

# Poetry Collection

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was still a thing, then. To have timed your arrow  
a perfectly meant watching the air for a moment  
seem stitched throughout with a kind of  
timelessness. To have straddled at last, correctly,  
the storm of falling in love (and staying there) meant  
the smell of apples, victory, tangerines, and smoke  
all mixed together on the breath

of a stranger, half asleep still, just beginning to remember a bit,  
as he stirs beside you. I dreamed we were young again,  
he's mumbling, as if to someone whose name he's known  
long enough to have called it out more than once in anger  
and sex and fear equally. Somewhere happiness too,

right? All those hours spent trying to outstare the distance  
of what the days must come to,

and pretending a choice to it: now the shadow-script  
that willows and hazel trees mark the barn's western  
face with; now the wind-rippled field, like a lesser version—tamer,  
tameable—of the sea, for movement (same infinite  
pattern, and variation; randomness and intention; release;  
restraint—that kind of movement) ...

Dear saddle  
of gentleness. Dear moss, sweet moss that only  
the dark and wet and patience make possible. To sing a song  
of water, and not drown in it. And some calling that  
a good trick. And some calling it

mastery. That last flickering before nightfall. From beneath  
the low branches. I dreamed we were new again. Stars. Just a little  
past dusk.

## Then the War || *Carl Phillips*

2

They planted flowers because the house had many rooms  
and because they'd imagined a life in which  
cut flowers punctuate each room, as if each were a sentence

not just to be decorated but to be given some discipline,  
what the most memorable sentences—like people—always  
slightly resist... Spit of land; rags

of cloud-rack. Meanwhile,  
hawk's-nest, winter-nest, stamina as a form of faith, little  
cove that a life equals, what they meant, I think, by

what they called the soul, twilight taking hold  
deep in the marshweed, in the pachysandra, where the wind  
can't reach.

Then the war.  
Then the field, and the mounted police  
parading their proud-looking horses across it.

Then the next morning's fog, the groundsmen barely visible  
inside it, shadow-like, shade-like,  
grooming the field back to immaculateness.

Then the curtains billowing out from the lightless room  
toward the sea.  
Then the one without hair

stroked the one who had some. They closed their eyes.  
If gently, hard to say how gently.  
Then the war was nothing that still bewildered them, if it ever had.

What's meant to be wind emerges from what's  
presumably a god's mouth, as if people  
thought that way, once, as I have read they did,  
though I have never believed it. Yes,  
the stag inexplicably there, on a raft  
at sea, how the light catches in the runneled  
fur of a dog's underpaws as he steers  
across dream; yes, the gods and their  
signs, if you want, everywhere –

but the wind is the wind. the map makes  
the world seem like a human body  
when it's been stripped and you can finally  
see it for the world it is: plunderable –

almost, in places, as if asking for it –

who wouldn't want to lay waste to it  
the map suggests, suggest the hands  
that made the map, with the kind of  
grace that proves grace can  
be a sturdiness, too.

–

But the world is *not* like a human body  
Or the dark that, just past twilight,  
overtakes a canyon.

Or the shiver of sleigh bells on the collar  
of an invisible donkey, scratching itself  
in the dark,  
in the cold of it –

donkey bells...

Above me, the branches toss toward and away  
from each other  
the way privacy does with what ends up  
showing, despite ourselves, of  
who we are, inside.

Then they're branches again  
– hickory, I think.

– It's not too late then.

## The Uncle Poem || *Jackson Holbert*

5

avuncular  
trees  
or was it avuncular skyscrapers?  
yea it was the skyscrapers but  
I don't know man  
I remember it was tuesday  
the cars were doing their  
normal car shit some asshole  
was blasting Puccini  
out of his BMW and some other  
asshole was singing  
an opera as he walked  
down Main Street  
what else  
I saw my grandmother  
this wasn't anything crazy tho  
she's still alive and all that  
she lives in town she was  
driving her convertible  
very slow I waved at her but  
I'm not sure she recognized me  
no other family interactions to report

something about the day unsettled me tho  
in the worst way possible  
I knew I would be going home soon  
home to the hills where  
hill things happen  
but I had thrown that terror into the future  
like a baseball or a bag of trash  
and of course it is the future now but I'm  
not  
in the hills not yet  
so why were the skyscrapers  
avuncular to me  
me who had many uncles none  
of whom were skyscrapers  
I think I have a few less uncles  
now but it's hard to keep track  
big family and you know what  
they say uncles are like crab apples they  
wither  
maybe it was that it  
smelled like crab apples  
while I walked down Main Street

I don't know where  
that quote comes from probably  
someone famous but I remember my uncle  
saying it and it seems like a quote  
about your uncles dying but that uncle  
wasn't dying not yet he was  
very much alive and very much  
addicted to oxycodone  
but the consequences would be  
far in the future but I guess  
the future is now which means  
the consequences have already happened  
which makes perfect sense  
because that uncle died  
tho not of overdosing exactly he died  
of a heart attack induced by fireworks  
on the fourth of July one of three  
citizens to do so in the county that day I  
do not know what made hearts  
so angry on that particular fourth it was  
warm  
but when wasn't it

warm in the valley I wasn't  
 there when my uncle died I  
 had picked up overtime  
 at the call center because  
 I needed money to buy  
 some oxycodone  
 for myself  
 I was planning to buy it  
 off of him tho obviously that  
 would be impossible because he is dead and  
 altho it doesn't mean his pills are gone  
 it does mean it would be super uncool to  
 break into his trailer  
 and steal them I have  
 determined that he is the uncle I am  
 referring to when I said  
 the skyscrapers were avuncular  
 tho referring isn't the right word  
 I didn't intend to call them avuncular  
 I felt it and it wouldn't go away  
 like a dog bite

of each toe he was so country that his  
 countryness stretched  
 out from his body and into his car  
 maybe it's because he never  
 saw these skyscrapers that I  
 think of him tho that  
 is bullshit and I know it so why the fuck  
 could I not push the avuncular  
 skyscrapers out of my decidedly  
 non-avuncular brain  
 was it the windows? the  
 black paneling?  
 maybe it isn't the building at all  
 maybe it's the idea of the building  
 and tho I don't believe in ideas  
 I do believe in uncles  
 maybe it is that the building but what made  
 the skyscrapers  
 so avuncular my uncle had never been  
 to the city and possibly had never been  
 to any city he was country from his hair to  
 the tip

is so high it would take minutes to elevator  
 up  
 and maybe an hour to climb  
 which means by the top you would be in  
 the future the real future the future minutes  
 away not seconds a future farther than  
 a word is from another word and maybe  
 because I look  
 at the skyscraper from the top down  
 I think of those elevators in reverse  
 which means I think of the future in reverse  
 and if those elevators go enough  
 the future will reverse enough to be the past  
 like the real past  
 like a few months ago when my  
 uncle was breathing and taking  
 pills and feeling the high  
 come on like television static  
 turning into tv or like tv  
 turning into television static



Colonizers write about flowers.  
I tell you about children throwing rocks at Israeli tanks  
seconds before becoming daisies.  
I want to be like those poets who care about the moon.  
Palestinians don't see the moon from jail cells and prisons.  
It's so beautiful, the moon.  
They're so beautiful, the flowers.  
I pick flowers for my dead father when I'm sad.  
He watches Al Jazeera all day.  
I wish Jessica would stop texting me *Happy Ramadan*.  
I know I'm American because when I walk into a room something dies.  
Metaphors about death are for poets who think ghosts care about sound.  
When I die, I promise to haunt you forever.  
One day, I'll write about the flowers like we own them.

Pale hands I loved beside the Shalimar  
—Laurence Hope

Where are you now? Who lies beneath your spell tonight?  
Whom else from rapture's road will you expel tonight?

Those "Fabrics of Cashmere—" "to make Me beautiful—" "Trinket"—to gem—"Me to adorn—How tell"—tonight?

I beg for haven: Prisons, let open your gates—  
A refugee from Belief seeks a cell tonight.

God's vintage loneliness has turned to vinegar—  
All the archangels—their wings frozen—fell tonight.

*Lord, cried out the idols, Don't let us be broken;  
Only we can convert the infidel tonight.*

Mughal ceilings, let your mirrored convexities  
multiply me at once under your spell tonight.

He's freed some fire from ice in pity for Heaven.  
He's left open—for God—the doors of Hell tonight.

In the heart's veined temple, all statues have been smashed.  
No priest in saffron's left to toll its knell tonight.

God, limit these punishments, there's still Judgment Day—  
I'm a mere sinner, I'm no infidel tonight.

Executioners near the woman at the window.  
Damn you, Elijah, I'll bless Jezebel tonight.

The hunt is over, and I hear the Call to Prayer  
fade into that of the wounded gazelle tonight.

My rivals for your love—you've invited them all?  
This is mere insult, this is no farewell tonight.

And I, Shahid, only am escaped to tell thee—  
God sobs in my arms. Call me Ishmael tonight.

## The Unbearable Weight of Staying || *Warsan Shire*

9

i don't know when love became elusive  
what i know, is that no one i know has it  
my fathers arms around my mothers neck  
fruit too ripe to eat, a door half way open  
when your name is a just a hand i can never hold  
everything i have ever believed in, becomes magic.

i think of lovers as trees, growing to and  
from one another searching for the same light,  
my mothers laughter in a dark room,  
a photograph greying under my touch,  
this is all i know how to do, carry loss around until  
i begin to resemble every bad memory,  
every terrible fear,  
every nightmare anyone has ever had.

i ask did you ever love me?  
you say of course, of course so quickly  
that you sound like someone else  
i ask are you made of steel? are you made of iron?  
you cry on the phone, my stomach hurts

i let you leave, i need someone who knows how to stay.

You do not have to be good.  
You do not have to walk on your knees  
for a hundred miles through the desert repenting.  
You only have to let the soft animal of your body  
love what it loves.  
Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.  
Meanwhile the world goes on.  
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain  
are moving across the landscapes,  
over the prairies and the deep trees,  
the mountains and the rivers.  
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,  
are heading home again.  
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,  
the world offers itself to your imagination,  
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting -  
over and over announcing your place  
in the family of things.

And this I dreamt, and this I dream,  
And some time this I will dream again,  
And all will be repeated, all be re-embodied,  
You will dream everything I have seen in dream.

To one side from ourselves, to one side from the world  
Wave follows wave to break on the shore,  
On each wave is a star, a person, a bird,  
Dreams, reality, death - on wave after wave.

No need for a date: I was, I am, and I will be,  
Life is a wonder of wonders, and to wonder  
I dedicate myself, on my knees, like an orphan,  
Alone - among mirrors - fenced in by reflections:  
Cities and seas, iridescent, intensified.  
A mother in tears takes a child on her lap.

I will wake you up early  
even though I know you like to stay through the credits.

I will leave pennies in your pockets,  
postage stamps of superheroes  
in between the pages of your books,  
sugar packets on your kitchen counter.  
I will Hansel and Gretel you home.

I talk through movies.  
Even ones I have never seen before.

I will love you with too many commas,  
but never any asterisks.

There will be more sweat than you are used to.  
More skin.  
More words than are necessary.

My hair in the shower drain,  
my smell on your sweaters,  
bobby pins all over the window sills.

I make the best sandwiches you've ever tasted.  
You'll be in charge of napkins.

I can't do a pull-up.  
But I'm great at excuses.

I count broken umbrellas after every thunderstorm,  
and I fall asleep repeating the words thank you.

I will wake you up early  
with my heavy heartbeat.  
You will say, *Can't we just sleep in*, and I will say,  
*No, trust me. You don't want to miss a thing.*