

SOMETHING
LIKE
EMBERS

A Triptych of Poems
by R. Salvador Reyes

SOMETHING LIKE EMBERS

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Epochs

This Dream Which Seemed It Was Life

And the bones laid in the field before
They were nothing.

Fallow me.

You are

From nowhere, floundering. This is
Not America. That is not your soul. Swallow her in the night until
Nothing else consumes you, let each thrust feed

That monster inside, aflame with its ravenous pleasure of
Lies. Hades' vapid feast. There is no way to be here

More than we are. This far, we are told, make more than what

We are. This

We do. This is not the earth

Alone. Build it

For numbers you silly carbon trinket. Kill it for fun

You brutal dumb machine. We will emerge seething &

Scathed, our reptile wanting &

Our supple, melancholy accident hoping

For everything else. We are the heavens, witness & failed

Savior. We are the looking

Down. We are the thing we see. We are sown

& reaped. We are

This dream which seemed it was life.

It's any afternoon, suddenly. Like every moment is
Suddenly, unannounced, barging. It was right here
On top of you—the whole day and its pollinating

Machinations. Every wire of you

Is fused with the world. Your hand

Held the paper bag full of coffee beans. You

Loved someone then. From the light, just miscast, you know
It is winter, but you knew that anyway, you did; the light only made you feel better about it.

**Before the bones laid in the field
And they were nothing.**

We were vices &
 clobbered accumulated
water Shed Like the man in the suit **remnants; redacted** its deaths
 that
 looked Like an ape in Exponentially
 2001
 lit Down all < <
 of humanity's brutality You hoped to save the imagining of
 One swoop Amphibians first or take flight endlessly
 felled on , which
 To the tapir preceded mammals—
 . A clean Even the aquatic
 femur gripped Interior
 Strong , formulations?
 The concavity < I'm in here, don't leave me. trying
 : weaponized; All of time since then
 to be
 Fruitful heard . Finding
 !The cantankerous way
 wailing, taper
 Expect to Be
 > this. >
Whaling
 In time the harpoon had evolved. Once a hand-
 held descendent of the commonly
 spear, it
 grew New

I rode the buffalo near
Tomorrow. Ply me. Catatonic the numbers in us before
They reveal themselves for destruction. This ballast
Came late. There were
Reams of it, some bound
For and some by what

Menaces are to come. Has the Pleistocene gone so fast? The hours
Cannot be counted
In miles or light. We mistook them for a wilderness
Of conglomeration. To witness
This manifest. In some other way I wished the same. That strand
From the spider was made last

Night unseen. I followed
The morning until the sun landed
On the thing containing
Me and its silk thinness. Barely
Alight in the wind between
The brick and the branch and the air.

Fabric

We're here
To there. A cruel impatient

Something Like Embers Containment. Bundled in the song, the rapture, the

Inconsequence. Particles, waves, rhythms
Of the calculations. Watch these succulents grow

Unfound in a garden one
Million years old. Are they still

Verdant? Is there something still like that
Place in which they live? While you thought
About everything, that whole time, this world

Existed. The universe thumped
Inside your shell. A thousand suns inevitably spored

You. Translucence. Translucence.

Translucence. Translucence. Capillary

Transmissions fending away the coalescing, the beauty,
The flocks in the appearance

Of seeking. All the birds & the gnats & the reservoirs
Of love that drown.

There was a time once, which is all you need to know. The time contained things, like all time.
The kitten was so small once, and then so tiny that she was gone. She continued
Like a point on the horizon, and then disappeared when you forgot to look back.
Everything was wrapped around itself and clutching at each other the whole time once. We knew
We were amongst it, and even talked about it then. But you have to stop foraging
Soon, the light doesn't belong there anymore.

Goodbye To All That

Gone

Passage &
Calamity. The sequence
Confused by its lack
Of order. Departure & magnificence. That felt
All collapsed into once. Some matter propels; some will poke a hole into the end
Of all things. What should we want
To say about this? That while
It lasted—*while it lasted*, the whole thing
Foisted. Sky
Just following rain, air before
Next wind, some kind
Of light falling all
Over the place, home.
That this air was conjured by the future
Tonight, wishing it were
Here; amongst the rocks and bricks and mist crickets, so soft fell these
Shadowed now out-lines of the redwood.

The empty

That you came to
Inhabit
This.

Fuck Us

Everything is wrong for you when you Read this. Gapers, *scurry*. I'll admit That we knew. And did almost
Nothing. I'll say it felt like a gleeful Cruelty of personal inconsequence. I'll confess This is not a poem, nor apology. I've come
To tell the truth, which is heinous & beyond
Forgiveness.

In Defence Of Everything Horrible

It could not be helped. Humanity. It was in its nature to fight against it. To diminish all the wrong things. There are so many complicated ways to forgo saying things. It could not be helped. The very way the story led itself along. Each of us was only. What else could have? We'll fight this too; seek that invisible. *It is invisible.* But it could not be helped. *Wanting.* All of the things always come from this. The horror lives with us whom the Beauty inhabits. And of that strange unknowableness

It Is The Hour
Of The World
You Will Remember

It was the snow, leaves
Of white water veined and
Frozen to crystal. It filled
The dimming air like flocks
Of regret, fell half way between mercy as it coated, caressed
Erased the shapes of things, made it all
In its image.

~

They were almost there. Gate B6. Three seats in coach (one lap child). 45-minute flight over the mountains. 15-minute shuttle to the hotel. One room: two double-beds. One bath: a group affair with 3-year-old, 1-year-old, and 38-year-old momma (40-year-old dad will shower in the morning). Pajamas. Lights out. And at last, sleep. Sweet sleep. It would be theirs so soon. If it weren't for the snow.

Caleb looked at Michele standing with their daughters beside him, imagined them all retreating under the dark snugness of a widely-laid comforter. Then he turned to the attendant behind the desk and asked, "How long?"

The attendant didn't lift her eyes from the monitor. "45 minutes. Maybe an hour. Maybe tomorrow. Waiting on the weather, sir. We'll keep you posted."

"But it's not even snowing here."

"It will be." The attendant pointed her finger toward the window. "Comin' over the mountains right now."

"I can't believe this," Michele sighed. She shifted tiny Alice from her left arm into her right. Sadie grabbed her free hand. "We flew 6 hours to get stuck here? I wish we'd flown direct."

"There wasn't anything direct," said Caleb.

"I know. I just wish."

Caleb glanced into the restaurant across the terminal. Strands of Christmas bulbs sparkled along the edges of the ceiling. Late-day sun blasted the shiny tables, leatherette booths & darkening space with a warm orange light that seemed to come from everywhere and nowhere at once. A few people huddled over coffee & french fries at the counter near a giant window that looked out on the broad, nearly-empty, gray tarmac where one plane taxied along, its wingtips blinking a hypnotic red & white.

"Everybody's starving," he said. "Let's go over there, sit down, relax, and get something to eat. It's an adventure, right?" He beamed at his girls, all three of them. "Let's make this an adventure, okay?"

~

They ate
Hamburgers, shared fruit cups, milkshakes. It was
Just that kind of magic that evening
Brings on this journey, so far from
Home, in these foreign places
Of somewhere else's time. Giggles
Beget all faith in being. No moment
So whole as your child. Somewhere
Outside of it all. In here. In this
Glowing space.

Out there, snow falls. Things change. Destinations vanish.

~

The rental car would have them there by morning. SUVs are made for snow, he thought, and mountains were made to be conquered. He would not be defeated tonight.

They strapped in the girls, tucked in blankies, and handed out stuffed rabbits. As soon as Caleb turned the key, Michele flipped open her Kindle and its blue glow washed over her fingers. He tapped *Start Trip* on the GPS. An hourglass emptied and filled, again and again, on the display: *No Connection*.

"What the fu—"

"Shhh." Michele glared.

"Sorry," he whispered.

"There's only one way over the mountains anyway. And we have a map. What do you need that for?"

She was right, he thought, and turned onto the frontage road. He could see the exit up ahead; the highway would take them all the way over the mountains to the Interstate. There was a path to follow.

"You're right," he said. "I'm on it."

~

Sometimes it feels like the whole world was born

Just to drive through it in the night. Burnt
Coffee, the music of other days in static, under
The canopy of universe while

The tires whirl in their pretend
Ceaselessness. The population of this place
Is asleep, and you are the sum of all minds, careening
Through the slumbering wind, attached
To everything that follows
You through the time. Immersed
Until there is nothing to forget.

~

The snow, in its unfortunateness, looks like
Itself mostly on any night in the dark on a mountain.
Roads seem like the other. Paths cover and unappear.

~

Caleb and Michele tried not to panic. They knew the girls would be watching them, gauging their fear to calibrate their own. And Michele was confident. They still might shovel out the car. Then backtrack at dawn, find their way to the main road. This was civilization, after all, she thought, we're in the middle of it. Caleb was less optimistic. The night was frozen, vicious, and the snow continued piling up. No phone service. No GPS. How long could they run the heat before emptying the tank? How long could they live in a heatless car in below zero temperatures? How long until anyone knew they were gone?

~

In his sleep he does not
Sleep nor dream, he travels. It was those last hours
Before dawn. Limbo between everywhere. He floats
In it, slipping into each moment
It hides. Your argument in the bedroom, about
The suitcase and all of the things you cannot bring with. Bedtime
Once ago when you would not leave the room with them, just to hear
That song play, again, while closet light sliver warmed shadows and they
Slept. One morning, any morning, when you heard those voices
In the kitchen, before you woke to that long lost day.

~

In the new light, it was obvious to Caleb that they'd never dig the car out now. He shouldn't have stopped shoveling last night, he thought, he was beginning to fail them. He could not fail them. How had this happened?

"I know what you're thinking," Michele said. She spoke quietly; the girls were still asleep. "It doesn't matter. That's the past now." She reached her small hand across the front seat, through a stream of warm, fluttering air, and squeezed his leg. Above the trees now, the sun glinted off a mirror. "What are we doing?"

Civilization, he thought, Michele had said it last night. It was somewhere here. He had to find it. "I've been thinking since dawn," he said. "I'm going. I need to go."

"Go where?"

"You said it last night. We're somewhere in the middle of all this, I mean, there have to be people. Someone. I can't wait. The heat's almost gone. We won't last another night." His voice raised as he spoke and Sadie shuffled in her car seat.

Caleb and Michele paused, silent, then turned back to look at the girls. Sadie pulled her blanket up to her chin, but didn't open her eyes. Alice, still sleeping too, heaved little breaths between her puckered lips.

"What if someone finds us?" Michele asked, convincing herself.

"What if they don't? We can't just hope. We have to try. I'm going. I shouldn't wait. It wouldn't make any sense to wait."

Michele shook her head, cast her eyes to his.

"I don't want to wake them," he said, not meaning it, but afraid.

"Wake them."

~

I'll bring you
With me, he said.
How? She asked. Here,
He said, and pointed. And
Here, he said, pointing
Again. And her too? Her
Too, he said. Okay
Then, she said. Okay.
Goodbye. Goodbye.

~

At first it didn't seem so crazy. All of this was just—*human*. These are the things we do to survive. Now he walked in the snow, and someday soon he would be filling a basket with groceries for meatballs with pineapples. But it didn't take long for his thoughts to change. The snow was deep and although the skies had cleared, he could only feel that the sun was millions of miles away. Heat had become an idea, a wish, not a thing. The places without drifts revealed only thick bramble and underbrush that said no one had ever walked here. It was maddening. Each hour of wandering fed the panic he couldn't quell. Every creek led only to another or disappeared eventually under the ice. He knew bigger waters flowed somewhere nearby, that they were his beacon, would bring him to a place. But they were phantoms. He was becoming a phantom. He felt it. His weightlessness. Only the thought of them held him down. Here, and here, he thought. It was the only part of him that he imagined was still lit when the rest of him disappeared into each tree's lengthening shadow. He moved his invisible feet because he would not leave them behind here, in these woods, just to vanish too.

But soon what he wanted would not matter. He knew this. He was right, he thought, this was all just human. Humans fail. They die in the cold because they could not get there. Their families die unfound. Buried in the detritus of it all. He could not fail them, he thought. He would walk a hundred miles in the snow, like the immortal probes scouring space, he would fuel an endless journey away from oblivion by the tiniest rays of the sun. He would hoard his life and carry it to a place where it would save them. The forest grew dark and he walked straight at the rising moon, smashing snow beneath his boots, hearing the life of his breath beat against the air in the night. He moved toward it. Nothing ahead of him that he knew. His face, hands and feet long frozen and numb. He wouldn't have known he was there, except that he did.

~

It was
The worst thing. And it
Happened. It was in that
Night. Ice at the edge
Of icy water. Those weary
Legs he cursed for hours. The miles
Behind him. One
Slip. A faltering signal unable
To make its way to existence. An intention
Lost in the flesh. When he knows
He is in the water he knows
It is cold. It is cold
And he is dead. Of all
The things that might've happened, he is
Freezing in these woods this night and it is becoming
True. He will end now, without
Them, but under the same moon.

~

When the night talked
About it later, it said it was
Beautiful. But there is no way to measure
This. So many things
Happened at once, and so many
Not at all. You could say the snow
Was on the ground now, no longer
Part of the sky. He felt
Something that he wished
He knew. He held it
In the part of him that wished to stay.

~

Neurons will flicker near the end, all the machineries of imagination and memory will clamber to fill those cascading, crumbling bridges of the mind. Caleb tried to move his legs, but thought he was reaching into his pocket for a receipt. It was a hidden paper history, the hieroglyphs of a time when there was a world in which he lived. Burgers and milkshakes under colored lights that were close enough to hang in the trees, right here above them. Right here.

~

She remembers
The tiny sun, a giant helicopter whirling
Looming above. And before. She remembers
A place she can't remember. It was
The snow. It wasn't the snow. It was
Someone. A presence. A whole place
Inside this universe,
Magnificent & unrevealed. It is
The hour of the world
You will remember.

Casting Ghosts

We began

At the end, at its arrival. And the last glass

That would break, already

Unpacked, waiting. Everything

So fragile

Already, in the air

That was so

Then

Soon gone.

Stout At Midnight

This is what

I isn't. Not now

Any more. Not left

But in what's gone. I was

Tired almost even of the

Crickets & frogs in the close-lit

Night until those sounds

Saved me, gave way

Somewhere for frothy

Disappearing. I've said this

Before, but there is no

Remembering

What you were.

It was *nineteen-seventy-something*, the later part with

The melted time—supposedly

Terrible, but really the best. For
Example, it was 1978. Can you feel

It? That supple

Future? Once doom
Abided. Once. Once. They'll say

That so much, but have no

Idea what they are

Saying.

Utopia

They all fell
Far and small. It has happened

That the stars have

Disappeared, just not

Yet. Some things will

Never not be: the death

Of all things, the fleeing

Of all other

Sun-like bodies from our own

Into the furthest & unseeable

Reaches

Of space. Where no one knew

The night had stars,

The lightlessness

Remains unseen.

Are we
Enough?

All The Truth Happens Someday

These strands knew
Me. These synapses have
Decided the father and
The son. They buzz now, loosing
Their catapult—their electric
Frame snap-crackling
Sped light into the void. Where
All absence defies
Presence & fails. Only

You hear this

And how it tells you

What

You are.

The Thing

The Way This Darkness Arrives On Us

Shadows cannot be piled. Light
May be thieved only
Once for transformation; we need
Just a single thing
Between us. And orbits, and a core
That spins. Translucence

Can vary—like intent or timidity, it's how these objects all found
Their way into

The path of the sun. That there was nothing
Between them once. Its furnace

Thundered, planets

Away, and warmed

Their flesh. This is where

The light went—how all
Evidence of presence is cast
Onto the earth.

The world came hard into
The 21st century. All that
Deep bass thumping its cock
In the dark & neon. All the skulls
Peeled & leaking
From the feast. It was time
For everything to be
Eaten. The bodies congealed
Into mounds. It was
A matter
Of consumption & detritus.
Some of the things clothed
Themselves & kept
Diaries, pretending. But our machine has
Begun. Even now it growls
Back, rearing & famished, awake. *It is not
What we meant. That is not what
We meant. All apparatus
Are built for harvest. **When It Found Us***

The Destiny Of Vertebrates

Some of them tried
To explain that it was all
Madness. But voices
Are only the smallest
Sounds; they are a bird
In the machine that eats them
Too, and the branches
Of their nests & the spotted
Eggs, pieces
Crushed & rendered
For the solvents
Of mastication—gristle
And syllable shorn
And devoured. *They're here
To feed. They're here to feed. They're here
To feed.* It was

The mandible. That was the first

Part for building.

When you look In it, you'll see it For a moment. Inside of inside A box like a hole With a window for eclipses. It doesn't stay. But it's beautiful.

Glimpse

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