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Love is Just a Word for the Last Body I'd Like to Keep Vigil Over

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LOVE IS JUST A WORD FOR THE LAST BODY

I'D LIKE TO KEEP VIGIL OVER

by

Robert Edgar Burks Jagger II

Bachelor of Arts

West Virginia University

2006

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the

Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing

Department of English

College of Liberal Arts

The Graduate College

University of Nevada, Las Vegas

May 2012



THE GRADUATE COLLEGE

We recommend the thesis prepared under our supervision by

Robert Edgar Burks Jagger III

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ABSTRACT

Love is Just a Word for the Last Body I'd Like to Keep Vigil Over

by

Robert Edgar Burks Jagger II

Dr. Donald Revell, Examination Committee Chair

Professor of English

University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Love is Just a Word for the Last Body I'd Like to Keep Vigil Over is a collection of poetry that was composed during my time spent at UNLV. Comprised mostly of prose poems, it was heavily influenced by the works of Richard Hugo, Robert Coover, Joshua Marie Wilkinson and several French poets who are often categorized as being members of either the Symbolist or Decadent movement. At its best, the collection attempts to invoke a sense of Joseph Cornell's boxes—odd juxtapositions of everyday items and language that create new and uncertain circumstances. Unlike Cornell's boxes, however, the poems aren't confined by structure, but instead seem to always be pressing up against their boundaries and searching for a way out.

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Dear Love, I have thrown rocks at your window

for too long. Have you tied your bedsheets together yet? A patch of moonlight on the balcony, and you pulled me through the garden until we stood in its center to wait for the rain without an umbrella. You told me not to wake—that the recurring dream of you wearing a green dress and playing the table tennis game of your life was another rehearsal for departure. After the accident, I descended with you, step by step into the cistern half-filled with water, the water half-filled with water lilies. There have been too many unclean jobs, too much blood on me that was not my own, too many deadfalls and dumbwaiters. I am through with diagrams and math enough to work. Love, be on the last train home, let me rest my head on your shoulder, let me float down your long hair into sleep. I will wake up across the river with a new name.

In Your Refugee Dream

As moths knock on the windows,
you listen through the dark of the farmhouse.
A soft candlelight comes toward you from the end
of a long hallway. A woman calling herself
Love grabs your wrist with her bone-white hand.
She leads you into a room that grows dimmer
with each heartbeat. You tell her, take me
to the river. You cast your best net.
You pull up a half-dead horse & ride it
into the sunrise.

Dear Love, when I heard the captain say “insert the metal tip into the buckle, and pull the strap tightly around your waist,”

I wish I had inspected the airplane. Person after person brought on balloon, balloon, balloon, and the woman next to me wouldn't stop trying to make shadow puppets. It wasn't a duck, or a moose with one leg. My favorite was not the derelict squatter with a corn cob pipe. After I put on my 3-D glasses for the movie, none of my pantomimes or gestures worked. I found a fancy hat—for you, I will become World's Fair elegant.

Love and the Machine

They were creating. The women,
bending gears to their own purposes,
the men wearing goggles, wielding light
and heat. *Crimp, crimp,*
then, the welding. Finishing
touches on the giant machine,
and I was too shy for even a jig saw
back in Klopfenstein's shop class,
fearing the tension / motion of a blade and skin:
the way they might combine

(full of covet).

They put it together piece-by-
process: precise repetition,
gear teeth into grooves,
and and and
it chuffed autonomous
once they cranked the chromatic engine
(each turn, a half-tone)
efficient in its ellipses,
oscillations; its apogees drawing intimate.
The shape it took was the shape
we all wanted to take: a body

<cont'd>

finding its form. Years later,

I dreamed of being the beginning of the story:

small bit of conflict; a linchpin.

This is how it started: I turned

the hand-crank thirteen times to set the machine

in motion (tine-by-tine uncomfortably up the scale)

my tendons stretching,

a flinch.

Birth / Machine

(after Arthur Ganson's "Child Watching Ball")

Limbs plucked from the body,
one by one, twisted off,
thrown in with the sawdust and metal filings.

(No:
 fingering the laces of a baseball—
 long, thin fingers to push inside a mouth.

 No wrist to be slapped, no more *no*,
 don't do that—
 no propulsion method.)

It was a cheaper model—

this made it easier
to separate the head with two quick pulls,
pop of tension gone slack,

the nippleless torso holey, hollow.
I turned its smoothness over in my hands
before discarding it—fingers lingering

for underneath the smooth skin—
a small struggle, a gurgle, a coo.

I covered my blueprints with logarithms,
the elliptical path of the red rubber ball,
the sight line of the tiny head.

Here, now: watch
the hand crank turning faster and faster—
a whirlgig above a crib.

The ball is oscillating away:
this is the stimulation. Eyes wide open.
Turning—turning. Dizzy with precision.

(No: slow roller—easy grounder—
 keep your eyes on the ball, son.)
Because, watch. There he goes. Such a good boy.

In Your Mentally Unbalanced Dream

You stand at a beige door. Children slip
you a funny eye and smoke cigarettes
by the lamp pole next to the building.
You walk through an abandoned city full
of fresh produce on the shelves and good
meat in the case. The lights are burning
bright enough to start a fire and the children
follow you. All of the birds
you have never seen in your life
roost on a long telephone wire
that might go on forever.
The oldest of the children
has a face that constantly changes
and reminds you of your face as a child.
You find yourself with a stone
in your hand. The other children
chant "It's all a game" as they clutch their Raggedy
Ann and Andy dolls. You throw the stone
at a whitewashed "O" in "laundromat."
The sound of shattering glass reminds you
of the laughter of children. You know the worst thing about being a child is
how easy it is, and how hard it is to go back.
In this dream, the last dream you had
ended the world. The littlest child
waves to you, calls you by name,
and takes you by the hand.

Tomb of a Day

Night is a gift,
a clenched palm opening
to reveal itself
wholly empty.

If I could talk to the man
who made the universe a machine
I'd tell him: Good job,
I can't tell the difference
and if time creates space
or vice-versa. The universe will grow
without me, my troubles
not among the moon, clicking branches,
chimes that pierce the darkness.

Sound
the land survives.

Dear Love, I wanted to have a good time at the drive-in,

but someone left buttery popcorn behind, and I was close to filament. The children started slipping their dirty fingers into each others' mouths, and the live animator couldn't synch up with the Wurlitzer. How nickelodeon! I thought about sneaking off with you into the tall grass at the base of the hill beside the movie screen. I thought about the only time I've ever touched you in a bad way. There's been a change of plans—you can find money sewn into the dirty silk shirt hung up in my closet. Don't stop. Keep pushing past Reno. Mineral and materials ladder up the city— enough glass for a fantasy, so much neon desiring eye, eye, eye.

First Meeting as a Well-Kept Secret

We have gone without murders, car chases,
sex scenes: seedlings planted
off-screen (listen for the audible gunshots,
the wisecracking sidekick's big celebrity voice
silent—watch the darkened silhouettes moving,
the clouds of birds flying away).

But now she has been spoiled
by Disney movies; wants her dresses elaborate,
spinning and swirling around ankles—
a camera panning up, hoping
to catch a flash of something *white*.

She wants her own Prince Charming,
the happily-ever-after kiss that will leave her
best days to future imaginations. Ah, if only
we could define ourselves as something more
than smudged cells: this obscured formula,
and push our relationship to the suggestive
wake-up-beside-the-other-in-the-morning sorts.

Perhaps we are both just tired,
and would like simply to show our teeth.

If the Bees Back, Then

we will slip our shoes off and sit in the spring grass.
This bee, almost like a hummingbird, hovers by the tree
in search of new buds. Like Spring, love
has become new again, has taken the shape of flowers

I folded all night and strung up in your bedroom—
the gesture annihilating all else I have
and could have done. To believe that
the beloved is too dear to the heart

to write about is to believe the promise of Spring
is false—green shoots from the cold ground,
a bird alights on the branch overhead—
the world wakes around us and does not wait
to be recognized.

Dear Love, summer is winding down here,

and the grass has burned off enough to reveal what goes on here at night. I found the bleached hindleg because I followed the trail of ants. I tried to guess it back together from what I knew and could only think of an animal the size of a briefcase. I'm sorry I told you about the dove fallen from its nest—an explosion of feathers the morning after and days later they're still picked from dogs' teeth. Like me, the bees are about to leave for wherever they go—but still some stragglers lingering around the purple hyacinths we tried to foster. The ones that are dying stay in the light that's left.

Dear Love, I apologize for my Thanksgiving table manners.

I often think of my home, my parents and lost affection. There should have been no mention of the bone saw, no contingency for the bellows. No, I do not recall x , I do not recall the narrative, I do not recall the mercurial consonants trying to fuse themselves together. Our lives span genres and tired blood pumps through our veins. Wishbone after wishbone snapped apart.

Dear Love, say what you want about my moving parts,

I knew we were finished once I saw the inner gewgaws of the machine and I saw my presence was dangerous. Before it was just you and I and the road. Now I cannot rest without a reason—there is so much unused circuitry. I hear my mother is eating shoe polish straight from the tin, and I wonder about all the chalked-in things of this world. Are there better words for it? After the room full of overturned top hats, you told me to travel light, but Love, my heart is there, and I have never been able to leave.

Letter to Harris from Wallace, WV

Dear Michael: I regret what happened to you and feel like I've led you astray. Or more like I wasn't there. Who knew that on that night we met and went to one of Morgantown's lousiest bars, and I had my mane of hair and my black puffy vest, that eleven years later I consider you one of my dearest friends? By the way, did you know that I picked that vest out of the garbage? I don't know how you did it—yard after yard of Guinness or Sam Adams and I was puking on the walls and throwing bananas into our toilets. You, though, always had a quick smile for a lady and your endearing white-boy swagger. I am glad you have outgrown most of the white-boy swagger.

I think the bravest thing you've done was telling me you were getting a divorce when we were in the treestand outside of Tygart Valley. The wind that day would only stop long enough to get a few words in at a time, and in that broken way you told me the whole story about how everything fell apart. I never knew that your dream was to fly, and that your wife left on long study breaks and finally just left. You know the spot by your home with the railroad tracks, the one that if you're going fast enough, you catch air and land twenty feet down the road? When I left, it felt like that. Just a little extra burst of speed and suddenly you're sailing. My daddy never gave me any advice about how to leave a state, but he always told me to never try catching a falling knife. I'm never comforted knowing that it's usually the wrong people who get the deaths they deserve. You always manage to navigate winding country roads and come back with a smile on your face and a bag of pepperoni rolls. Save a late night alphabet car game for me and keep on leading. Much love. Bobby.

Dear Love, you have wrecked me and my poetry.

We watched the snake into the underbrush and couldn't stop the quail shrieks afterwards. In that desert, I am an immigrant promising my shoes to scraps, and am following the calliope's tiny song into the distance over the dunes. When we first met, I felt there was more to scavenge, that language was a door left standing, shut in its frame in a bombed-out house. But here are the fires, and the grasses to feed them. As they roared past, we waved, and everything was gone.

In Your Walking Down a Dead-End Road Dream

It is hot & sticky &
the air swells with cicadas.
You pass a few birch trees & the gravel
becomes coarser under your feet.
A maroon Chevy truck trundles
down the road behind you.
As it passes,
a man holding a hacksaw watches you
from the front seat.
You walk the road with a good girl.
You do not hold her hand,
even when you discover the small creek
cut through the field and a memorial
to the last roost of the Passenger Pigeon.
A maroon truck passes you
and the man in its bed is cradling
the neck of a wounded horse.
Further down the road is a barn with its sides blown out.
There is hay rotting in its loft. There is a cloud of dust
rising in the distance ahead of you. Something red or maroon
is approaching. The girl you are walking with says,
let's turn back and save the rest of the walk for tomorrow.
On the way back, you're still not holding hands.

Note to Paajanen from Mesilla

As always, I go off alone under cover of darkness. I waited
for the narrative to be turned loose, waited to hear your song
too good to hold in your lungs.

Now there's just one more thing

to X out. I was jealous,

years ago, of the men you smiled at in the dancehall,

the ones who, with only the lightest touch

and gesture, could keep you spinning. Unwound that gyre

and found enough electricity and copper

to burn a filament through the night

and a key to fit your tiniest locket.

I know to say "I don't want to lose you" admits a sort of defeat.

I wear your ring in your stead. Love, there is rain breaking over the mountains and still

a great distance to travel. There is no last line of defense.

I spur the car faster down a hard road into the heart of the storm.

First Meeting as Something Needing to be Revised

Already, the story undoing itself
despite efforts to pin it down
prop by prop like a grade-school diorama—

But it was unclear
where to place the paper moon,
our cornstalks a maze of stiff pipe cleaners—

Because we often argued
the *first* time. Remembering
it wasn't wholly unpleasant. It was

a mouthful of nouns like *nipples* or
splinters multiplying in the margins—
our accounts altered with each strike-through;

the to-not-to-step-on-toes criticism of workshop
often repeated:
maybe cut this, cliché (?), perhaps you could...,

I'm not so sure. That's the way it was;
Memory Xacto-ed out (line, line),
“kinesthesia of space” and “bare surfaces” soldered in—
(the sense of overlap, the idea—)

wad it up like a pucker,
a pair of pouty lips. No.
Not that one. The other.

Dear Love, the trees are filling with dead leaves

and the air smells of smoldering mesquite after it rains. Are the birds homeless where you are too? There is an injured one here to nurse back to health. I stood on my tiptoes and put it on the highest branch of the flowering dogwood I helped my father plant years ago. Sometimes it will cock its head and croak a warble when I approach, too weak to fall from the sky and tear at the blood-dark earthworms shallow in the soil. Sometimes I want to ask you if I love this bird, if you are here with me now. I think about the early seafarers fingering their lonely sextants and astrolabes by starlight, searching for the silhouette of land ho. An answer.

Letter to Paajanen from Truth or Consequences

I walked through the remnants of the wrought-iron gate, past the walls, the bits of glass and brick and the wire that jutted from the compacted earth where the house exploded. A snake into the underbrush and no way to stop the quail shrieks afterwards. Your father once gave me a blueprint of almost everything he wanted in this life: a courtyard with a small marble lake, benches from maple or teak and our hands full of splinters. Rosemary, jasmine and the hydrangeas we could all be knee-deep in. There is a figure on a distant hill—a rider on a horse carrying a cross with a fern leaf that springs the world into its four elements. A compass rose and the winds to guide it. A long time ago, we tried to sail a jalopy that we built from a bathtub, bicycle wheels and an old TV set across the desert. You stitched us sails from the hats we collected along the way and the clothes off our backs. Like then, I'm starting in on my second bottle of wine and there are clear skies until morning. I might never be able to say you've made me a clean man, but like the world, I will be honest again and again. Love always, Bobby.

The Language of War

I.

At first, the enemy was generic,
a noun, like *casualty*,
moving through the columns
M.I.A., P.O.W., K.I.A.

Even though “we don’t do body counts
on other people,” crisply-folded
flags are still being delivered to our next-of-kin;
those numbers “a metric to assist

in conveying magnitude and context after a battle.”
But even those words are nouns,
and still, are a more symbolic concept
than a proper person, place, or thing.

II.

At home, we dig foxholes enough
for concealment. The higher price we pay
at the pump, the constant celebrity smear

on TV news, sub-prime mortgage rates
and soccer practice. Out in the field,
though, they’re preserving what they can

with arterial chemicals: non-aldehydes,
conditioners, anti-edemic solutions,
humectants. Cavity fluid to treat the viscera.
Counter-stain for the jaundice.

III.

The robots in our factories
create new ordnance:
more ways to kill most efficiently—

language like *thermobaric*
(imagine the worst thing possible).
Our imaginations running wild.

There are schemas for that.
An ominous-looking blueprint.
Certain hinges.

<cont’d>

And now, the army is ordering their guns
to calibrate a new *working envelope*. A T.O.T. barrage.
The shells we mass-produce to burst.

First, the seismic release,
then, the whistling.
Then: coordinate 51b B30a 3.5.

It can be that precise, the seeking—
the Lieutenant surveying topography,
eyeing the contour lines, the bent blades of grass

after the grunts in the field
lift their bodies— [x , y] adjustments of Cartesian motion,

each point its own coordinate,
each coordinate, a body.

In Your Dream in Which You Wanted a Little Boat

There are a murder. There is a fine industry there. They perch indifferent. There are the crows chased away. Our hands. There's each word. A shadow of a man plays a single song on his hurdy gurdy by the lake. No one is driving his carriage and all the tones are sounding. There's the snow breaking over the mountains. There's the narrative being turned loose. There are the crows in the sky. There are their swirling shadows beside the empty hopscotch court. There are the lights faraway coming down the mountain. There's the kiss that is anything but reassuring. There are the crows alighting on the broken fronds of the palms. There is the wind blowing and the palms growing bare.

Dear Love,

let's say there was an impact event.

Let's say a small bit of tooth

would be a stone in our stomachs.

Let's call our knees rattletrap after

a floating rib's arc abrupt and open to the marrow.

Let's drape a sheet, white as eyes, full of night, and smolder
enough to hide our names.

I'm sorry, let's say we exchange *night* and *smolder*,
my fingers anymore, no good.

Let's say now we don't touch

in bed, and I ache imagining

the architecture of a kiss.

Let's pretend that *recovery* means more
than a few knots of sinew or tissue.

Let's let her name fill our days

with misery. Wait with me.

Only time will make a space

for a new love.

In Your American Pioneer Dream

You decode the landscape
and the plants to eat
in an unorganized territory.
If the animals are broken down
or lost, everything must be
sacrificed. A sky
without clouds can be dangerous—
the expanse and distance make you believe
anything is possible: those fields, that sky, God,
is something.

There is a solitary speckled hawk
in the black branches of the lightning-struck tree.

When the weather comes in,
drop your tools or you will die.

At night, the field mice slowly
chew the edges of your blankets
as you lie in bed. There's skittering
in the ductwork and the furnace.

You plant too few trees
in your windbreak.

The wind won't stop.

Letter to Julia, from Ewen, MI

Only the died-out things remain
in the farmhouse where Uncle Roy died—
husks of spiders cling to the ceiling
waiting for the flies
still stuck to the walls
and littered on the windowsills.

There are still only three roads in town:
the old road, the new road and the cemetery road.

Grass enough outside to hide the bones
of half a mauled deer and a person
up to their waist.

You can imagine the buildings as they used to be:
broad, strong lines and planes to hold up to the prairie wind
and the rest of the Midwest weather.
They have splattered a bit
since the “For Sale” sign staked in the ground
by the turnoff from the old road. The cream separator
and the crane in the byre still work,
but the sheds are full of broken glass, empty
oil cans with defunct companies on their sides,
birds and rotting machinery.

If I was braver. Tell me the story again
where a little straw-haired girl spent her days
swinging from the pulleys and trolleys
of the barn loft only to be swallowed
by the secret trap door down to the manger.

When the government took some of his land to make a rest stop,
I heard you told him nothing is whole
and nothing is broken,
but he never believed it.

In the fields you once played in,
the cicadas are emerging again
only to live long enough to sing their song
and attract a mate.

May there always be enough prey where you are
for you to avoid predators. Love, Bobby.

Dear Doctor—I wasn't afraid of the diagnosis

until you called it love—until it seemed the idea was a sound shuffling towards me in a narrow hallway in the dark. You used words like *affliction* and *reciprocation*. You said, “Yes, the leeches.” I was aware of your jury-rigged stethoscope, the way you tried to listen to my animal body, your hands everywhere they needed to be. Please help; this is a geometry I do not know.

Dear Love, did I give the counting correctly,

was there proper method to the telephone? I thought there would be enough mathematics to proof a safe return, to take that leap of faith without faith. Now we are well past theory. A long time ago, Yuri Gagarin has completed his landing, and I wish him well. We thought we could outrun geometry too—was that the point past forgiveness? You gave me a few strange verbal reports, a SOS to the entire world. Conditions are growing worse, why won't you answer? The world will never know about us.

First Meeting as Our Last

Jilt the locket; its tiny clasp,
the heart opening and closing
around our fused-cheek picture.
It ached to learn our sexual fantasies
were better before we took them to bed.
The first whorls are falling from those trees
that bloomed above where we liked to spread
our picnic blanket—a kaleidoscope
of orange, red, yellow, and white
pinwheeling; the fragrance of lilac
and *want* still lingers
where our fingers pulled the carrots of our names
from our lips. Remember that first kiss?
Baby, I got what I wanted;
now I'm done. Say hello
tongue. Goodbye.

Dear Love, I Forgot Who You Were

until I watched the pigeons jerk the entrails out of the red mess by the road. Planes shift the constellations, and I sat in bed until morning, alone, thinking of a way to use our last parasol. Forgive me—our forms were cut into three trees too many, and your name is a bit of bone that comes clean in the dishwasher.

Dear Love,

If the Lord is my shepherd,

then I must be lost.

Like a river, I expect my bones

to get where they need to go.

I look forward to my last home

and its comforts.

What will I have left to negotiate with,

save my heart

and names?

In Your Depressed Dream

You look out the same window of your house
day after day. There are evergreens outside,
occasionally the pattern of parked cars
is different. Your friends
ride their bicycles inspired
to your house. When it rains,
they unspool their paper kites into the squall
until the tiny ribbons and streamers drop
to the ground enough to choke the birds.
All you want is everything to be made funnier
by monkeys. You know what they want
and know they don't want you to stay.
There is only one way into a kingdom
with no borders.
Each guess is a trail of breadcrumbs
leading to another trail of breadcrumbs
and there are no more birds. You dream
of leaving the world behind, of blaming
the wildest dog. Upon waking, you cannot name it.

In Your Circus Dream

I am not the main act.

The circus you are part of
has eight rings—one for each
ancient wind that blows through time.

I dreamed I was a magician
in the sideshow alongside
wrestling gnomes and Belisarius,
the blind man who lashed a ladder
out of swords and then proceeded
to climb up the delicately forged blades
and slide back down before begging
for alms. The best trick I ever pulled
was to disappear
beneath the ruins of a city
and emerge in the ancient hippodrome
that hosted horses, angels and other warriors
of light. Hail to the windjammers,
the roustabouts and the razorbacks
of an animal-rich circus! What
a bestiary we compiled
during our leanest years
when we had to shout out

<cont'd>

“Hey, Rube!” against those seeking access
to our curiosities and kept secrets
cluttered in our cabinets.
We often blamed the wildest dogs
for what happened to us, but we were animals
that filled our mouths with bones too.
You watch our grotesque chapeaugrapher
and marvel at all of the lighthearted hats
that are placed on your head.
You are given the ringmaster’s hat.
Your circus contains equestrian acts,
feats of strength, our sideshow,
a man walking a live
wire over a pit of tigers and
the deception of a lithe woman.
People will ask her for a private showing
of the flea circus and its intimate automatons.
When something goes wrong,
everyone keeps reminding themselves
that clowns are funny. Eventually
the circus grows too big for itself and collapses
into your white-gloved clapping hands.
No man should ever outgrow the circus.

<cont’d>

We are all very far away from home.

First Meeting as a Cinematic Magic Trick

The magician wakes!

He puts the two halves back together,
pulls the rabbit from the hat.

The world snaps back,
ready for another trick.

If I was smart,
I'd be in fiction.

Forget obsessions with cosmonauts
and robots, how they translate into bodies
and the engine of the getaway car.

The woman who first told me about plot
is shooting me

IN DEEP PANIC

an email about the weather.

If there is a first meeting,
it involves a mishap—
a man with a cat,
my grandmother's burning bread,
mistaken identity or a collision
be it in a corridor or a motorcar.

<cont'd>

I will never share a whole breakfast with you
because I am too busy talking out a window
at a landscape. Egress.

Find creepy crawlers in the shower
drain, the corner
of your eye, your hair.

Good riddance, from the original!

SCREAM, hands on cheeks.

It will hit the vegetables
of the Korean greengrocer.

Our hero can *ESCAPE*
the ropes using sharp objects
and supple fingers. Then a ruse.

JUMP free at the opportune moment.

You tried to surprise me
with a romantic candlelight dinner
I failed to attend. Someone's
pearls looped a noose around my neck.

Shortly after we met I said, "I want you
to have this ring. It's a family heirloom."

<cont'd>

Circumstances permitting, *you can THROW it*

into the river / ocean / well

but not return it.

Dear Love, When You Said “To Designate a Vector Implies a Relationship”

the oxygen masks popped out. I found your longest hairs in my mouth, the small veins of a mirror. I was using my morse code voice, sounding out the minor triads of a xylophone. When I was caught knee-deep in the hydrangeas, I thought there were too few birds outside, the sun and the sky cellophane. When you said *the sound my body makes, sometimes, is the sound of its leaving*, the way I looked at you was a spreading bruise.

Dear Love, When You Said, “I Want You to Want to do the Dishes,”

I felt as if the conductor wouldn't stop tapping his baton—as if nothing could be ordered again. On another stage, a woman was singing “Love is Just a Word for the Last Body I'd Like to Keep Vigil Over,” and it felt like someone had given me a bag of bees and walked off. The cymbals crashed, the musicians dropped their instruments, and the grand finale was a bunch of dud fireworks. When the elevator wouldn't stop catching fire, we tried to save what we could—my hands full of bougainvillea. I wanted to keep all the pictures with you in them so I could forget where I want to travel and why. There is only one door to go through. Each step is new.

First Meeting as Something New

Ageless are aches
involving second parties—
im / patient waits. (Tracking
#’s, for instance.)
If not for the driver—
his weak coffee in the diner,
folding back, folding again
the road map (wrong
turn on the Charlotte cloverleaf),
we would receive updates
signed-for: a package
going the route, crossing state lines
into a warehouse just ‘round the corner
tonight (I know, I’ve checked every hour).
To want is another set of hands
on the wheel—another mouth
to freight a tongue into
through the red-eye miles—
the hope, sometimes, to bring
two where two roads meet,
and make a low fast run for the horizon.

Dear Love, I Had a Great Time at the County Fair

when we were watching the planets and the bright moons through the lit spokes of the ferris wheel. After we cut in line for the rickety carousel and the man gave us the butterfly-wing luminaires, I felt my skin lasso-loose holding that light—the stars kaleidoscoping—and you slipped me a little tendon. Each kiss a sweet cherry. My bones and your bones fitting together. I spoke your name. It came out the shortest way possible, and everywhere I looked was a ladder.

Notes

In “Dear Love, you have Wrecked me and my Poetry,” the line “But here are the fires, and the grasses to feed them” comes from Donald Revell’s “Bacchae” in *My Mojave*.

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