



THE KNOWING ANIMALS

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## Visitation

Roving through flowering megacities,  
fields of sea lavender—carrying a zygote

nearly invisible inside me, while savoring  
the soft pornography of this Disneynature

landscape, waiting for Meryl Streep's voice  
to come gliding in, luciferous as always,

draping sublimity, narrating every kill.  
I haunt the deer who have come to feed

at the edge of the coastal wood. I fall in with  
the flow of animals closing and opening mirrored

doors with a feeling that I'm being followed:  
a complicated faith, utopian and disquieting.

## Mother Earth

Rewilding, nourishing, slow-eating her life. Instagram  
spoon-feeds perfectly squared bites of pale Icelandic

women microdosing on Nature, washing their sex's stress  
away in baths of rare birch forest air; she carefully dabs

the corners of her lips with a double hemstitch linen napkin  
before closing in on her second course: a plastic junk platter

of Japanese shipworms and Asian shore crabs freshly floated  
in from across the Pacific, washed down with a heady headline,

*Trash is the New Titanic.* Hour by hour she devours a third,  
fourth and fifth course: blurred nipples and low-fat depictions

of gutted whales on empty beaches, followed by an on-the-house  
round of rubbered hands sampling their bodies for the kindly

purposes of Science. *Dessert?* She has her cake by the lake  
paired with a handwoven basket of off-white edible flowers

poised (accidentally) in the framed shot, filtered through  
Mayfair and luxed; she lines us up—counts who loves it.

## New Day of Girls

Hacked black hair in the chipped sink—choked  
drain, an angry pipe like a father's arm: punch

to the gut, to the sewer. Count the sharps—  
12 large knives, 9 small knives, 1 meat tenderizer,

10 cookie cutters—now count them back to me.  
The seagulls cackle on the hour. The boyfriends call,

they wait outside. Room checks, house checks,  
2:21 am: a crowbar wrenched into a cranny—

the house is emotionally insecure, threatens  
relapse, trauma metamorphosing into rats gnawing

through grey matter mattresses, but the drug  
dreams remain intact. Tomorrow is a new day of girls

sharpening their weapons, disappearing into cars,  
sharpening their weapons, disappearing into cars—

I've lost count: there are too many knives, heads,  
shoes. Georgia O'Keeffe's flowers bust off the walls,

break frames, throw open doors, kiss foreheads. Listen,  
closely—here are the rules: apotheosize and lie

when you must (*She doesn't live here.*) Don't flinch.  
Don't cry. Make lunch. Stitch their torn clothes.

## Glimpse of the Hook

The lake rumples alongside us like a bedsheet,  
a pulse line, a thread of memory pulled  
and pulling, ever unbuckling belt...

Two old friends: you in your red-violet jacket,  
bloom of a single purple rose, a dark bead  
of blood—and I, a thorn in your clavicular notch.

*The world's encrypted by our confusion*, you say,  
catching a glimpse and then gone: a trout leaping,  
a flipped coin falling on heads, a knife

decapitating, severing diagonally and downward  
through the pectoral fin, before I fry its firm,  
briny body in snapping, blistering grease—

I catch a glimpse of the hook I dug into your  
back last autumn when your husband came  
in my mouth like silk and salt all at once,

in a thicket of unremarkable spruce, bushy  
frames of forgottenness, no longer forgotten—  
the same ones we sprint past each night; their scent

thrusts a memory of long fingers inside me.  
I'm not here. I'm not where you think I am.  
I haven't left the house yet—*your* house.

## Menstromania

Loose and bloody in the bathwater, a crossbred  
sea star/sponge/jellyfish of mucosal tissue,

a strand of uterus, a small stringed instrument,  
a nest, a tuft of down feather fallen from a bird

in the hand of my body (a hedge sparrow)—  
or maybe it's a knot of spider silk. It is time

spelled out—f-o-u-r weeks to be exact; a shredded page  
from a calendar eaten by the moon whose teeth

shine as it bites through my lower abdomen, a pain  
lit from the inside like a paper lantern—yes,

this is what my body has become overnight,  
a ranting lunatic of clarity and impulse, dysphoria

and cravings—a bloated hull, red sky at morning,  
an eyelid turned inside out, a dauntless sea-craft

crossing waters in an equatorial counter current  
spurred by monsoon winds—wind spiking

the ocean's surface like a dragon fruit; my body  
is the red rind of a tart, hidden pomegranate,

the air is appetite, tonguing the pulpy seeds  
(*of what?*) inside me, inciting a slow evisceration,

catabolization, breakdown in the bloodstream,  
the hemodynamics of the world, its nonstop

pulse searching for the aortic semi-lunar valve  
in the arterial tree, a big-tooth aspen perhaps,

yes, that's the one. Don't call me hysteric, call me  
wisteric, bearing racemes of blue-lilac papilionaceous

flowers and wrist-thick trunks, collapsing latticework.  
I'm a head case with an acute associative disorder

tending a garden of hypochondriasis with offshoots  
of violet amnesias, long convoluted tendrils climbing

a trellis of intersecting stakes—I'm a recovering psycho-  
somatic somnambulating between the body and the mind,

rebuilding the distance with words until relapsing  
into this poem, this unmoored monastery of endometrial

cells adrift, this intertidal rag-bag tatter of home, no longer  
a home but a memory—far and near, loose and bloody.

## The Knowing Animals

In a wood stirring with elk blood and rorid air,  
the invisibles were all ears: all lays and hoofprints.

I heard one miles deep—  
a bugle from a womb of black spruce.

I remembered my own dark language,

hedged by hemlock and fir, guarded by forked roads,  
diverging arrows. An unearthing requires more than a compass.

So, what now of those rooms, empty and aseptic,  
trimmed with brainwashed flowers?

*Shh, listen*—a rustling of the watchful,  
who wade unbridled through brushland.

A fracas of ravens in the treetops: I thought of you  
and your crow's feet, your hulking, hooded eyes.

The day you were pulled from unbounded space,  
trees toppled, and the needle pointed North.

## Vernal Equinox

*Do babies watch Octonauts in springtime?*

my daughter asks, as I mind-bend

flipping through a magazine, wading into  
an essay on the Death Valley Superbloom

sea of desert gold, paintbrush, and gravel ghost,  
swayed by each wave of colour spattered

on the glossy page; I can almost taste optical  
brighteners and wood fibres while creatures

submerge into an ocean of cartoon blue  
on a phosphorescent screen—the two of us

sinking our teeth into fulgent fruits, picked  
from drooping media: how peculiar, paradise.

## Going Out

*Why are you everywhere in the night?* the children ask,  
as I pull on my tights. Your legs look like black snakes,  
the youngest says, as he brushes my thick, coiled hair.

I kiss each of them with my coral lips, wetting  
their skin like a queen wasp before brusquely shutting  
the kitchen door, locking everyone inside. I walk alone

through Stygian streets to feel a part of the day that's unfastened  
clasp by clasp in the handsy dark, rearranging—the way  
my body does when the dress finally drops. I have a feeling

that tonight one of my friends will get too drunk, spill  
the wine and tell me that her husband's never made her cum;  
or maybe I'll shove my hands down a man's pants in a 1:00 am

parking lot. Did you know that the root word of nirvana is blow?  
Meaning, blown out. I'll think of this, stumbling home in the  
pitch of it while my loved ones dream of worse or better lives.

## Passage

Across the way, a woman catches something tossed  
from an apartment window, while my daughter recounts  
her birth: *A pony dropped me in water and mud,*  
*and then I popped like a balloon!* What in the world

are we to do with time. We're held by a string and then let go,  
rivering through the air into the after. The woman smiles,  
looking up, blows a kiss then climbs into her car.  
In the blue sky a promise of ceaselessness is made

and broken. My daughter and I walk as if she'll always  
fit into her yellow firefighter boots. A shining skull  
stares at us, perfectly centered on the wooded path.  
*It was a deer,* I say, giving death a sweet face—we'll walk on

until she tires. A swift sleep waits for her, salvific, under  
an awning of afternoon hours, back at home where air  
pours through the windows, stirring the houseplants  
growing new tissues without our noticing.

## Naturecultures

I mistake the call of a hermit thrush for the melody  
of your *Download Complete*—what does that say about me?

Fresh tar and lilacs, manufactured capsule-Blue No. 2 sky,  
a note of the decomposed lifts sharp and tangy from the glistening trash.

To the woman with the bleach-blond hair, whizzing by in a wind of fuchsia  
bicycle:  
how dare you snag me on the antler tip of the buck inked on your bare calf.

Watch my step—coltsfoot clammers from concrete clefts, groundlings  
of the groundsel tribe, lovers of rifts and shambles, larvae food for the  
Gothic moth.

See the children climbing through neon jungle gyms, clutching fistfuls  
of dandelions? Light-freighted harvests emerging from plastic tunnels.

Scratching my sunset voyeur-itch, peeping into intimate caves of LCD glow:  
a man bathes in media streams of cold moon-like light—his face, a  
puckered O.

## Volta

Meet me at the volta, the high-voltage tulips' canary-  
coloured trance supervened by a spell, a turning

away of attention, intention—what is hypnosis?  
I mean rose hip gnosis, red and pluck-worthy

they were on that bitumen black night at Bear Cove  
where you bit into the fruit's hip, into its hairs,

while I rambled on about King Tut's meteorite knife  
and X-Ray fluorescence, the two of us harebrained

in a warm blizzard of juvenescence, the moon  
a puzzle of orbital bones, or was it a wolf spider's

egg sac? Round silken globe lighting the starflowers  
at our feet, the terraqueous space of water and land,

chaos and cosmos—did someone say subaqueous,  
subconscious? The red of your sweater was all over

me and tut-tut went the tip-of-the-tongue phenomenon,  
and all I could think of was a pic of the tip of a tulip

stamen in our grade ten bio textbook, and how you  
pinched the skin below my breast alerting my attention

to the almost-rhyme, *stamen*, *semen*, and the wet shock  
of spit that followed from your laugh, landing on my bare

shoulder, spaghetti-strapped, open for business, the first  
in a series of disillusion, I mean dissolutions—was I

the solvent or you? Repeat after me: *solvō*, Latin for loosen,  
untie, undo—when the sweat and the red was all over,

the tit-for-tat, or something like that, the word re-  
turned to me at last like an old friend I no longer knew.

## Painting Suburbia

Violets and midday eyelids at half-mast.

Houses, white like church, alyssum, asylums. Their windows, grey

like the ladies who wait inside, hands folded in their laps—pearls  
laid to rest in drawers.

A woman with white wine hair carries shears half her size,  
heads for the forsythia: its yellow, once celebratory—forty lit wicks—  
now sirens.

Another is on her knees, patting soil the colour of wakeless sleep,  
while a strawberry-blonde dog dozes on a fresh-cut lawn—  
everything about him, tethered. Even his eyes—leashed

to a hunger: an uproar of feathers, crimson cabaret  
of crushed esophagus song.

But aren't we all waiting for some red glimmer to taste, to chase—

lipstick or a car?

\*

No sign of the children today (carried away by Crayola-bright buses),  
nor the men (somewhere in the base coat, receding).

The sky, mind you, its colour is wedded to the hopefuls, to the long-hauls,  
to the made-to-last—

remind me, what shade is that?

## Considering Physics, Destiny's Child, BDSM, and Simone Weil at Drag Bingo

Scrambling for a blackout, for a revelation of reality  
through joy, circling numbers, slim circling

hips, sequined Queens, drinks overflowing  
consciousness, losing ourselves in the disco ball

scattery lights like throngs of tiny crystal trembling,  
atomic oceans of Brownian motion, and rich,

velvety pressure, pulsing waves of R&B refrain:  
I don't think you ready for this jelly, I don't think you ready

for this glittering, hot void, 99.9999999%  
empty space; God's absence has never been

more glorious or better dressed—what a sweetheart  
thing to say at a starlit bar superclustered

with sweetheart asses shaking this teeny town  
out of its Tuesday orbit; little wildings, little unlost

souls gathering crops of crackpot glee under the harvest  
moon's root vegetable fullness of being,

love-hating every minute of our false divinities—  
we offer little hope, and yet there is such munificence:

the ballroom's bursting, bodies busting rhinestones  
and buttons, ripping serged seams; scream-

laughing in a confetti of bra stuffing, a fandangle  
of something-nothings, all a-jive and awry, sneaking

glances at each other's tireless eyes working over-  
time to un-see through this mad rabbit chase:

The beauty of the world is the mouth of a labyrinth—  
at its centre, Madame Never in her leather Dom-wear,

cracking her 45.7 billion (and counting) light-year long  
whip, wielding her power over us whom she's thrashed

through starry oblivion, flung by chance into  
a winning card, a warm skin-dream, all kinks and quarks.