



# THE PAST IS ITSELF

Alvin Charity



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## LIKE SECRETS

there is no want for that unknown,  
for want is summed best in my mouth.  
those stillborn words flaming out  
just before tumbling into a quiet  
afternoon of us lolling and sofa bound,  
faceup. lazing with pens and paper,  
searching thick whitepaged  
books for where we might find  
just a little more of what could be  
rather than who we were then.  
as desire, summed best by who you are:  
glasses oval and dark framed, seated high  
downstairs, before it was my down stairs.  
in cars, us windblown. turning the stereo knob down,  
down so that the church would feel farther.  
what want was has burned,  
open and fully, as dead imagination  
fell to the logic of indifference.

what was thought is still only that -  
spinning down some pulled plug,  
retreating from any idea of need  
i may have.

spinning from who i might be soon.  
turning, turning.  
turning that much further.

# PARALLAX

you'll pay  
with clipped  
phrasing  
culled moments  
of collected history  
(known later  
as circumstance-  
only through  
dispassion)  
pay with  
foresight  
i had none of.  
with familiarity  
and resonance. we  
will end smeared,  
grayed and itemized;  
firsts and lasts  
among indeterminates.

## SPARE

breath has colored my eyes shut  
for the expanse behind clears

the work from my hands, the  
consequence from a history

split between sense and passion  
the dark expanding into binary

clouds, two halves that never  
meet, parts that never sum.

shut to all dark, like the space between breaths,  
like the ache of movement.

## FISHING

i remember cold though it may not have been.  
the damp of spring that began in the clouds,  
the chill that wisped down through the tree tops  
tumbling along past each half formed bough  
resting upon each bud like an empty promise  
of heat, the light that will reflect off asphalt  
to glint off glass and water with repetition  
like eyelids fluttering, softly brushing my brows,  
touching my lashes and hand-shielded eyes.

tracing the path to the spring river,  
us two moving silent and deep,  
moving as the unknown tends to,  
like not knowing how hurt will manifest  
its crime for the rest of my life.

little me, hiding in a room  
composed of closet clothes  
and an oaken desk chair.  
a room, a tiny noise trap  
to block out the shouting,  
the thrown things that clink

and crash to the landing.

a little room, before we moved  
from the house with the woods  
by its side, the woods that  
pressed out the fire of my father  
with whispers, coaxing my little legs  
along to seal in their tremble,  
making my hands into fists  
that did not know to fight.

moving through these spring woods i found combined places,  
tucked between winter coats and pine trunks, the dark  
of morning, the dark of fighting distance,  
the terror of being six. the light sleep  
that stuck with my little whelmed mind, unable  
to shake the idea of dawn and quiet days,  
shake moments he looked to me  
with a smile curling his mustache.

we walked to the river as spring wind wrenched  
loose small drops from leaves so high (above even him),  
loosed them so they could fall between our palms  
to grease our hands apart.

we tramped dirt to the river with inappropriate shoes, with a single rod between us.

we broke the tree line as two  
with only one other watching on just down the coast.

## FROM THE BEDROOM WINDOW

the soft beak twitter of children  
grassy green & felled by warmth  
unspoken hands in air and hands with ball  
ultimately rounding little lives eternal,  
upward into those never years of double digits.  
the soft haze of less meandering away  
from classroom to yard  
smoothing the girth of too many hours  
tacked upon little heads.  
to pen into forever those ideas of children  
for the pretext of every wish  
may the air carry doubly for them.  
might each shoe foot trample lightly,  
each green blade begets memory,  
to idle on a pine-sap relayed story of them  
divided infinitely- children now  
told breathy and soundless across other hours  
and hours not yet known.

## DERISION CHANNELS

the city is missing in me, being from outside  
constantly lumbering upwards,  
minus brevity, intensity, auspiciousness.  
a social singularity foregoing the cohesion of community  
while its damp red palms spread outward  
from the force of its insisted farce,  
falling apart, false for too long.  
outside of me is a city.  
its fingers folded but each laced touch falls  
as a drop in a flooding creek bed,  
and not the distant soak from every eye  
on every street, gauzy  
with the repetition of perceived movement,  
of bodies forgotten around corners.  
wasted angles sloping hard into night,  
grooming tension over nothing.  
gifting its own appearance with the benefit of praise.  
before me now though,  
in terse monochrome, its image holds no absolution.  
for nigh still I am to myself  
and those others without.

## MONETARY DISTANCE

i stand in my parents kitchen when i visit  
my father has stories now that we are older  
little missives caught now in his mind  
as if they were coins tossed years before  
to be caught and examined, this little coin  
of car repair, of my grandfathers garage  
and him standing at the entrance discussing payment,  
(my father now) discussing how a man took to him  
with kind hands. another little coin of payment  
and when everything could be finished, worked  
into a time line of chance. a little coin  
buried in this mans face, burned into the  
nightly news as this man was presented as wanted,  
as the leader of the maryland klan  
his eyes skyward to the coins yet to fall  
onto my grandfather and his black children.

## THINGS (1)

you begin considering the possibility of the thing aloud, among others as the secret welling of hope lowers opportunity, exponentially. you begin considering the possibility of the thing aloud, among others, as the secret tumult of dread brings a gently sloped keel to anxiety.

sometimes you want the thing, and your want for that thing correlates to the chances of that thing happening. so within the realm of chance that surrounds the acquisition of the thing, despite the upward rise of the want for that thing, you are not simply left with the absence of that thing, as the thing itself is still present as the residual want that cannot wane as quickly as the thing can be removed.

sometimes connections to the thing hash themselves out when discussing unrelated people or events, and you find yourself with this new tie boring a hole through the recent past to make it to your mouth unintelligible and jumbled as you speak, with the thing, fully intact and epiphanically clear, resting at the opposite end.

sometimes, a thing happens infrequently enough for its occurrence to be dismissed as “special circumstances.” sometimes you live on the cusp of “special circumstances” waiting for gravity to do all the work.

sometimes you stop doing the thing because you are not good at it (where good, on a scale, is relative to the necessity of being good, and the thing, on that scale, is near the top), because it is sometimes painful, because it brings other questions of your relative merit to bear upon life as a whole, and so the thing becomes larger than itself until you get drunk enough at the beach, you stare down the black ocean at three am, you forget about the thing for a precious few days, and then return home, return to the safety/horror of limited people and begin again the thing you stopped and realize that the action of doing the thing is variable, the variability of the action lies within the nuance inherently present when acting upon the thing, the cues that led to the thing needing to be acted on, cues that indicate the differences in each action but/and that all actions are unified by a single sameness: a reminder of the protective strength recovered by giving up the thing.

sometimes the best part about over thinking the thing is that, eventually, the things don’t really mean much.

# LAWSON

fifteen again, standing in yards north.  
hope is empty armed  
and present and unknown.  
bedroom, baltimore small,  
wooden floor and painted.  
lying alone with the clocks red letters,  
the open eyes timing our together.  
open hearts beating firsts.

## DRUNK, COPS

pass cops at convenience stores, buying liquor. chatting cops accosting the attention of attendant and leaving, waiting with steady eyes, aiming attention at drunken weaving. one half-pint into the evening, i walk, pushing exit doors slowly, saddened for us not being a secret in half lit rooms. writing about you now, for there is limitlessness. halfway home, stopping. cops pass a searching me, center lane, flashers on. francophonic albums on. alcohol-addled tensity. writing about the wish in stale air, floated, turned beyond dark hallways. the wish to be burned but not, sitting silent on hardwood. silent in blue ink. cops pass once more with home corner lengths beyond.

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## WEEKNIGHTS

i have come to want something from everyone  
as it seems everyone has nothing to give to me  
and its important to push myself beyond knowledge  
and beyond pushing myself as not growth  
but as a way to sink deeper into nothing  
but as a way to wile away the hours of unknown  
watching the television glow.





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poems by Alvin Charity



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