Nothing To Do With Reverence

by

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NOTHING TO DO WITH REVERENCE

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Muse

If I have a muse, he is certainly
tall, well-hung, a doughy gay man.
I suspect he’s hiding in my closet.
I’ve yet to receive total confirmation.
I saw a neon green boa slip out once
while the door was left ajar. I went
to follow its trail, but it snaked its way
into my closet’s depths
and disappeared. My balls swelled
when I heard what I thought was giggling.
Here I am still waiting.
Presence

Rheumy-eyed
and hungover. Full
bladdered waning
erection. I rise
from the floor,
stumble over bottles
to the bathroom
where I catch myself
in the medicine
cabinet’s mirror
startled that I too
cast an image, I too
have presence.
Cat Shit

I’m learning to compose
to create poetry like a toddler,
full of preverbal babble,
who crawls their way
to the bathroom
attracted by the stench
of the litterbox.
Who finds that fresh piece
of shit and presses one hand
into it smearing it across
everything—
blue walls, tile floor,
round polished pine knob
of the cabinet below the sink—
and stops to look on
a sitting buddha,
all the while savoring
one final taste.
Commerce

Pound once whispered something
about broken wood and making commerce

with Walt when I was an undergrad.
I believed him. Now I wonder

whether or not he would have ever worn
that ugly black shirt if he had just tried

sucking dick. Like you, Walt, with your royal beard
speckled with the dried cum of endless suitors.

A pure white body however electric
is another god I refuse to recognize. A pact is

impossible. Lacerated by lineage, I emerge
as an orphan seeking no shelter. No path.

No return. Like a plastic bottle left
on the roadside, this is what persists.
Unpacking, since I first tried to leave eight years ago

A plastic rosary from Marc that bears testimony to ink-stains from an exploded pen. Last I heard he is out on the res in Wisconsin teaching writing. The ivory cross, stained blue, yellow and brown, makes me believe that God must not take things personally.

Nana’s funeral card with its Irish blessing. I returned just in time for her brain to hemorrhage. And I made it down to the hospital just in time to watch her die.

And the St. Christopher coin with her ash embedded in it.

*Be at my window and direct me through when the vision blurs from out of the blue.*

A defunct alarm clock. It once woke me each morning in darkness to sit in the Zendo.

Chanting and bells. Incense. Refuge.

An empty pack of Camels. Non-filters. The state bear waltzing along the bottom.

San Francisco’s crazy bum logic professed over spilt liquor and beer, stale cigarettes and stumbling singing swallowed by the bay’s pre-dawn fog.

An old matchbook. Red phosphor turning purple, the matchheads bleeding into the next forming one large, useless glob.

Two lighters.

One I have no recollection of receiving. Its picture of the flag and the Constitution on it, reads *We The People* in large script. Some flit of madness must have swiped it. An inside joke I had with me and my past mad self that could only cohere to an empty stomach, too much drink and perfect nihilism.

The other is baby blue with a Martini glass on it etched away by strung-out nerves, picking and picking for days and days. Clarkson, now a river rat in Colorado, gave it to me, saying *always carry the fire* through his tobacco-stained, full-toothed grin.

The vintage styled matchbox she sent me away with, stuffed with a 20 in case I were in a pinch, a wheat penny for good luck, a tiny pencil and postage stamp so I could write. An origami swan to remember to return. A hair tie. I had long hair and she would later cut it. A piece of agate she found along the coast in Humboldt. A candle *in case you make a new friend and its their birthday* with one wooden match to strike. A button and needle and thread for when things broke. A note enumerating the items, assigning meaning, encouraging me to *be nice to the stray dogs and to kiss the Carribbean.*
Puerto Rico’s jungle-steam rising up and out into the tropics of Cancer. 
Siestas with the workers. Cacao trees planted up and down the hillsides. 
The living borders of mango trees, the remnants of sugar plantations.

Catskill rain, knobby paths, the pause at the sight of Trillium bearing its ephemeral blood red flower.

A tiny, bronze statue of Buddha in meditation. 
Seven nagas hover over him, protecting him against Mara, their serpentine form like a fanned flame radiating around Sakyamuni’s emaciated concentration. 
So much weight for such a small, tarnished figure.

A map of Mt. Tam, folded and perfectly creased, beckoning me back to incense offerings at the feet of Jizo. 
Cliff-side trails covering coastline. Wild strawberries in wild grass. Redwoods and ferns.

Denver snow in March. An old friend growing older. 

A stainless-steel bracelet handed over as I, scared psychotic, left their car, finally free from L.A. smog and endless hordes of tourists, transients and transplants, the plastic smiles and tender violence of Venice.

Heat coming off the asphalt of Highway 1. Pointed thumb and measured stride along cow fields. El Niño’s rain. Shelter in the roadside’s composting toilet. Meth addicts burning pipe in the lot, sheltered in their beige sedan.

Almost an entire roll of electrical tape. Construction takes many forms.

A piece of seashell with dull shades of purple, undertones of yellow and orange, speckled from rolling in sand and surf. 
It takes the shape of a giant’s fingernail, fossilized by salt-brine. Place of origin is unknown. 
There is no way to get it back to its place. 
As I sift it across my fingers, I hear the ocean reminding me how to breathe with its tide-like cadence. 
In. Out.

   In. Out.

   In. Out.
Horizon

White capped mountains empty of words and phrases.

There the dark figure of a bird

takes flight, breaking the silence
I am too far away to hear

let alone touch.
Spilt

I want to believe you didn’t notice you left it there—the spilt piss yellow beer spread out across the floor. But you make signs I can’t always read. The familiar horripilation of late spring air spreads across my naked body as I crawl out of bed.

The dog trots over, nails clicking against the hardwood floor, sniffs and tastes some portion of the abandoned pool. He looks up at me for an answer to a question I too am asking. I grab my moist bath towel lumped in the corner wipe up what is left, noticing how tense I get each time the hardwood creaks beneath the weight of my wiping.

But the damp left in the towel does what I hoped. Tossing it into the hamper I study the dry patch—what’s lost in what remains.
A Difference in Temperature

Aster blue gaze,
red cheeks, dirty
blonde fade—

he walks by.
Between us,

the restaurant window,

a difference
in temperature,

steam rising
from my plate.
Three Poems for J

I. Aqui

Beneath your flesh is a queer quivering, made potent when all you utter
pulses like a geyser gushing out of your mouth.

It is this language that my tongue is learning to taste.

There is more to your spanglish than the fusion of borderlands

juarez

el paso

chicago

mt. tremper

salt lake city

phoenicia

berlin

horizons

here is everywhere is your cenote.

Above and below

collide

where I bathe in the profusion of clear water:

what is it to touch marrow born beyond bone?
II. *Por que*

I say I love you because I must.

I say it for the naked, unwashed, the war-torn, jeering crowds flooding the streets. Burnt-out buildings, the brutality of men and money.

I say it for the child beggar at the feet of Mayan decay.

I say it for the single waitress with tobacco-stained teeth. Her motions are a wasted waltz. Her story caught in the folds of the plastic menu, food caked on each day, washed away by gossiping hands at night.

I say it for those born into a world without senses. Wealth holds a debt no one can repay. Cracked feet and ribs jutting out like small mountain ranges on a desert plain, speaking signs of famine, migration.

I say it for the forest’s edge, the forsaken goddesses and forgotten gods, inter-specied bodies, elemental. Seawater reshaping shorelines. Coral reefs bleached white, skeletal frames, ghost chambers that harbor no life.

I say it for the farthest depths. Memory we sometimes taste when we sit in silence. Incense curling. Buddha grinning. Candlelight throwing shadows.

And the flash: *I am become death, destroyer of worlds.*

I say it for black blood pumped to fuel the global machine. Billboards on American highways, clearcutting and coppicing, so-called protected spaces designated wild and so find boundaries for wildness.

Endless highways that flow into cities harbor the destitution of the unnamed—for faggots and queers and queens.

I say it for the ants who take the crumbs we leave on the floor. For the bugs whose wings you collect, the meadow voles who nibble away, the red-tailed hawk who cuts the air, perfect circles no one could trace.

I say it for the five crows in a dead-branched tree. Sunlight fading with the fall. Moonlight glowing between glimmering starlight. Abandoned lovers who led us here.

I say it for the heft and weight of hori-hori the meaning of soil, language, power.

I say it for wide hips, curved and balanced like an ancient stone perfected by weather and time.

I say it for your eyes, deep and dark, burning with erosion. For teeth stained with tea. For laughter only the sane cling to.

I say it for a world confused by its own machinations.
I say it for your legs. For your tiny feet that drive you to dance.

I say it because I am afraid. Because I too, like you, have been broken by this world.
III. *La luz*

Today
is everyday
because there is no day
just this.

Today
is love this thing
I cannot grasp
so I
offer
it to you to
share this burden of not
knowing
what is
and is not. Can
you feel its weight? Can you
forgive
us for
this emptiness
that is not ours?

Today
is like
any other
day, fading.
Turkey Slaughter

She is the third, maybe the fourth, when the shock begins to wear off, when I forget what it is I am doing and it becomes a job. Scooping her legs in one hand and hugging my other arm around her body I guide her into the traffic cone we fitted onto the pressure treated beam. Pulling her head down taut through its hole

I cut a v across both jugulars. Hot blood coats my hands, runs down her beak, taps against the stainless-steel trough below her like rain on a tin roof. We are all quiet, but it has nothing to do with reverence. This is, after all, another job and each of us plays our role without thought. The wind picks up and moves past us. I cherish what warmth of her is left on my swollen fingers. Her feet kick and pulse against what she knows is met with inevitable change. Shit oozes out from her feathered asshole. Green and white the way the cow pasture is beyond us, dusted with mid-November snow.

Her eye grows wide then wider and then softens to a squint. And I envy her place. Beyond sense or reason, she is at rest.
Late Harvest

Reuters reported Gaza’s death toll topped 10,000. I can’t help but guess if this crate of muddy, contorted carrots contains a matching figure as I load them into the barrel washer. Encased in the steady hum of machinery, mist hovers above our bodies bent over the day’s tasks, washing, sorting, packing. Through the noise you yell, *fucking is always difficult during wartime*. Another hot take you gleaned from images on social, or was it your own cock you were concerned about? It’s a late harvest. The soil will freeze soon. I turn around to correct you. I stop. I remember time. People trying to resist. Everyone I know still goes to work. You try again with *daylight savings always fucks me up each year*. Loading another crate I force my voice, *I can’t help but sleep this time of year*. 
The Cost of Water

Lone paraglider caught in powerlines above the Be’eri desert. He burst into flames upon immediate contact according to reports. Here in America, it is rare we receive good news. Far right radical circles Harvard in his white van, cropped photos of their faces pasted on its exterior. Firings from internships. Revocations of scholarships. Resignations from the board. Grand Central is rendered inert. Welcoming the cop’s cuffs, a grandmother recollects her parents surviving the Shoah while she chants along with the crowd *ceasefire now.*

Mahmoudi caught on a smartphone’s camera utters *water, I need water* while buried beneath the rubble.

A man clears a hole with his hands, pours what is left of his water bottle, sunlight mixing into the stream.
In the Cavities of the Earth

Head sunk into pillow
your eyes peer past
visions I do not share.

I reach out and you flinch.
I am not whatever you watch.
Before your coffee or meds

this is the way it is
when you wake to the world
we share. The first bleached

blades of daffodils emerge
in my garden. Nothing else
but warmth in the cavities

of the earth. This weight
an expectant mother
lingers over a sense

of unknowing.
Down Broadway

My tits are still perky.  
My nipples rise to the air  
like hot breath oozing  
out of the sewer grates,  
you know how it is.  
When you are gambling,  
the odor of another  
is god. Thinking back  
on the last guy,  
he was so composed.  
I knew he was hiding  
something. He smelt like shit.  

Magnolias are unfolding  
a new persuasion. Pink  
and white performing  
yearly trance that says this  
place is not what appears.  
Somehow, I must capture  
this and this and this  
and that on my phone’s  
backlit screen.  

It’s the feeling of walking  
down Broadway. We've all  
been down it, I hope.  

Cars bustling by  
nameless, offering  
company. Exhaust,  

fried food, baked goods,  
cig smoke, sometimes  
I never can tell what it is  

but it’s dirty, dank, hidden.  
The streetlights flicker on.  
*How do they know*  

*it’s getting dark?*
Looking

hey

looking?

is the message
I get from a bear
at 6:38 AM on Sunday.
His profile pic renders
him shirtless, hairy
and bearded
on a couch
self-reclined
against a white wall—
his arm curled behind
his lime yellow beany
like an uncoiled
fiddlehead. I’m afraid
to take the leap,
to taste his pearled
salt, stoppered
by the curved pulse,
almost electric,
he might offer.

Only then it seems
I could sing, so
why the hesitation?

What do I have
to lose in being
gagged to choking
histories I consumed
and fooled myself
with?

of course
what else would i be doing on
a day like today?
Blue

— For Skylar

Falling blue. I want to call it your eyes but it’s too trite and I know I could do much better than that. And the sky too easy. Hardly one at all. Falling up is also an impossibility to transgress. It was blue is blue like blue is not blue before we knew we needed the shift in perspective, a change in tense. Rare blue jewels coveted and displayed in some showcase on a rich man’s street that I can’t even afford to walk on. Nothing left for the rich who always take up space in a wide blue convertible on a narrow road winding along a steep cliff. But I don’t care about that. I came here to write about you and the blue in your eyes, their inevitable dominance over all things blue with nothing good to say about blue and that’s why I write about it, having nothing much to say.
If

Ketchup caught in the corner of your smile
curled up toward your left eye
open only halfway, almost winking

at me. I was embarrassed for myself—
maybe you. I’m not sure really.
I just wanted to reach out

and clean you. I just couldn’t
tell if we were there yet.
Hot June Night

I.

I’m trading for all the smut I can on grindr. Walls and walls of dicks. Enough to make me cum twice in the past hour or so. Stoned and bloated from stuffing myself with too much chocolate, peanut butter and corn chips, I still don’t look half bad from the right angle. My balls ache and the generic chat is an empty exchange I consider for another reality. Netflix? Instead, I just lie there on my floor staring at my ceiling, between wall and phone.
II.

I enter an electric tornado.
I see a riot of naked masked men.
Rat and cow and lion feces,
poorly painted. You walk alone
like a fearful sphinx. Your riddle is
not your own until you solve it.

Hence the lightness in your step.
Just look look look—you know this
is what you have been waiting for

while I’ve been lying in wait.
The Memory

There is a desert
we don’t mention anymore.
It was down in the garden

among the zinnias where
they gave you the diagnosis.
There are paths in bodies

our eyes cannot trace. I still don’t
know how it was you were smiling.
The brunch we shared was beyond

indulgence. Pancakes
and waffles, coffee and cream—
was it right to eat without shame?

There, to the dismay
of your friend, you handed
me the note.
Hibiscus Tea

Too tired to speak
well with words
that take flight
quicker than those
dragonflies who
hover and glide
above Rondout
Creek's drought-
wrung waters
stones smoothed
by the current
now made bare
bake in the sun
liminal space
between red and pink
sweet and tart
viscous and light
to touch
upon tongue
a mute mosaic
of the muddied bank.

Come, he says,
let's walk
together.

Smooth brown
legs almost
ochre streaked
sunlight slight
sweat shifting
back and forth
careful steps
I follow for
us to make
together
our cups
deserted
for now
recollects
redpink
lukewarm liquid
summer heat
sucking us dry
no longer
footsteps but
rolling bodies
begging their
way from
streaking mud
dank sulfuric
musk wafting
along the creek
bed settling
into dark hollows
we make with
our rolling
between web
footed tracks
of waterfowl
at water’s
changing edge

gone

something
missing as
we lay
side by side
staring into
empty blue
breathing
breathing

untouched.
At 1:23 AM

My breath condenses and floats off into nothing and I remind myself the bill runs high if I put it above 55.

Off-white walls. Who chose this? As you know, aesthetic was always lost on me and that I find it hard to decorate rented space.

I hear the fridge click over. A ripple in my stomach grumbles with the stressed hum of the compressor. I migrate to the kitchen, clinging to the bit of warmth I find in the silk kimono you left me with—soaring cranes, floating clouds, blooming white lotuses in a sea of lavender.

You must be in the mountains by now, congregating with the monarchs. I like to think there is at least one hatched from the milkweed in my garden, floating
around there.
A trouncing memory of when your bare feet were pricked by the dead thistle I left to dry in the mulched path around my center plot.

Flight seems impossible from here but I am earthbound as you always said, watching the shower water run murky off my sweat and soil encrusted body.

No word from you in weeks. I must believe that you are in the mountains.

I decide tea is easiest. Turning over the dial to the stovetop I watch the coils glow red. Setting down the kettle I wait for steam to rise, water to hiss.
Past Your Hunger

My forearm presses into his throat, red-faced, eyes bulging. We are both gasping struggling for something different. He bucks his hips like a wild horse and flips me over, his fat hand braces my right thigh where I feel stunned up and down my leg an electric current dissolving my sense of its place.

Recollecting his wrestling days he swings around with ease, scooping my neck with his other hand.

His body on mine now I am the one losing air. I don’t know how it started. There are cars parked everywhere, but no one is around. Just the sound of the strip mall’s speakers echoing the dull drone of some bygone hit. I snake out from under you. I shout, *I don’t care if you don’t marry me off for your name.*

You know the fight is over. Finally refusing your violence after all these years, I want to know why, father,

you could never feel past your hunger. How couldn’t you tell it always drove us further away from home?

Hidden

*Walking through the SUNY: New Paltz campus*
I hear them muttering something inaudible with affected Southern accents over “Rich Men North of Richmond” playing low on their speaker while both, two young men in orange hard hats, work to replace the exterior windows on JFT. It can’t be a week since the first GOP debates. People like me and people like you…there is something in their eyes I can’t deny. Do they hate that they’re replacing our office windows? Do they know it is not our windows? I fantasize about whether either of them has seen a cock not their own without wincing. Definitely the one with the earring. It’s still quiet for the first day. I am early unlike others. I walk inside the lecture center and it, as always, tastes like a worn-out condom. Not even a plastic gilded cage remains inevitable. And its sign of decay is air I’ll never know anywhere else. Most of the classrooms are empty, except for one I pass where some monotoned professor lectures: there is an engagement issue, 80% of people in America say they are not passionate about their jobs. Students slumped stare, most with slack jaws, up at the projection on the front wall. The dimmed room mocks a postmodern cave and I remember the meme Nolan sent me last night with the image of a young woman’s face from the top of her nose to just above the crown of her head, stale ceiling tiles and fluorescent lighting haloed above. The caption read in plain white font, plato let me back into the cave please. I am always looking for an exit that equates to nothing more than a kind of wandering. Zen monasteries. Cock sucking. Ass licking. Pumping holes. A clean hetero slate complete with the fantastical promise of progeny. Alcoholic romance that returns in staggered images of sleepless mind. Lavender lipstick. White flowered tiara. Flowery dress. Dips in drag. Drug infused, schizoid half-cracked laughter I swear I got close to something real. Farm work where I learned the pastoral is a blind fetch for the excuse of machinations and calloused enterprise. Sobriety. I found it in some sense. I worshipped things and I can’t say what they are. Enough. I cannot make it cohere. It never makes sense. Let’s make it a good dream, Shugen Roshi repeats all the time. But I’m not sure I want to dream anymore, American or otherwise. I arrive to the classroom early to play teacher. Another way to remember what it is I am supposed to do.
Confined

She walks into the office, wide-eyed,

   almost singing as she speaks.

Here again, my limbs fuse to my desk,

   jaw clenched, breath constricted.

She steps closer into my space.

   And I am happy to feel confined.
Lullaby

I did not know time then. I did not know why I was always forced to go to bed with light still shining in the sky, but it was you who determined the structures of my life, your word the active font for writing the rhythm. Peepers chanting in the wetlands beyond my bedroom window became the coercion of a lullaby. I did not know what they were. I was ignorant to the meaning of their liturgy. But I knew their voices were meant for my ears. I still knew how to listen like the robins, who every morning lowered their heads into dew-wet grass, listening for insects scratching through the soil. I do not remember if your breath smelt like Jack Daniels when you kissed me on the forehead to tuck me in—breath hard with the memories of your father’s sanity abandoned, locked in the asylum. There is a picture that proves he and I met back then, but I have no memory of his presence. It is his blood I know better by the disease all three of us share. I do not remember how they started, but I remember images of the worlds I went to that you called night terrors. The abandoned desert town, skeletons encircling me in their bone dance, the bald pale man with the scythe for a hand, the incision across my scalp, the cupped hand around my mouth, the deep, dark empty sky. I remember the heat in my body when I would wake up screaming. And the cold sweat that clung to my skin like ice on a thawing river. And you would be there. And I would not remember who you were—not at first. It’s me, it’s mommy you would say. And I did not know who the man behind you was either. He was always there waving his fingers and sticking out his tongue like a clown—a mirror of a face I now inhabit. I remember you looking up at him and saying stop that as he laughed and walked away to return to his coffee in the kitchen. I remember coming to and you would be asking questions about who I was, who you were, where I was from and, sometimes, I would lie and pretend I was still crazy. I do not know why, but now I tell myself I was taking refuge in being forgotten.