

Linnea Nelson
ENGL 467
Dr. Betsy Birmingham
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In Spite of Thunder (or Flight from a Burning Tree)

I.

*How did I
Ever
Get so many
Boxes
Of matches.*

II. *Train*

I no longer like taking anything apart

But I dreamed this morning that I lay on the railroad tracks
That stretch through the town I am from
And I was surrounded by gods
And it was my job to sleep there dusk to dawn

I think it was in fulfillment of some
Kind of agreement but I couldn't tell you

And I don't subscribe to reincarnation
But it got me thinking

If we all used to be something else
And something else before we were that

Then do we die as one being
The moment right before
We're conceived as another or
Is there some grace period
When you get to hang out as nothing at all or
Just enjoy the scenery
Whatever
That may be?

Anyway I awoke
And this afternoon the light
Caught me
Just right in the mirror of my windshield and
I saw myself aged 30 years
And really understood what people see when
They say I look just like my red-headed mother

And I wondered if she ever wrote poetry.

III. *Footfall*

You will measure your life
in strokes of keys and footfalls in short,
open passageways.

You will chance death only a few times.

You have lain awake and thought of other lives
of parallel lies, but

you will walk on streets you did not choose
and salute the river in the white early morning.

You will wonder everything
and leave before the answer arrives,
suitcase packed and gloves still on.

IV. *Parting Instructions*

Finally,

be gracious to the sunrise,

even when you have no use for it—

even when it arrives
unannounced and is not gentle with you.

Not all sunrises belong to you.
Allow others this recompense.

And, if you can,

bow down and offer

your little fragments of gratitude,
however stale, however stained with
second thoughts,

for this obstinate regularity;

for this harsh compassion that ignores your
curtained windows and desolate blankets;

for the way it turns from
your vacant hands and disconnected

sorrows, as if it sees
nothing at all
in these protests;

for how it sears your spaces
into those you left
when you went from here

and tenderly keeps us alive.

V. *Elegy*

When your beginning was over,
no one sought out a small, solemn boat and pair
of eager oars to sail
away and find you.
No one locked themselves up in a burning
lighthouse to watch for you.

I unlaced my boots and listened
for weeks to creaking furniture, soap
spreading itself over vital
skin, and flakes of winter slipping into
rooms where you and I had made
staggering accusations to
the human race for who knows
how long.

Our beautiful neighbor
continues to choke at his breakfast;
books and cupboards persist in
closing.

The foolish lights we considered walking
under, for the sake of breaking
the veritable world somewhat open,

still do not suggest
what exactly it is that
holds even the tallest of
mysteries together, and
still refuse
to go out.

Wherever you ended up,
I wonder if you, too, are noticing these things;

if it's any easier there to get the last word—

if you are still giving yourself away
in indiscernible quantities—

if, there, it is also true that some people never get
old enough to do what you did.

VI. *An Introduction*

these are bruised pages torn from
separate chapters in a book
we do not care to read

we are poisoned darts in the quiver
of a shepherd &
the blind man's eyebrows &
eyelashes
his withered invisible
hat

he is torrents on the lake outside &
we

send the waves back
one spoonful at a time

one teaspoonful

VII. 2011

It rained all winter.

In this country snow makes
fools of survival and
the Cold is a presence
that walks everywhere with
Absoluteness chained to its steps,

a being who knows nothing of proximity
and takes residence inside
everything it can,

uninvited and sorry at its
own awakening.

But that year

the concept of morning was understood
and dawn found no one weeping
in their private orchards.

No perpetual whiteness hung about us

and the world did not tremble or darken
even once.

VIII. *If Absence Can Be Manipulated*

I want that absence to feel the way signs do when you are too far away
To make out their letters

Or like how you know the future all the time
Without being able to acknowledge it to yourself

And I want the days without me to be like
The moment when you pick up a jug of milk
That you expect to be full when it's actually empty

So you accidentally use way too much effort

And I want that to be extraordinarily shitty

And I want there to be no carbonated water around the
House because it is reminiscent of me
And if dehydration strikes with a deadly fist
So be it.

IX. *even then*

the planet drips

& winter is on vacation elsewhere

hey winter

we've been expecting you

we keep the doors unlocked

in case you come

in the night

don't bother ringing bell

I bought a shovel two weeks ago

the world is not on vacation

& you're such a tease

I hope you brought souvenirs

it won't be Christmas without you

people are saying

the lady upstairs has been playing

brittle records to get her mind off your absence

Bing and Duke have overstayed their welcome

waiting for you

in the deep of night the music

continues

to keep her pacified

whatever lifts your luggage

lady

I think of saying

you're nobody till somebody loves you

someone is saying

whatever floats your boat

you maybe nobody till somebody loves you

but sometimes

not

even then.

X. *Help*

We did not watch for solace
soon enough.

I do not believe in the earth.

Night is gray and blue,
& the dogs here are all white,
the birds are all robins &
they are everywhere.

I ask you why you wait & why you
bothered climbing towards the lightning,
in spite of thunder.

I will fall from these branches.

Lucifer and Adam
fell from help.

Morning comes.

XI. *Falling is a Type of Flight*

I watch the silent vein in your neck
bulge and gasp.

You bite back at your own syllables,

as if my
not knowing yet makes the sentence
lighter,
slows the speed so you can watch
your match strike against its strip
and understand,
*this is a match, this is
its strip, and this
is the moment
when you can expect flame,*
all at once,

as if I
am still safe in the branches
of the tree you are flying from.

*

When I finally descend,
when I fall, build
a new nest

but do not build a new bird.