

With Julia in the Milk Bed

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I.

Yes, the world made way, opening once more.

What choice does it have but to go on?

The two of us mark a place where time
turned inside out, dropped
through itself,
your head tucked, looking back
into the past.
The old world
you were born out of remains
unredeemed,
irreparable—

Yet here in the house cleaned for your coming,
the old bed has been made with new sheets,
the doors and windows
have all been opened.

The pliant limbs of the willow oak give way
as if to usher in this breeze that blows night and day from the east.

Summer is fully fledged. It trembles at its own excess.

All morning two falling notes,

then two falling notes:

Little chickadee, high
in the sunlit willow oak at the east window,
then deep in the cypress at the north.

Brief song handed back and forth.

One for sorrow, two for joy, isn't that how it goes?

Joy then, I'll take that,
along with my ice packs,
my cabbage leaves
and compresses. And you
that I can hardly call my—
I'll try—unpacked bundle
I scoop onto my slack stomach.

Your star hands flex and wander
your blurred and sunlit heavens.

II.

Somewhere far below, the shriek and thump of your brothers
washes in and out of the house like a tide. Below that
the groan of distant traffic, and the soft, strange wind,
and below that . . . an almost imperceptible grinding.
The slow wheel of time consumes the present moment.
and below that, below that . . .

You grope to latch and fail, again, again,
startle yourself
with a thin
strained wail,
gape-mouthed,
my huge hand guiding your head
in to try—*there*—press—
you clamp wide
we teeter
on the brink—kick away a sheet of pain—
and you—and we—are falling, drifting
down into the wilderness below thought,
into pure perception.

Shifting branches fill the windows and mirror,
continually swept aside
and then falling back into place.

World veiled, unveiled.

Beguiled, beguiling, and guileless.

The wind is the world's emissary,
and we open our doors and windows to it.

Small body of our bodies,
Small soul of our souls,
we called you here,
always to be separated
from that which you desire.

III.

Everything seems impossibly distant
and also unbearably close.
I'm weeping again
for the children's
days-long dying. Ambulances
waiting at the blockade.
Perhaps this is how it is
in the mind of God. Continually
scraped raw.
Today they write
*still searching the Atlantic
for bodies.*

Likely never recovered they write.

The 1, the 12, the 82, the 126
let fall.

A flash in the sky and a rapid vertical descent.

Julia, your fire is laid in ashes.

One room among rooms
beyond number,
east window carried up at last into morning sun.
The beveled edge of the mirror
flicks its light into the swept corners.

Everything intermingles.

The pain at the breast
indistinguishable from the sweet
ache in the palms
as the milk lets down,
and the blood, the afterpangs.

I can't tell the difference between joy and despair
and something deeper still.

IV.

Slowly, now, distinctly. In the foreground of hearing:

Two notes,

two notes.

Where is this spring's moss-flecked nest
with its six speckled eggs? The boys and I
searched but couldn't find it.

Perhaps the black snake already knows.

One thing,

and then one thing,

and then another.

The bedside petals edged in fuchsia,

and then their fragrance, come round again

and reaped for joy.

Blossoms, Julia. Vines, unfurling, grains of soil clinging to their tips.

Everywhere one turns, abundance.

Surely goodness, surely mercy . . .

