

april, buttersoft

a poetry microchapbook
by nat raum

i have yet to examine
for Cape May, NJ

how the root of my suffering may in fact be
because i have now passed two winters
without going to the beach right before
it was supposed to snow. i have never fancied
myself a sandcrab, but the right time to travel
is when the whitecaps are nearly the same
shade of bleugris as the sky, when washington
square mall is only lightly bustling.

last night i slammed my front door so hard

the soap fell into the powder
room sink and i have always been comprised of a little hatred

so i think nothing of it, comfort myself with the clatter
which emanates from an as-of-yet unknown room in my house

and then immediately do it again because sometimes i just need
to shove something so it isn't someone; sometimes i need to hurl

a chipped brandy snifter into the outside recycling bin like i am
smashing water balloons on summer pavement, like the lightning

strike which birthed this glass owes me money or something,
like the world responds to anger with anything but more contempt.

consider

the way time moves, at once languid
as cold molasses and brutally brief.
the way the body moves with it.
the sensation of finding oneself in the middle
of speeding bullet days. a finger to the pause
button. a true stop, where nothing keeps
going in my absence.

inflammation besieges the body

at all times. my lymph nodes are two
sideways adam's apples and i have
gargled enough saltwater to empty
the baltic sea—all the waves go

still,

no

whitecaps, only swelling frothing
forth from the same point of origin.
i am able to suppress the growth on
my own, but puncture my shroud

and all
bets
are off.

something lives desperate in me,
forever in search of a surface
upon which to spread
every earthly thing

it owns.

in my own dms

- which is to say speaking
- to myself in tongues,
- bouncing erratic thoughts
- back and forth, balloons
- that can't touch the ground
- or they pop and i warble
- the saddest arias, snippets
- of lyrics i memorized
- not because they brought
- me joy but rather, the way
- they deepened the ache

purgatory or else mist or else cobwebs

i often think i am beyond the veil already, clutching
in perpetuity for something. lately, life, or at least

aspiration toward afterlife—my ego has died at least
five times and here i respawn, heaven's cast-out

cockroach, pixelating apart like an enemy struck
by shotgun or arrow. even still, i am white-knuckled,

firmly grasping what i can of prism light,
of anything that still feels like blood surging

ventricles. my heart is a muscle the size
of the dead rat on my block this morning;

my hand squeezes like it will bring
the warmth back home.

part of me believes

i can go on like this, with catastrophe
always at my threshold, with the sweet
embrace of ruin hot at my heels. i have
long ignored the destruction of my molars,
the narcoleptic extremities, electricity up
and down slouched spine; i have come
to expect the hits, the subsequent break
downs. no structure is earthquake-proof.

consider

love as a prerequisite
for lust, as a lubricant
to saturate the shades
of grey which make up
the parts of me that still
want. how long a fire
can sustain itself when
there is still oxygen
to flow through its coals.
how eventually, left
unattended, those very
same coals will expire.

no one told me

starlings are this beautiful in the morning
sunlight. i feel like i have been lied to—
isn't that the way? i wonder if there is such
thing as a time before deception, but
there couldn't be, if a spotted lizard can lie
about the skin on its back to stay safe.
if a mourning cuttlefish can be boy on one
side, girl on the other to dissuade a rival.
maybe then i can cede fallowed ground
to all the lies i've told myself,
forgive those that were told to save me
from the maws of scavengers. no one
told me the universe could be this way, sinister
forces so embedded in the everyday. i think
it's getting darker out; the sun is dipping
below the horizon now. get the candles.

listen,

there are days my goosebumps
are actually welcome, where instead

of curling body inward at the first
sign of cold, i stand with my face

to the wind and feel my leg hairs
strafe in the april breeze. the dogwood

flowers are timid, only just starting
to unfurl. i swear this all used

to happen earlier—to be earthly
is the sharp inhale before the dive.