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ARGO, MY ARGO

The mirror's crowfooted
not me. Afro's gone Medusa again.

Every coil's its own Hydra.
I'm adventuring with a comb.

The sink's full of myths . . .
The myths are growing . . .

Every day I find myself
smaller with effort,

my life's light
with every person who

spoke of me. Last night,
Achebe tried again

and I nearly heard him.
Ngũgĩ refuses these tones, says,

*this music has the worst sort
of oceans beneath it.*

Besides, his ears
are busy with real myths . . .

Being alive must be nice,
says the sink basin, filling

further with myths . . .

I say, *abandon narrative*,

latch onto landlocked

home—forget ships,

take planes! land with

passport onto place

with shore—forget ships,

take planes! land with

passport back to place

without shore—forget ships

for a day sometime on

winter break, during summer—

our only seasons here.

My body's a crowfooted boat

not me. One time I went

blonde, that's a different

prow. One time I went

with suit jacket, that's a different

sail. One time I go

and touch the exact difference,

pretty, sailing, she says, *I love you*.

I say, *whose boat*.

STILL LIFE

Onanism but like coffee without the cream.
My skin yes but also the pointlessness
of our pleasures. In a maple seed's shape
you have copper and plastic inside of you.
Nothing's growing. I don't finish.
So, I'm part of this thing where fish learned to walk.
Your first baby pictures look like seahorses.
We stop now to consider our lungs.
Look at all that we have made
and behold it is very good. Otherwise the pale beginnings
would swim to nowhere, gasping
with gills they do not have
(once, before memory, I made this journey
and found myself
somewhere, slapped
clean and crying with a new soft bottom).
Loneliness. That's one way of seeing it.
A palm wet with dyings.

ARIA

Nigger-eye
Berries cast dark
Hooks—

—SYLVIA PLATH, "ARIEL"

An aria's any song's sympathy with Ophelia
An aria's any darkness
Then any light involved in darkness
Then an aria's like a pool of water
Then an aria's like a painting
Then an aria's like any other sound.

When you're sleeping you sound
And the sound sounds up Karen
And the sound is how I would like to paint
Karen's sounds on my darkness.
The sound is what I would like to be like the mirror
That Karen sinks into her darkness.

Mirrors are little darkneses
Not unlike my mouth how I try sounds
But find water.
I hope someday my mouth finds Karen Carpenter
Even if my mouth is not a mirror it is darkness
Even if the mirror is where her skin eats itself like paintings.

Your skin's not a painting
It doesn't eat itself it doesn't eat my skin's darkness
And in darkness your skin's also darkness.

Your bedsheets make a sound
And the sound sounds up Karen's
Sounds again. You wake and consider me. You pass me a bottle of water

And I drink it. *Then take the bedsheets as water. Then take the air as water*
And now I'm drinking all of you as a painting
—Which is when I hear horses, hear Sylvia:
She's swallowing everything as paintings and her darkness
Is a red eye rising as morning's first sound
Then the horse into that red eye is darkness

Then reading her horse into my black eyes is darkness
Then words are sometimes water
They're the flow of sound
From each to the next, little sips then swallowing then with them we paint
Each other—the darkest darkness
—And I paint you, hear horses, hear you, Ophelia, Karen, Sylvia

Still painting over all of us and the darkness is painting
And the mirror is every little sipping sound in your room's darkness
And the sounds are everywhere like skin like *in this darkness how mine*
is yours
like any other white girl's, an aria.

MISCEGENATION ELEGY

after Jericho Brown

Let's talk through my window, what it has to do with God.
The stars also suffer. Immense and dead, their gases burn
distant like castanets of antebellum teeth. My open window
a synecdoche of country. No matter how much smoke a pig
roast won't erupt into a song. How its head won't find more
careful music than this apple in my mouth. Pardon his sex,
this apple erupts into violets. Historians archive our care
as an axe upon a ladybird. Air now through my window,
what it has to do with Edith strolling away from me. You
see, I implant now not only a grandmother but a garden in
your tasteless heart. With just that name and its slant rhyme
"Eden," you hear "Gaia." Have you heard a person bloom?
In that garden, Edith's lips hymn. Skyline maintains its mar.
The poem required sound from a body. The poem required
meter heard by those trees. I gift a woman's voice bottled
so cleanly for you. Salt it. And coo admiringly with tongue.
There were other names: *Sogolon, Madhavi, ubume*. Leda.
Ariel. Hierarchy in how I love? Not violets, no—implant
an ending: *known for representing purity, white flowers are
a neutral tone that accents any color*. Camelia. Wisteria. Lust.

CONNECTICUT

Mornings, his wife could not remember who my face was.
Her face stared at me with a mushy smile while Henry ate

the same corn flakes with bananas. I watched the yellow flakes
uncrisping in his bowl of milk, his gums too soft to bear them.

Henry then put me to work on his “fields.” I don’t know who
first said it. Probably, his teeth cackled “fields” to his friend

who visited him—limping gently—as Henry rolled around in his
red tractor. It roared through his backyard, funneling narrow lanes

into the black, hot soil. Waddling after him in my white sneakers,
I held blue seeds of grass that pricked my fingers. I tossed them

over the soil like a flower girl. “Why are they blue?” I asked him.
“Fertilizer coating,” he said. “Dry, mutant rice,” said my fizzy mind.

Nights—they opened with heavy sweat—he would sit and watch
Fox News blare. Me next to him, reading a long novel on suffering.

But he shouldn’t have paid me as a gardener. I dug about as well
as a child in a sandbox—shallow, amazed by my skinny handling

of that spade. Its crusted rust as dark as my dry skin. No, Henry paid
my hands to hold his loneliness. To hear him. I needed a place to stay.

He liked to hear me singing off-key in the mornings, taking long
cold showers. And walk down these stairs to him: aging, waiting

to plant more blue seeds.

PRAYER

Move *with* me, I said to my brain before it startled itself into a mind. I mind myself becoming this person but without that mind in this world then there *is* no world of me. Then there's old myths of me and they're stuck now inside me. Then sit in churches in my childhood that's where I learn my looking over other people's shoulders. You did not malintend. It happened in that room it did not stay in that room it was as if it were not *with* me. Open that creamy book. Notice now orangutans in all of us, chimpanzees in some of us, gorillas in half of us; and the other half, dolphins. Somehow we all swim. But O I love how dolphins swim, how their blood screams at them when the white moon pulls tides with its myths. . . . And on playgrounds I so badly wanted to *be* a dolphin! Still my fur, how mightily it weighs me as *him*. Were I the son of God and not of my gorilla, would the dolphins still be closest to God. Then the churches still haven't been struck by lightning. Then my country still doesn't have jungles. Or oceans. Where do we come from. I don't know that strange country. Never heard of *her*. Never will.

ELEGY

I have bitten down on the chameleon in my throat. He burst into a single color. Predictably, that lacerated into what white people have since called *sincere* and *quite pained*. And black people continued with their day, never having needed to pretend rainbows to sing. I am flooded with other people's selves, their quiet traumas, their various walking speeds across the river. I have seen someone walk on water. Nor could I blame my father for an event horizon he just happened to have ejaculated me into. Nor could I blame my mother for then having characterized me as ungrateful for the invitation to this . . . party. '90s kids be like, *by the time we showed up all the alcohol was gone*. They drowned. My turn-ons include watching capital explode into non-imagination. Initially: my personal finances, yes, and now: gross domestic products, the ozone layer, democracies. It's been a good season, these few years. Whereas for those without a sense of humor, the idea of skeletons pole-dancing is not appealing. Whereas for those with a sense of humor, the reality of systematic death is also not appealing. Whereas I do not know upon which ground I stand but it looks a little parched. We return to the subject of my throat with the additional question of my ownership: if I pay my taxes, do I belong to myself or do I—you have not attempted to wave away original sin with social contract theory? I mean all genders get along if someone else suffers for peace, says every human arrangement of tar, toil and torture. It's a pretty skyline. In a plane that thunders towards another human arrangement, they stuff me in Economy. There is always someone who works harder than me. There is always someone who is more of a morning person. There is always someone else who isn't as pretty as you.

FILM STUDIES

These black lovers on-screen
save themselves from concrete.

Credits roll. Once, my mother
throws a burnt log at my father,

and it must be like this: holding
on to love's inevitable reel. Once,

the projection streams a finger
corked into a heart: knife-wound.

I tell the doctor, *let go*—unmind
the dark jet when my finger re-

turns to me. Narrative saves us.

If mirrors disappoint, consider
white eyes. Then flood cinemas

with light to drain the mind.
So look at trees neutrally,

says landscapes. A history book
infects them with bodies. I try

a different bingo. I don't go on
walks depending on the news.

There's always news. The lens
should not have considered us,

but there's a block party in the sky.
My ancestors sway. I take pictures

to envy white people. *To envy my-
self*, says mirrors. Shut this door,

walk away from lectures on stars.
Schadenfreude the physicists as

this universe fails us one last time.
The sun's bad season looms calm.

Perhaps we send someone to look,
die bravely to prevent supernova.

My body floats. Earth forgets me.

The producers greenlight a sequel,
watch you finger the burnt popcorn

at the bottom.

POKÉMON BLUE

The virus vacated us. The campus filled with parents' cars.
The plush ones I ordered off Amazon, I left them in my room
fresh and emptied of me, stuffed them into a donation box.

You loved Squirtle most of all. His thin beaky grin—like yours,
mouthing that blue turtle as our child. You held him, pushed him
off your crotch. The cleanest birth ever, you said. But his shell,

there's no way you could birth a shell. Then I said my sister was
sliced out wet from my mother's guts. But Squirtle could swim,
he swam between us while you slept. Our pillow, I watched him

while watching you. Our other children nested on my drawer:
Charmander, flame-tailed lizard; and Bulbasaur, corpse-lily bud.
I met them years ago, thumbs sticky on my sister's Game Boy,

pixels instructing me to choose one to explore a new world with.
I picked Squirtle. Trained him to fight other creatures. Captured
and collected their bodies. Those entire continents of life for me

to catch! Each one with its own theme music . . . I wandered every-
where, listening. Hear music everywhere. Hear the campus yard
sound the largest brass, timpani. Captured from native land, built

by collected slaves. Hear my room swell with shepherd flutes
as if my blackness still sleeps there. Left him. We left them there.
You flew home to California. I sleep in a friend's basement.

Midnight. I wake from a dream where you birth a blue snail.

THE WORLD

This morning this kitchen is problematic.
Every burner on the stove is a capitalist.
I want to sucker punch the Honey Nut
Cheerios but the chapel echoes. Instead
I invent a new pornography: it is soft
embarrassing and difficult. New gestures
are required to teach it. But for myself,
every crucial fingering invites mothballs
from behind a Buddha. What comes first,
moth eggs or the statue inviting them?
You knew, but I swallowed you yesterday
with my palm. Sometimes I hear myself
suckling your toes, making oceans. O
tides, render me gently—desire cannot
make the world. Pure logic says this egg-
soaked bread frying here now is not
a paradox. Because past implies future:
the same egg to crack to soak to fry.
To mother me. And so Darwin purges
toast from his south of France (his anus:
I climb inside it in a dream). More grist
to mill, so Vaseline—hold me gentler
as silicon Epicureans garden on Mars,
quarter tubers on lunar plains . . . Whose
radishes ravish your teeth tonight?
You are too latent inside this spaceship,
exhausts gurgling like open balloons—
and I am air. How you will hear me
whistling while my mind jogs and
orbits Saturn's rings, my palm burning

on my stovetop. The world does not
require you. It is busy and Buddhas you
into bad theories and my heels cannot
cynic for much longer. Plymouth looms
over Pluto. Someone's skin shivers.
But it's quarter to seven before light
reaches out, says, *The question is how
the first molecule arose.* No God accounts
for someone's knowing it takes seven days
before our Earth says, with great feeling,
I just don't want to be with you anymore.

SYMPHONY

Begin as always with a voice.

How long can a frog in a well last?

The well is deep.

(friend, what're you doing down there?)

(friend, when did you start croaking?)

(friend, how high can you jump?)

(jump . . . I could be your princess)

(I'm cute enough to stop you croaking)

(these nights, I also find myself croaking)

I can't jump.

(but . . . I could kiss you?)

(but . . . then you'd kiss me back, green and sloppy)

Please—said to no one in particular—don't kiss me.

I went walking in search of the sun after dark.
Like any lover, I'm into failed experiments.
Like any other lover, this is where I succeed best.
I called you. I pissed you off. You went to bed.

So the sun set. I leave bed. I never minded time.
I wanted to break the sun up into amazing bits.
Chew sun-bits as cereal. Make films with that light.
Or rocket ships. Either way: I garden amongst stars.
She thinks I left flowers outside her door. I should
leave flowers outside her door. She wanted me to
leave flowers outside her door. On February 14th,
these flowers I am gifted ready their wilting.
I want you as loud as an orchestra. The quiet is
the loudest orchestra. And people are only always
as large as duos. But I am also something serious
to pay attention to. Should I pay attention, too?
When I do pay attention—I'm sorry. I don't know
when I attend. Maybe—should have been—here.

A croak ascends once more from the depths!

(hey, I think you're kinda cute)

(sorry, I think I should go to bed now)

Going back to bed now. I'm awake too loudly
in the heavy of noon. What's all this speaking
of appropriation? Sounds like violence to me.
Please go away. Please come back. When you
please come back: look a bit more like the girl
with these flowers not gifted from me. Christ,
you *are* a girl with flowers not gifted from me!
Wonder now if any story stands if not on its lone
foot. I called you. You storied yourself again.
I'm sorry for not reading you. Books are so . . .
you know . . . thick. Maybe more so than people,
who at least have the courtesy of talking back.
Okay: say *courtesy*, mean *regret*. I don't have
enough of those, just too many. We are too far
in the evolutionary road of things—thought
is a bit of a curse. I would have preferred touch.
I would have preferred us without the anxiety

of *thought* of touch. I did the mean thing to you.
Another girl does the meaner thing to me. Easy
to not touch only to invoke the thought of *touch*.

(friend, the frog is croaking for us to *touch* it)

(friend, the croaking is a doubling of our lips)

(friend, have I spent too much time with you?)

We only like to kiss girls.

(but I'm not a boy)

Not much of a request.

(not much)

Not much of a demand.

(no, not much)

(you don't have any flowers for me)

The flowers are croaking. The flowers are croaking.

SONG

Forgive myself for breath and I should die.
Self-love an excuse but for that exit: this daydream
of me ended. Of feet parched with weight beyond
the hurt of pale bathroom scale. Or love this
itch between thighs as slower metabolism gifts
slower moods, these dull penetrations of face
into pillowcase. *So die then*, says another country
or lover; splits me long through thoughts of this spine.
And a dream of nerve cells copying beneath this glass.
How inexact to possess skin. Like a flailing sack
too stuffed with consciousness. I feel as a piñata
and you are peckish. Not just the promise of guns shot
but allergic itch draws blood in late summer. I'm sorry
other black men died. I'm sorry I keep thinking,
I look like him. I'm sorry my life feels as easy
as these leaves failing to defend themselves against
their too-soon shifting colors. But I want myself.
I want to want myself as much as I want your shadows
flickering against the walls of this cave, fooling me
of presences beyond myself. And this music: I want this
foolishness of my mouth transmuted into woodwind
and brass. As if this could salve. As if this grass between
my lips epistles this grey sky as any virtue but failed rain.
As if peaches. Forgive myself for breath and this song
should die. I am as new as the paintings in this cave.
Am the same burrowing of grain into body and loss.
Am the same ochre and hematite, inevitable and sorry.