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Try to Remember Breath

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Try to Remember Breath

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I.

N choose K
 $n!/k!(n-k)!$ or how to calculate possibilities

I am the infinite
assembly of alphabetical
breakdown, of
combinatorial thought, of
tongue and torque.

$26!/k!(26-k)!$

A comes before b
and then after b
as birth comes before
death but the death
can happen anywhere
in the course
of the shifting priorities
between the love of a
good man and loving
the man who loves back.

When b precedes
c, I am changing with
each image of the
sea rising against
the octopus caves
as the sun shifts the
barnacles from white to
orange and each stone
continues to disappear.

$26!/4!(26-4)!$

I have made my pact.
I transfer it
because it is loose
and fractured
into fractal patterns that

mock the finite
and the impulse to
change what is already
soft. This is the same
reason love is too
easily repositioned.

[no break]

The pact becomes
the only possible subset,
the only one
subtracted from me.

It creates its own sky
and then peels it back.

Arrays in C

Include irrational exuberance

Include risk adversity

Include emotional rescue

{ open

My prayer beads have lost their crosses and there is only glass
left to press
against my thumbs in petition for truth, and by truth I mean that when I pause
for the hymn
and find only false bells, it is time.

It is time to climb the fire tower to assay what I have delivered

in desolation.

From the tower, I blow the French horn that calls in the horsemen.

From the tower, I recede like my fist into a pocket.

/*these are the choices
and they cannot be made again */

But the season is long and dry and there are no fires to call out
because love is a choice that cannot be made again.

Here there are ranges of solvable limits for which
I will not derive any answers.

I have calculated the rise of the slope

I have sketched the strokes under the rising lines of
each point of inquiry.

Each is an apology rising like an *Ave Maria*.

I am my own axiom of extensionality, all my sets the same.

return 0

close }

$$F(x) = 2/T$$

I must know some algorithm.

There's an order of operations, after all.

A certain number is necessary for the true accounting.

This missing number will come of some set of steps.

This equation will be nothing but precise edges and air
that will tell me how many times I can be divided by going into another.

But the numbers float above
one another in some relationship
I cannot seem to derive
and I missed a negative sign,
there are decimals and fractions
and sophisticated ways of splitting
from wholes and functions, all not
quite what I thought they were.

Taking Account after Divorce

I have turned my back and cannot see
what is behind me

I have numbered the countable things
 the things I have poured
 from palm to palm
each failed hymn that did
 not rise from my throat

I have measured god and time and gold
 The kisses that thumbed me in the eye

What waits behind me taps my shoulder and runs away
It is a river that grows smaller under my burning touch

I will not spin around
I can't help spinning around
The spinning is killing me

The room is stuffy and my lungs won't fill
 I open a window and the rain comes in
and no one can live that way either

Rust imposes itself in the night.

What is red in me grows like cash in the bank.

Heaven

We are full of planets.
They are elements inside us.

Any of us is capable of cracking open
at any time.

Go ahead, crack me open
and tiny worlds burst from
my chest
they snap into the endless,
spiral into galaxies
swarm into clusters.

I can hear Saturn's rings colliding against one another,
Neptune, draped in star trails and blue gas,
singing praises in electromagnetic verse.

If I pivot on my rotational axis,
I can be a shining disk, a knotty glowing structure,
nothing but a dust path.

It's all heaven:
All those suns calling us into
life, red plasma bursting through
the boiling gases, a million heavens
so alone no one
has ever come back.

St. R-

I am woody with an undercurrent
of raspberry.

You are saddle leather with an undercurrent
of sore.

Aphrodite's sweet-worded desires
are the hard sated green of spring:
they have the quality of raindrops evolving
into hail.

What you claim:
the overfed sea creature of your tongue
and the taste of iron on my lips.

What I claim is cheap:
The moist cake of your prayers
iced with desire.

At Sixes and Sevens

A state of disarray or hazard or confusion

We are as weak as gin
pooling around a shredded lime
but some of us
are the lime
coming apart
striking out for the
bottom of the glass
meant to mask the cool
burn lurking in the clear gin

Say we are the loose strands
of the soon left lime
Say we are the thin sin
leaning back in a chair
that ought to be played straight

I'm telling you we're real green
We lurk in the rumor
of some jazz school glass
We are June
shoved aside, gin upstaged
and we do not know why the
lime sinks so soon, why it can't
sing before it dies and why
it only leaves its greenest part
instead of something gold.

Benediction

(after the sleet, after the snow)

✧

sliced through soft
soil hair
pin turn

✧

does rocked
back
on hocks
on the edge

✧

like John's
Revelation.

✧

souls thrown
in
reverse

The One with Violets in her Lap

Here is the brick made from good red
Missouri clay. The corner has cracked
and sheared off a spot for the spider to pull
the frothy white from the hollow of her lap.
It is easily swept away. The sharp pits of the brick
pull my skin from my skin in the sweeping; they collect
the ash of me. The green pollen powders the surface,
the sunsodden grain and the dust that spangles
down from the living trees; each pit is a toehold
for the inchworm who has floated greenly
down his invisible strand. His feet stick to the hot
rough clay. The good red dog with the soft mouth that holds birds whole
and unharmed has bitten off and dropped from their stalks
the honey-scented lilies to be trodden to the tiles;
we are flowerdeep in their rot and urgency.
The good red bricks will blaze and cool and
the honey-scented lilies will close up against the night.
I will die suddenly. Who will pour the wine over
me in celebration and lament? In the dark hallway,
I will reach out two empty arms. The soft desire of
death and the empty down bed will greet the warm violet dawn,
will greet the warmth of two sunburned arms that dare to
reach up and around a bent neck that is no longer there.
I am honey-sealed, sea-dark; the world is changing; I am still.
The sheepskin will be pure and supple; the ink black and sharp.

Lines Written to the Sun

You are a mass
of incandescent gas;
there is nothing
between you and me,

and I can reach only
a small way through
our emptiness.

What a team we are!
Holding our gorgeous
on the inside.

We might spin against the world at any time, sister.

For now, we are bolted
together by shear purple universe
and streams of ionized gas.

You reach through me,
the kinks and twists in my
magnetic field where nothing is solid.

Surrounded by a fierce solar wind,
we are hydrogen,
the lightest of all elements:

We are nothing to stand on.

Cross Country

(for Stanny)

I wouldn't mind
sitting with you on
that horse jump made of
narrow logs piled up like
a wall. I might perch with my
knees up under my chin, the rot
of downed trees staining my jeans.
Unlike you, I'd want to face
the woods, be the wet branches
underlit by 3 o'clock sun.

It's cold, but only
Missouri cold.

I might close my eyes and
wonder how to soak up our loneliness --
make you test me like that old electric fence
until I snap.

When the horses do trot by,
necks wet with the
effort of beating down
clumps of prairie, we will be
like others of this breed, our
noses aimed at the
top of the next fence,
because it is there and you and I,
we are being put to it, knees
to chin, a whip of white tail.

What are reins, anyway,
but thin excuses for restraint
when we'd rather breathe
great painful heaps of frosty
air, hay, sunshine.

II.

Just Once

Here – grab this cactus.
Most of its thorns are soft as infant hair --

the rest are the needles
found in certain parks.

You know, the places even the geese
won't go. Stick with the purity of my point, now.

Stick with the way a square head thinks.
I am sure we will right this ship of state.

The conclusion is abroad this night, nodding
in the yellow alley where light and
space sneak away for a kiss. It bites the cold
five ways to the bony galaxy -- the whips
and sweats of dusk give me vertigo migraines.

God, the fresh threat of the text
message that's making the screw stick.

A little chocolate please,
enough to spread rest to my tongue

On Beauty

1.

It is possible to think
In tetrahedral

Like the plankton that spin
Their personal cathedral
Of calcium and silt

It is possible to worship
Like radiolarian
Pre-Cambrian desires
A feast for those
Who will come later

It is possible to judge
Our conic progress
To sweep it across
The desert floor

2.

Ticketless --
Recall the way
Is not long

Possibility --
It exists

3.

But don't tell the sweet cherries
Shirley Temple is dead

I'm Gorgeous Inside

We sit on quietly humming
highways, red streaks of
neon snap alive the end
of this day after day
with a certain purity.

It is clear we are mocked
for our sufficiency,
our neat, modest homes
with steel-fronted Frigidaire's
and fresh paint.

We know the rumors
about the 21st century.

Who will not kiss
Sunday's sleepy hem,
its faith hoarded

close to the vest
like the cheap glass crystals
that sugar each new year.

Each morning breaks with
shredded wheat and
flaked corn, boulevards lined with
blossoms that promise pears
but bear no fruit.

Dear Girl

Oh, my girl: Your body is truth.

You are endless lines of ants climbing straight
up the oak.

You are the yellow pull of a late summer sunset spreading itself
across the top of a forest of oaks.

You are a mantle laid on bent water
and the water bending.

Go ahead and tell me I'm wrong.

Many times others will have a right to your body. There is no one who will guard you
from this.

Be like the katydid,
a green leaf that
can only sing its own name.

Absorb lies like a cave.

I won't be the one to forgive you.

Data Structures

August is always underfoot
December a paradise of decay

if I choose to walk through
the fifty-five fields

each must be sorted and
ranked

each long bowed row
must anticipate a horizon
dip into everywhere

the heaviest grass
will wrap hard
about my knees

the grass hums
it hums!

as it disassembles
the shadows:
 six dogs in the summer heat
 tongues lolling like black pudding

We had Hoped for More

I was told the world shelters a carnival
under its tin triangle.

The Irish mothers in Southie sugar their tea,
add milk, and curse the lottery.

Slick black tanks full of ethanol
will race from the cornfields this fall.

I buy yeasty red wine in big paper
boxes, ring the yard carefully with cheap flowers.

My back is behind me.
A new concrete church proclaims
my love of God, the ritual of country.
I can have this one minute for every
incinerating desire.

For when the begonias fail in the drought,
the walls crumble and tumble across the cracked asphalt,
and nothing looks good after the rain,

I will steal my own bricks of clay to sell
to the politically significant, even as a debate
may not be developing about what we pay for middle-class freight.

Dear Syria

I was talking to the sky,
and we were speaking in blue
about how to wear birds
draped like a scarf, low and fringed and

how to wear bombs like drop pearls
each falling from the silver breast of a plane and

about how to wear oil fires like pendants
each finger reaching up to
skirt along the edges of an orange evening

This is how I learned to wear your ghosts like buttons
and drink your fear like hot tea and
this is how I learned to dream of eating
my own future.

Eating Crow

Bear it
like the sweet stick of custard
on a baby's lips or
the wet pain of a rotting tooth.
To know what is it?
A punk leather jacket
embellished with lock tite.

For some, the world is flat:
a table, a page, a rule;
to know what is good is smooth,
meticulous.
For some, the flat is
a perfume of done this,
I have.

I nod to what is sly and dead
and soon will come down
like a miscued hymn
so beautiful and wrong
my teeth slam shut.

**The Night Season,
Ferguson**

The jet stream
steams through
blue August
while we,
who were never
prepared for this witness,
see no choice but to
climb the heat spiral
of our last moral
objection to the
flames staining these
middle-land breezes.

We, who were never
prepared for this witness,
are desperate to
chase the tail winds.
They are smoke,
they are colored
by the wisps
of blue and red light,
they are satin ribbons
that slink through our
fingers like the last
whispered no.

We, being prepared
for this witness,
know what has been
stolen from the margins --
we, who tender empty
epiphanies and pointless
resignations
to the smoke.

**South Florissant Road,
After the Burning**

Our sacred separations
and reparations slip
through us
like prayer beads
loose on the string.

This swamp
is cut
into two
living ditches --

Like the
river birches
we stand
in dingy clumps.

We wonder how
we will survive
when all night long
our supplications
pull us down,
the fires
pull us down,
the old water
pulls us down,
to see.

#fergusonunrest

FERGUSON STATION

Let's talk about trains --

Trains in the Missouri Old West

where Jesse James slept here,

where St. Louis needed a suburb

where businessmen could tuck

their wives and servants into square

Victorian houses on clean country streets.

Beneath Ferguson Station,

its custard, its sandwiches, its

church supper banners,

the tracks carry cars from GM,

coal for power plants,

the coffee that comes up the Mississippi.

Below all this freight,

Ferguson Market is full of

geraniums, soap, Spanish omelets frying

on a muggy morning while women

wearing embellished t-shirts glide through

easy-ups looking at strawberries, glass earrings,

eggs the size of dinosaur teeth.

It's not their train.

If you break it, they will come.

"Nobody was there to protect them," Jerome Jenkins said. "To the African-American community, that is the greatest form of racism. You don't protect and serve. You allow 20 to 30 criminals to come into our community and burn it down."¹

¹ <http://www.cnn.com/2014/11/25/us/ferguson-restaurant-vandalism/>

Sometimes the dusk blazes her
zinc pink reflection in the windows.
Sometimes she walks softly
over plywood emblazoned with hope.

"But it's worth telling the world, 'Listen, it wasn't us as residents who dropped the ball.'
"2

Ferguson, Missouri is nothing if
not 6.2 square miles of ordinary

people with lined
palms, who order lunch,
pull 20's from the ATM,
buy caramel cakes at Natalie's,
lip balm at the Walgreens.

The federal government's response to the Ferguson "Troubles" has been to treat the town as an isolated embarrassment, not a reflection of the nation in which it is embedded. 3

The fires of Ferguson
we let burn.
At the un-indictment, the burners fanned
out,
the edges of the protesters frayed,
dispersed,
set alight all they knew:
The bitch
must go.

St. Louis is a Boston crème donut:
rich and white on the inside.

There are no integrated neighborhoods in St. Louis,
only regions jumping colors.

² ibid

³ Rothstein <http://www.epi.org/publication/making-ferguson/>

WHITE FLIGHT FOR FUN AND PROFIT

Or (How to bust a block)

(Bust a move)

(Flip it real good)

1. Buy a few houses and let them fall apart.
2. Hire black mamas to push their babies up and down the block.
3. Buy up houses at a discount from panicked whites.
4. Resell houses at a markup to blacks.
5. Repeat on next block.
6. The whiteness cannot hold.⁴

THUS SPAKE LT. GOVERNOR KINDER:

Yea, there is more racism
in the Department of Justice
than in the whitest corner
of St. Louis.
I tell you truly,
the Marxists and black radicals
fan the flames of racial division
for they are the minions of Obama.
They who are obsessed with race face left.
We who are the rest have moved beyond it.⁵

HAPPY HOLIDAYS –

swings red above the
absurd white boys in shiny white masks
who drove in from white suburbs
to shiver with
grandmothers standing between
their childhood and their children, with
an imported Cornel West spitting repentance
at police officers before disappearing back to Princeton.
Hear the middle-aged Episcopalians chanting,

⁴ *ibid*

⁵ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/03/16/peter-kinder-ferguson_n_6882538.html

chanting.

[no break]

They are angry.

They are angry.

And the crowd

that moves with the soft

muscle of the ocean

against break walls and

sidewalks only pushes

a little.

*Coming together, she said, is about acknowledging that there has been a death.*⁶

POLICE REPRESENTATIVE SAYS DOJ “CONCEALED THE TRUTH” ABOUT FERGUSON

The Department of Justice raided

St. Louis like a band of marauders...

What do they find? They find that this so-called
hands up don't shoot myth was just that: fiction.

It is a big lie to bury the truth

About Darren Wilson and what happened
that day on August 9th in Ferguson.

A lie that they perpetrated upon
the people of Ferguson, the people
of Missouri and the people of the world.

We now pretend, 'It was never about
the shooting, it was about the abuse
of people by the Ferguson police
department.' Give me a break. People weren't
marching in the streets saying 'hands up, don't
write me a ticket and don't arrest me
when I don't show for court.' They were saying,
'Hands up don't shoot.'"

*"I don't mean Michael Brown's death. I mean a death of Ferguson as it was. A death of this region as it was. Whether that was good in some people's eyes. Whether it was horrible in some people's eyes. We have yet to come together and just acknowledge that we are in a different place, and we're not going back."*⁷

⁶ http://www.stltoday.com/lifestyles/faith-and-values/on-easter-four-pastors-reflect-on-rebirth-in-ferguson/article_86fe09c4-0903-5f14-8f15-6b80e61fe068.html

⁷ibid

THE NORMANDY SCHOOL DISTRICT LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

A true tale of high flying adventure
In the urban inner ring

Behold one of the most segregated
schools in America;
This unibrown performance is 1.4% white.

Watch closely as we make it disappear!
My beautiful assistant, Poverty 91%,
will now reveal the worst performing
district in the state.

But wait –

Keep your eye on the ball
as the AYP tumblers roll into
unaccredited and spring the transfer
trap: The brown people of Normandy
will now pay the whitest districts
in the state tuition for hundreds of students.

NOW, FOR OUR FINAL TRICK –

So who actually runs Michael Brown's school district? Well, the president of the board of education is Peter F. Herschend of Branson, Missouri. Herschend isn't a former teacher, or a former principal, and doesn't have any training in the education field. He's the owner of [Herschend Family Entertainment](#), which runs Silver Dollar City and other amusement parks. He's also one of the biggest contributors to the Republican Party in the state.⁸

Normandy School District is
Normandy School Collaborative
Is now accredited
bled, broke, and
Poof!

⁸ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/08/21/michael-brown-high-school_n_5682852.html

The children have disappeared?

HEAR O HEAVENS, GIVE EAR O EARTH,
FOR GOVERNOR NIXON HATH SPOKEN:

This district is broke
And it affordeth not the bill
For the children of the people.
I shall look deep and hard
At the situation.

The district earned only seven of the 50 points possible on the assessment, an almost 4% drop from the previous year.⁹

MAY
STILL FERGUSON

Across from the police station,
only a man waiting for the bus.

⁹ ibid

III.

To Sleep Like a Rabbit

Small things do not deserve to die alone. When I pried the baby rabbit from the dog's jaws, I thought to put it in the brush pile, but then as I watched, it took a few shallow breaths punctuated by a huge gasp, just the way I do under morphine. I thought I should hold it until it passed; it would just be a few minutes; rabbits are not great-hearted creatures. But then the breathing evened out, the pained eyes closed, and suddenly I had a tiny napping thing in my palm. I found myself scooping grain and filling water buckets with my left hand while it lay in my right. I poured myself some wine and began to hope she would wake up because that was the right thing to hope, but I knew how awful waking up is, how I always come out of anesthesia desperate and vomiting and weeping for the lost oblivion and I was not sad when her tiny breaths came to an end.

Leaves, Trees, Sycamore Bark

Everything about a tree
comes apart,
smoke-scented acorns
rattle the ground,
leaves relinquish their green,
every richness is pinched off
in faith that it will
rise again.

I don't understand that.
Not the pinching.
Not the rising.

The sycamore has
bark so hard that
it cannot stretch
with the growing tree
so it peels off.
The bark underneath
looks smooth and pink
and fresh, but I've
run my palm over it
and the cracks are
already there.
I mulched the leaves
and swept up the
flakes curled along
the sidewalk and I
sat on the short steps
in the inevitable evening
where I am also
letting summer go.

Yellow Fragments

49. Today I am yellow. It is fall and the sky and I are in drought. The leaves are a dull yellow, mottled, turn in on themselves and drop. A yellow like that. A yellow like the sun in January as the snow moves in.

0. The yellow place that is the fragile boundary between fact and truth. Chased around a corner where it disappears.

34. Once when I had to be treated for latent tuberculosis, I actually turned a little yellow. The isoniazid nearly destroyed my liver. It recovered, but remains offended by any antibiotic. My body doesn't want any help.

5. My mother often needed a break from me after my siblings were born ten months apart. I was around five when my father would take me to work on the new house. I watched as he painted our big bedroom primary yellow. At noon we went to buy a sub from the shop near the hardware store and I got a slice one red meatball wide. When we moved in the babies had one end of the room and I had the other. My favorite part of the room was that it had a window that led out to the garage roof. Later, my sister and brother would lock me out there. I also went to work with my father, who picked up loads of sugar from the docks and delivered it to the Borden factory where the women gave me big bags of chocolate chips. This was not yellow.

63. I don't think my ex-husband will know to thin the daylilies so they don't spread too far, leap over the garden border.

30. All my pills for everything that is wrong with me are a shade of yellow.

11. My favorite tree is the silver birch, which Frost made metaphorically famous for their ability to bend under snow. I love their glowing yellow leaves, their ragged edges, their

ability to hold on to the very end of autumn before they rain down like hot stars to the rocky beach below. That sort of yellow.

Cremation

St. Louis Cremation is burning on a foggy night and the round black smoke can't escape into the air, sits on the neighborhood, stinks like hope sliced open

My father was cremated and perhaps parts of him also settled as grit on somebody's open windowsill.

During our last conversation he told me he didn't mind dying, but that he'd miss his family.

I was sixteen and he was going into rehab again and that was the only other time I'd seen him cry as he pleaded his love for me and in confusion I bleached the wine rings off the Formica counter.

I climbed a mountain trail last year and I learned what he meant.

I, too, have seen all I do not want. How we must all endure the burning.

Full

All day I sit and eat
butterfly after butterfly
as they land on my tongue
each powdered like a wedding cookie.

I swallow them
although they are poison,
although they
split my beautiful gut
in two.

Survived

I count the helicopters.

They beat the air against the window.

It is not a window that opens.

I'm trying to remember about breath.

I'm wondering about each broken and stilled body descending from the sky.

If they, too, will wake up in rage.

I am reminded to pull oxygen through my heart, my blood, my brain.

Here is my body, still with me.

It is not a window that opens.

My lungs are reasserting themselves.

I am beating against my heart, which misunderstands.

It has misunderstood everything.

Remarkable

My anger is not
permitted here.
It is possible that
this is worthy of remark.

OK, yes, I'm alive, in the same
sense a warehouse piled with
sugar is alive, no longer a thing
becoming, but a thing going away.

It's all so unjustified:
bricks, sweetness, confessions of faith.

What is any of it to me, receiving
my share and pouring it out from
thumbs stretched taut
as a ripe plum, thumbs passed
over the pulse of cheeks hardened
by the cold shoved ashore.

The small vein in my wrist tells time.
I am going to stand here
as if I belong, and perhaps
it will become true.

Rampant

The wide arms of
the purslane
scroll out into the limestone
path like a Persian love
poem. When tugged

it gives itself up
easily, only to
twine back out like
how I want to become
air in the
shape of a bird. Not

only air, but the burden
of breath in profusion.
Not only love, but silver
tipped leaves that
breathe on each other. Not
only profusion, but the precision
of bloom.

Laetare

- riffing from Rilke

The bowl of roses is a candle
with tripartite wicks:
Jesus, Mary, and Joseph
blazing like the false
note of regret. The scent
imagines itself a floribundant
spiral of blown petals papering
the garden floor.

We are not to be forgiven soon
despite the promises of
all the Rose Sundays
what we have done
has been done
what we have seen
has been seen
the hip that has been
touched can never be
fully restored.

The garden wind is
wild with despair
and loss. It swirls
up into the low
buds of our lungs
bursting the blood
in our cheeks. A rose
that is opened never
closes again.

It is the yellow
rose, hepatic and toxic.
The Greeks knew where
love is to be found
the blooming tender
enough to touch our lips

to, a rough outline
of us running out of time.

Notes:

- “ $n!/k!(n-k)!$ ” is the function for calculating how many possible combinations can be derived from a set.
- “Arrays in C” is formally based on the C programming language.
- “Sixes and Sevens” is a golden shovel poem.
- “The One with Violets in her Lap” takes its title from Sappho’s Fragment 103 as translated by Anne Carson. The rest is inspired by Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*.
- “Cross Country” borrows from an unpublished poem by Steven Schreiner.
- “Laetaere” is inspired by “The Bowl of Roses” by Rainer Maria Rilke

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Poetry Quarterly, I'm Gorgeous Inside,

Rat's Ass Review, Cross Country

Red Earth Review, Dear Girl

Shiela-na-gig, Just Once, The One with Violets in her Lap