

FINCH



LATITUDES

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Latitudes

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A Movement

Incomplete and unfulfilled—the pleasant couple—
fall into long shadows late summer casts
daringly, piercing a dew-heavy new world
of still air, escaping warmth.

To Return

Delved into the dark of pockets
carved of a cliff called existence,
the animal hides out of a hope
fathered by longing.

Fear roams close by
the space scratched out,
but what drove the animal
there is something farther off.

In hiding, the outside and its cold is
shunned, seemingly defeated,
risen above in low places.
Still, unfettered,
unchallenged by such escape,
a stark day remains.

To return can't easily be right, but still
affirms itself with each coming,

and smiling, asks what could still be wrong.
The animal has no answer, and how right
that none's needed.

Heard

It comes through worn plaster,
reverberating past the pale
cold of a sideways landscape,
vibrations of something
shy, eluding words.

There it is
and then you know.
Smile; have a tear
pulled from your eye.
Move along walls
searching for doors, a window—a way
to the source, or
just a glimpse.

Then, nothing:
the moment's fled.

Exposed like old photographs,
memory of the serene
becomes sun-bleached, gloss
lost, a paper testament defiled.
The light of day is the cruellest thing.

One I Rely On

Been around longer than any friend or lover,
was once the rock weighing down,
gripped tight as hope,
turned into a snake (little devil)
to slide through ribcage and coil
around a heart that'd learnt to beat
and seize it with questions,
questions, doubt and dread
one by one laid to rest in a graveyard
kept out of need, not respect,
not remembrance,
and after every six feet of earth
the voice from nowhere
and those cruel five words:
never far enough to forget.

– for Josh, who dislikes poetry

Charon

I guard the way to the Leader's city
from throwaway castles overlooking
the ground that came apart, screaming and thrashing
beneath shells falling. In a land of dark holes
hungry for the grateful dead,
the gravedigger is out of work.

Our heroes have no names.
We stop counting lost friends
when we run out of fingers.
Their flag shines
red painted on their chests,
and golden as metal fingers pointed
at the hearts of the condemned,
hearts strangely like theirs.

Don't leave my side too soon—stay
close enough that I can feel your chill presence

wrest each gasping breath of desperate warmth.
Don't let them know out there that
something still lives, and lay
a brittle hand on my shoulder as I pass
each one your way.

Here I am, blind but for a dead glass eye,
watching grey foxes scamper
among the tumbled stones, all by the bank
of this roaring river. Just as well:
something for the unwilling oarsman
to ferry lost souls along.

We are all so clueless,
so foolish. The Leader
is six hundred miles away,
and Death six inches.

Katherine

It's the way you
pull me under
after that kind of dance we do,
falling softly, never so softly,
stop and start, in between lines
I give swirls to for some
dusty rune, crude mandala,
and now here we are, everything
we have laid out,
and it surrounds
and then melts,
and we slip softly
down rabbit hole,
through blackened sun,
but still all's illuminated,
and then rising, a cold hand
lifting the lost man—
and what's a plateau if not

the smoothed-out height,
at every side an expanse
pretending it can be known
like paintings so fine, we believe
the subject could be ourselves
—then what did I miss?—
 slipping out—take me back,
 lay me down again
 and tell me in whispers
 about those dark thoughts
 no one else will share
 making a home of your spirals
 as your curling smile dismisses
 all that is named, here and there,
 time and place, foolish sense of self
 at least for the daring nights spent
 together, precious hours swallowing
 themselves, mourned if not for
 moments that brighten an
edgeless map, a strange sum—

I'll be back, but you'll be expecting me.

Kept

Where your skin is fire-fed, familiar
veins channelling hotter blood,
the same heat when the other approaches
may warm, may burn,
the same glow too bright
to appreciate, to understand
a certain shape taken, patterns
found on foreign birds.

It's not suspicion or scorn
for what disagrees with the known,
but the distance and unfeeling
our sun must have from far enough away.

These are worlds
bridging a gap more valley than void;
this is the fire known in the way
it's kept close: fiercely.

Negotiating Eternity

A meeting—a story
that's happened before, he says,
but no: she insists.

Their language changes almost as they speak it.
Stem cell, telomere: cloudy words
that mean nothing
and everything
at the same time.

A brilliance of lights,
constant motion dizzying
one generation before becoming
the everyday reality of theirs,
matter of fact, self-perpetuating illusion.

It envelopes.

It propels.

The tunnel narrows.
The singularity no longer has a label.
Every fear coalesces into one,
and it's ancient,
and it's perfect:
what's more terrifying than change?
Death itself is only change,
life to non-life, being to non-being.

A glowing field of diodes
will be their fire in the night,
feeding pixel-seared retinas.
She recalls another story.

*Two hard lives, and one made together
that could be called happy.
The wife's tumour is sudden like a car crash.
The husband, himself a doctor, can do without
the drawn-out prognosis, a speech about chance—
chance in a game rigged from the start.*

*Both knew a bad hand when they saw one
and when cards should be laid out on the table.
In through the door of an old home, they share
a very particular feeling, to see a good thing
and fear its decay—and that aching, grasping
yearning to keep everything as it is.
The look exchanged is of caring, sadness.
Up in his quiet, quiet study is his doctor's bag, brown
leather
frayed at the edges, coarse, worn pockets holding
glass syringes, vials of morphine.
Autumn's cusp lets them sit outside
to turn cold, white, still as that empty house,
four glassy eyes set
on something off in the distance that couldn't be seen.*

He asks if an ending has to mean defeat,
and had his own memory vivid like film on screen,
though from where, he couldn't say.

*Beneath the round sun, houses
back out onto dusty long grass
teased by the midday breeze.
A man watches idly as he passes by a girl
digging in the soil, only noticing
the ground begin to give way as she starts to slip
down the emerging hole—like Alice,
he thinks—before pulling her up.
A crowd gathers nervously,
wordlessly. The sun hanging overhead
won't pierce the misty paleness
the hole looks down into.
Each person there remembers in their own way
that sense of some great dark space
and how so close beneath it seemed to lurk.*

A living moment is sufficiently strange,
for some not enough,
for others plenty—or far, far too much.
Eternity would be the ultimate promise.

Perhaps he and she need time to adapt,
but time is just the problem.

From the ledge they perch on together
the city before them takes no shape,
expanding of its own accord.

The vastness that bore them becomes their suffering.
This story plays out in any number of ways
but its ending remains the same.

No diversion resolves such a negotiation.

This battle accepts surrender, but what escapes
understanding could be so kind.

No wrong answer in what follows, no outcome but the fall,
only in countless variations. What's left is the way there,
to move or be moved, a meeting—
a story that's happened before.

Like Circles Have Corners

How wrong for a shape not to fit
the slots that suit, assigned by masses
most comfortable with the one and zero,
what's black or white, here or there
and nothing in between.

You are. You simply are
chaos and multitude,
burningly bright sky,
passing storm, dark little wave
on a sea of the forgettable.

– for Isobel, whether she likes it or not

When in Blossom

They're moving. There's so many out there,
he told me while standing by
the window that casts sharply
light sworn to fade.

Yes, the first crowd, flowing like a river,
all as if in sleepwalk, sharing that same dream—
bright, violent tomorrows, and
why shouldn't revolution be a quiet affair?
What more it is, it is by our designs.

Then the fanfare of the city's
sounds becomes irrelevant
beneath the growing rhythm.
The percussion starts with
 desires chanted,
 rock-shattered windows,
 the dull thuds of tier-gas

canisters, wailing, wails
stretched long
and hoarse
by hands of rage,
grief—for what
but new names and old chaos?

When a tree blossoms, it's not to make a promise.
To put hope in its leaves, you have to forget autumn.

Choice

You stand in puddles
to avoid rain, and cloaked in
fear, question cold feet.

Nights I Know

Grit your teeth, love.
It's come to this again.
Like these leaves falling all over outside,
it's only ever a matter of time.

The muse whispers in my ear
smiling, biting a sweet lip: *What's two plus two?*
This bee that knows better
craves a poison nectar.

As branches go bare, I speak of passing things, of
being better people, and we share that look
of wish and doubt. I have a hundred reasons,
but only one that counts.

All said and done
until it isn't, as we know full well,
the muse leaves with that goodbye:

I'll see you round.

∞ (Jar in a Brain)

I jarred my brain.

I took it from a body no longer of use to me,
the only liberation to be had after nude portraiture.

leftovers converted to fertiliser feed a grove of olive
bio-mechanical trans-human organism free-floating on
politician, plebeian, philosopher and fool my status as
I've since become fluent in, inhabiting transient enclaves
anarchists who proclaim on streets concrete and digital
separated is immoral to the n th. To be eyeless and see
forever. I'll now use my final I and become one

I have one final request to make of you,
corporeal comrades:

don't knock over

this jar—

my brain's

in it.

My
trees; now I'm a
the internet debating with
human in the eight languages
to evade unmodified techno-
that mind and body
all! I'm going to live
with reality.

Reflection Upriver

Wouldn't say I dislike change.
That's one river I wouldn't swim against,
unlike salmon without the nuisance of self-doubt.
Through a constant medium comes
banks burst in tests of character,
and languid seasons when the sun's milky
heat thins that flow to simple streams
whose fords form false promise—but I rant;
water is life.

No, what I like most is
pillars still standing in place in face of wind that bites,
decay;
walls that, like books, tell stories they must, and
(especially) those they don't have to;
beaten old doors, paint flaked, that still remember
where they lead to, patient.
If you'll let me define beauty: resilience.

Flesh that Resists

I hope these words find you well, for as you read them, I can tell you that I am no longer among the living.

By this point, you will have heard of an incident having taken place. Sources will use demeaning terms to refer to myself, my brothers and sisters and our actions, but remember that they are no more than mouthpieces for those that would deceive. Do you know the plain and simple truth? This is not Judgment Day, but what precedes it.

Allow a dead man to elaborate, gentle reader.

We possessed the means and methods, and had in place every cog required in this, a machine of heaven. The initiation was something beautiful as it was pragmatic. Belongings from the former life were relinquished and burned, and the acolyte received white tee-shirts, black khakis, jackboots and a pocket copy of the Scripture. The young and disillusioned found purpose and grew; the aged and jaded rediscovered life. We became one, remade, the thousand threads of a rope.

The Word roused them from a deep sleep and stirred something within them, guiding them as chemicals dulled their bodily senses, and lay to rest animal desires as they came to see that glint of light and truth. We came one by one to dream little dreams of a divine glow, the white-hot presence illuminating the threshold we were to cross, a new world order, pure set aside from the impure, wheat from the chaff.

Imagine it!

Even now, as the servants of ignorance encroach on this ground we made sacred, we sense that glow around the final corner of this fleeting life. We were never so ready, so brimming with that energy. I can see His greatness in the jeweled eyes of these brothers and sisters, feel it pulsating through every vein.

Let them come and ask the knife what becomes of the flesh that resists. Let them drown beneath waves of righteous lead and cleansing fire. Then and only then can we hope that they find absolution, so let them come. Angels will smile.

Man John

My man John is from round here
but he's been all over—couldn't tell
you where. Guy's tanned
from all the years under the sun,
has this craggy face that tells stories
before he does himself.

My man John doesn't have a home, doesn't ask
for money, just once a cup of coffee
if I didn't mind (and yes, I got him one).
He plays the drum, a little one,
and the banjo as well. He goes around
with them slung round his side, turning out tunes,
this song in Spanish, that one in Hindi.
He asked if I play anything.
I said I just write.

My man John's been roughed up,

kicked in the face, taking it all in his weary stride.
A song's a song. A meal's a meal. Blessings are blessings.
He's a monk, a bard, out of time, on the move,
always on the move.

My man John is from round here
but I've not seen him awhile,
not for a long time.

Rootless

Desperate, parched,
he tries to find footing in
a landslide new world.

My Other One

She thinks what I dream of and desire
is blonde or some dark new taste
to sink past eager lips. We play Fear's game
because it's the only one we know.
Those curves I wrap hands around,
that sweetness I crave is
gone before morning, hollow
like the bottles they are.
They pour, empty, fade like clouds.
My other love is no distraction,
only first and last
and all the spaces in between.

Again, Seasons

Where is it? Where'd it go?
One day and then another,
I was damn sure it'd come.
I watch blankets of grey hanging
overhead, hesitant little washes of drizzle,
and check I have the day right
 (they only seem to blur together more and more),
 and yet, skies clear—
 well, clear except for tolerable cottony strands
 to punctuate that wide-open blue field—
and light,
warmth
bearing down
in a moment that seems to smirk as it slips away.
What's clearer than that instance but the truth of it?
I'm sorry. Does the allusion bore you?
Just allow me one more:
if this fickle thing is spring,

let me have the winter I know better.

Always Returning

•

Black river, soft shore
where scents mingle by rising
nape awaiting warmth.

••

Not knowing water
the gentlest riverbed rests
between sweet hilltops.

•••

Opening up, field
is hesitant before that
fire sweeping on down.

••••

Like this oasis
gives life, I offer myself,

rain falling to earth.

.....

The air is soundless
for the breezes of content
over midnight bloom.

To the Dead Bird

You're what I felt closest to this week.
Flattened, still, unrecognisable against wet stone,
you had a familiar look of dejection on your face.
Tell me, how'd you get up from there?



ART

