

## Prayer for seven years

Listen I do not want your pity I was a child and I did not  
speak did not understand and now the story has no power  
yes I was I am that yesterday and the day before and the one  
all the ones after I was going somewhere listen I loved more  
than anything my mother listen this spring to the wings  
scraping the sky raw watch the seething boiling shore where  
the dying songbirds are stones are stones the journey made  
their eyes white with flying with distance the fog settling in  
while you watch I stand on that southern shore and the season  
throws dying birds like vile rain like rain trying to find its sad  
its orphaned way home I stand alone and she has already been  
gone a long time and you know the story in these seven years  
the body is rebuilt inside the outline inside the shadow of itself  
my hands have been recast as the hands of a stranger she was  
my mother and he was not my father and you are not my lover  
not my love any longer and all migrations end one way or  
another and some of us don't ever make it home so I'll go on  
moving away until the hands that forgot her greet you  
as a stranger each gesture a flight path to some unimaginable  
far shore where the joss paper boats sail out and we wait  
for their time to come to an end all those years ago or here  
on this shore or later on some other

## Shipwreck—The shore

The sea mutters its curses its prophecies along  
the lip of sand and dune and granite gray by  
star gray by broken gray by cliff gray by sky  
by tourist loud in the glade of his fifty week  
sorrow listen that is Cassandra that is the ocean  
speaking every secret every song every prayer  
on its vast and dying mind while cameras while  
phones freeze the foam to spilled white milk  
and the gulls steal from the hands of children  
deaf to everything deaf to all that will chill them  
until blue rises through their seas until it clots  
like paint in their soft in their softly crying lips

## Shipwreck—Rubber duck

How the ocean is a snow globe gathered to stir  
gathered to shatter how it assembles these storms  
of cheerful plastic toys they're Leviathan's mobile  
her day and night sky they're a child's whole system  
for learning the wave they're poison ordinance they're  
uncountable seed they're everything that is cheap  
cheerful toxic and permanent the constellations  
for which we can't be forgiven she follows their spin  
and gyre she traces and names names and traces  
against the backdrop of border current and heave  
she calls this one *mushroom cloud* others *the dust bowl*  
or *the great drill* the constellations she names after her  
three million ships *Thresher Bismarck The Albatross or*  
*Unbeaten* lost with all hands the *Henry Ford* from whom  
all factories come the shards form a scrim they spray  
and scatter like bullets like lead they breed and they  
breed and they breed and they block the sun

Shipwreck— [It's like they're sleeping]

It's like they're sleeping and Leviathan  
a nursemaid sweeps silt like silk over  
their rest

instead of bones fine china

instead of a beating heart sweet breath  
clean teeth an engine locked shut with rust  
the choked stacks empty of smoke empty  
of horizons

knives lie jumbled on decks

white skulls like shells sway as if in dreams  
rest in rooms in rows along cold corridors  
they fill the cavity the ache of another rusting  
enamel hull another small disintegrating world

Corona, penumbra

We married in the spring we married the shoulder seasons  
their discontents their liminal natures we burned our faces  
burned our shoulders with the dying sun we divorced before  
we had even been born we lived almost at the same time we  
became halves that belonged to other wholes we became  
holes in the bodies of those who loved us we were holding  
out we were holding our hands with our hands we were busy  
keeping our distance we kept to the shadow stood the night  
watch we stared out too many windows watched the foxes  
watched the hunting cats we rented rooms and called them  
homes we went again and again into the weather we came back  
unchanged and the same storm finally came for both of us  
and all we will ever have is our bones alight with it the blue arc  
of power that lightning strike we married other people we  
didn't know how could we have known we both wear wings  
wear scars etched into our bones we wear feathers  
in our skin we cannot fly we stand in this current we burn

[Scientists grow new hearts in the shells of old hearts]\*

—for F. M.

When I'm not there all the time I'm thinking of you of  
 not you of the blade in your hands singing as it severs  
 air from air the cut the hum and fuss of it *tachikaze* we call it  
*swordwind* the air alight the whitebright speed its lethal shine  
 that shine trapped here between the traffic and the train  
 here in this room in this stumbling this gut-shot city faltering  
 to its knees the body already unrecoverable the sun's bleached  
 heat the acrid green of lawn rectitude of waste and rowhouse  
 when we sleep we sleep inside weathered escutcheons inside  
 nests of cylinder feather and wire our skin ruddy in the spark  
 of our alarms when we bleed out in the street when disease  
 kudzus our bones when the poisoned air thickens and sparrows  
 fall it begins to seem as if life as if life itself is just a ghost dream  
 is a synapse in the dying brain of god the gaps too large for  
 lilacs any more too large for touch for snow rising in the pines  
 the chaos of what was held so dear falling into stutter into  
 fragments I age we age the place our place disintegrates  
 people always say beauty and terror as if they were not the same  
 as if they were not conjoined at every point all the time the way  
 the blade there in your hands became somehow the most whole  
 the most perfect thing left of all that remains

(\*The title is adapted from the title of an Atlas Obscura article)

[A prayer for our mortality]

To begin think of wind river sand silk the various strands  
currents how falling moving how leaving can be exactly  
that benign a cessation of resistance a species of quiet  
abnegation think then of a flame on its wick flickering  
in the drift of air stubborn and still alight holding on  
in the draft that sifts through a summer screen the leaves  
greenly afire on their piers their waxy wicks the sleeve's  
small collapse against your arm in the breeze think  
of the current of time how it too swirls eddies and then  
abates as sticky afternoon slips into sticky dusk itself  
slipping into moonrise into full dark think of the lit window  
and you candled there you inside the moving the breaking  
heart of this thing think of the glass doing its invisible best  
the shell the egg of your dwelling the way it cradles you  
how soft the body's flesh how there are two of you  
the unformed fetal you asleep innocent as weather and  
the you that paces in all that yolk light the light that spills  
thick and angular through screen and glass the light  
that falls across the trimmed the orderly lawn the way  
your shadow hushes the crickets afraid there in the sudden  
dark the way it releases them as you vanish into song

[Charm against the death of bees]

Their tiger's eye corpses are hollow fallen husks on walks  
on lawns and afloat on lakes husks light as dander light  
as floss milkweed silk lighter than the sick sun of August  
the afternoon's thick gilt fever light as a stain lighter  
finally than the air the body just so much absence absence  
of sound flight sweet absence of sting dear god of the bees  
gather if you will these spent seeds hold each to your ear  
as the echo of a hum dies down listen to this ghostdirge  
this song made up composed of no more pollen no more  
wing nor flight no more pulse listen to the aorta stilled in  
mid-thrum no heart at all they never needed one just this  
holy arch turning in your thick fingers into dust please  
speak sing or breathe please breathe life back into these  
bodies these husks into our jasmine afternoons our long  
honeysuckle dawns let the vessel fill again let the flight  
commence let the aorta once again sing and be carried up  
carried into the orchard into the air aorta from the Latin  
meaning arch meaning lift meaning please god let them  
once more this day and the next let them please again rise

Something inside you is always telling a story\*

When the dawn comes for me unlocks the chaos-cage  
takes me back to waking something almost everything  
in me wants a pier over plain water wants a sturdy  
granite shore wants the dark mute green of pine the rust  
of needles thrown down when the dawn comes for me  
I pray to wake again on that small island that place made  
of granite sandwiched between blues but the day speaks  
in tedious small talk it sends in a meal shouts through  
loudspeakers it opens a window onto the awful radiation  
of buildings under the punishing sun onto streets melting  
into slow choked rivers full of steel vessels and filth  
while elsewhere Appledore while Seavey and Star while all  
such small wild places await their own extraordinary rendition

\*The title is something artist and actor Jim Carrey said in a documentary about his painting.