel worthy of her waking up to hold me
when I try to sleep for the third time, of her
accepting words on a screen as my voice
even when we're alone, of her telling me how she loves me
with words and food and quiet and body
and a presence that keeps my gyroscope carefully balanced
on her fingers. She touches me and her eyes say she heard
the freight train in my head. She is there, laying pennies
on the track. We pick them up together. How they shine.

Maps

You are in love with a cartographer
who forgets to eat dinner. She is planning
an expedition to Pluto. It is cold
and the whole world is sad. Everything looks happier
in bright charts and textbooks. She will carry flowers
in seeds on her shoes. She dreams of a forest in the bedroom,
the soft light bending through the sheer drapes,
a warm, fulfilled potential from another timeline. You bring her
birds and lost memories. A finch flies through her chest
every time you kiss. Together, you form an whispering:

The stars are ghosts.

The tongue is a complex molecule.

Dance is water soluble.

Sex is a lesson in heat transfer.

I am being made into a diamond.

I am telling you how to find me in the end.

On the airplane, she sees a darkness growing,
maybe a cloud shadow, maybe a large murmuration of starlings,
maybe just a projected emotion. There are no tools
for making the kinds of maps you need,
yet. You are leaving the bodies
of every person you have every shared breath with. No room left
unused. She sees the compass needles spinning
but can't tell you how to fix it. She has no songs for this journey,
and you have too many. Together you trace a topography in salt:

I have a lump in my throat.

I am holding the paperwork for the future.

The ground is always rushing toward us.

The sky is always holding us in place.

A map holds the whole past, the coming, but can't tell the stories.

A pin can mark a destination or a place where change is coming.

Pushed out of orbit, pulled up the lightning,
you think about magnets. You are painting with iron,
it is heavy and you are already only charcoal. She tries so hard
to wrap you in skin. You are grateful for skin. The atmosphere
of her heart is warm. You should sleep,
but the salt won't let you. In the night, you hear the ground shift,
a sound like rhubarb growing. She tells you it's the trees. Outside,
the whole world is sad. This place
is not so different from home. She is with you, marking geographies
on your body when you are too tired to move. You are not lost
and never will be.

Fifteen minutes

We are fifteen minutes away from everything here. Maybe twenty. Fifteen minutes from work. From dinner. From groceries. From healthcare. I think about my dead adrenals. I think about how I could already be in this ground. We are standing on the flagstones of the xeriscape together. Take flight with a hummingbird. The only other person who really knew me has a headstone fifteen minutes away. There are flowers there, drying. I don't care about that. I care about the crepe myrtle and rose bushes and the redbuds that will bleed life in the spring, sending their roots deeper into a place they never really left.

Bucket lists are for fools, I say, but when I feel like I'm dying

there are some places I would like to go with you. Hell is one of them. I would be naked and you would lose the weight you've been worried about. It's okay. We dream together in isolation. Maybe later we can visit the coast. The flowers are still blooming, and I would very much like to try being a hurricane with you. I will spin quickly, and you will be the eye, and we can dance until the ocean boils and we become too powerful. We can retreat to the mountains. We can become hermits. We can talk about saints and stones and swifts. We can not talk. We can breathe more easily when the rest of the world erases us. When the world ends, we will expect it. We will be asleep after a tender kiss.

As magnets do

I like to continue around the universe -
a neurotic miracle, not buried in grass, dancing with it
from unrelenting rain to ruinous tornado. A wine bottle
to cleanse the channels of dry days, fragments of stained glass
shrapnel lodged comfortably next to a heart.

This is my place. At the window. As the window.
A transmission threshold.
A prayer within the smallest gem cluster, finding
the ritual in my hand for every day in your chest.
Too few to count. So our souls continue.