

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*

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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.

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.