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How to Grow Blurry: Poems

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HOW TO GROW BLURRY: POEMS

Nathan D. Metz

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I

How to Grow Blurry

Black on Maroon, Mark Rothko, 1958

I.

My mother taught me the dark is the same as the light.
 She never cared for abstractions. She was only trying
 to comfort her only son. I slept with a nightlight
 until I was too old to sleep with a nightlight.
 In the doorway, her silhouette was dark.
 To her sides, two shafts of light.

Watch, watch

she insisted, switching off my bedroom light
 until the room pulsed black and I began to cry,
 then quickly switching it back, to
 assure me, to name all the little things
 that did not change in the dark.

II.

Two maroons surrounded by black surrounded by maroon
 Two people surrounded by figures surrounded by people
 Two memories surrounded by forgetting surrounded by memory
 Two bells surrounded by static surrounded by bells
 Two windows surrounded by walls surrounded by windows.
 Two roads surrounded by fog surrounded by roads

Two vibrations surrounded by vibration surrounded by vibrations

III.

“The door-like figures loom”

“Throbbing like the inside of a body part”

and other things smart people have written.

People who name things gave the name

“Color Field” to what Rothko did, and now,

here, we have arrived, a field,

summer, night, moon movementlessly. Wild-

flowers unseen until kneeling. A whole moment

pumping its wings so fast it has grown still.
 “Color Field” because of some emptiness’s capacity
 to hold, to carry. The way a body carries desire.
 The way a door carries what is behind it.

IV.

Purple is black blooming.
 Maroon is red wilting.
 It seems Rothko was just another painter
 obsessed with flowers.

V.

Let us give Rothko a word here: “Art is about expressing basic human emotions” he said, and then he named them — “tragedy, ecstasy, doom, and so on.” “So on” denoting the other basic human emotions in the list so basic Rothko doesn’t even mention them, doesn’t even want to waste his time mentioning, those being movement, movementlessness, shimmering, swollen, peeling, pressing, stained, bruised, trying to touch, failing to touch, trying to remember, only remembering partly, roars, blurry, and the most basic (and common) human emotion, which is of course the color red.

VI.

‘Blur’: noun and verb, origin unclear,
 maybe 16th century, possibly born a blend of *blear* and *blot*.
 Definitions of ‘Blur’ or ‘Blurry’ include the terms
smear, confused, indistinct, and my favorite,
of having a blurred appearance.
 Under words, more words. Layered
 like years or dirt or ghosts or paint.
 I say ‘Two’ and it sounds
 like exceeding, or likeness, or direction.
 Rothko paints two figures and heaps
 such thickness around them that at night
 they must lie down and rest,
 so still and so near
 so much.

VII.

And of course we must also reckon with the fact
 that Rothko, like God, used shitty paint.
 In time, thin peels of black, the topmost layer
 of the topmost layer, have lifted from the canvas,
 revealing tiny bites of bright red
 he hid there, probably, to draw

our eye.

VIII.

A girl named Mary lives in a black-and-white house. Mary has lived in this house her whole life and has never left its confines, not even for a second. And why would she? Mary is a genius, a speed-reader with a perfect memory, and in her black-and-white house is an infinite library of books, all in black-and-white of course, on any topic she could think of. It is paradise. By the black-and-white light of her black-and-white lamp, Mary has become quite the scientist, an expert on everything from marine biology to planetary physics. However, Mary's newest passion, her favorite field of study, is the neurophysiology of sight – Mary knows all there is to know about wavelengths and their corresponding placement on the spectrum of visible light, the minute anatomy of the eye, the maps of complex pathways and processes on which stimuli (she calls them stimuli) embarks when transformed from reception to sensation — she is fascinated by the concept, by its intricacies, and is, by all measures, an expert in the field of color. This story can only end one way. When one day Mary leaves the house, grows curious or brave or stupid and walks through the black-and-white front door and sees there on the street before her, in all of its redness, a fire-hydrant, what does Mary know now that she didn't before? When she runs out to touch the hydrant, does she think she is touching the color red? It doesn't work like that, Mary. You can feel but you can't touch, can't hold, can't carry – why is Mary crying? Oh Mary, is this not what you wanted? Save your tears. The door has been shut behind you. There is no going back. You, you poor thing, must now settle for art.

IX.

And it doesn't help that science shows us nothing touches.
 In the small world of colorlessness and soundlessness
 and languagelessness and acceleration and vibration always,
 electrons repel electrons. As consequence,
 a hand caressing a cheek hovers slightly.
 Of course, in the world of sound and color and language,

the hand on the cheek is felt,
sometimes always.

X.

After especially tiresome days, Julia
closes her eyes and lays her head in my lap.
On the couch like this, she tells me about her day
and work and our friends.
Memory is nothing but touch
and repeated touch. I listen and stroke her hair,
struggling against forgetting,
learning to settle for forgetting slowly.
The TV is off. In the black reflection,
she and I are simple shapes of almost.
A body is a boundary almost.
Feeling is touching almost.
In the center of the canvas, two shapes of red
bound in shimmering slightly,
soft with hovering, and blurred
at the edges.

Slow Swirl at the Edge of the Sea

Slow Swirl at the Edge of the Sea, Mark Rothko, 1944

At the edge of the sea,
Dancing. At the edge
Of the sea, creatures
Like slow swirls, alive thus

Dancing at the edge.
Surrounded by shades of earth, two
Slow swirls swerving alive
In the music of the edge,

Surrounded by shades of burning. Two
Passions of organisms
Draped in the edge of music,
Draped in the edge of body.

The passions of organisms
Are edged, are sharp
As the edges of body –
Edge of neck, edge of shoulder.

Edges imply endings,
Crescendo quarter note, then rest –
Edge of breast, edge of hip.
I pray to the reasons

To sing, to dance, to rest.
Surrounded by shapes of fracturing,
Tonight, we pray to edges,
To find where they touch.

Always this fracturing makes shapes
Of the spaces between what is left,
Where we find a place to touch,
To sing, to dance, to rest,

To be shaped, to be left, merci-
Fully, at the edge of the sea.

In Some Lights

Untitled, Mark Rothko, 1969

Nights stack dull like thick slabs. You woke up late
and late for nothing. Gray clouds rain gray

rain, catches in the smog and spices your city
sour, street lamps and headlights proving the black

of space more apparent. Rothko wanted to paint
about death, traced a thin line keeping black from gray.

You don't know which of the colors is death. It could
be both. God sits and observes from his black-

and-white TV and is bored, the picture fuzzy,
the sound off. He is just guessing. Gray

is a hesitation that begins when squeezed
between absolutes. When your friend died, everyone wore black

and told stories and they were all love stories
and they were all ghost stories, the day's gray

rhythm kept ticking on death's time. Rothko
was stubborn and purposefully placed darker

colors on top to keep viewers from mistaking
his moods of color for landscapes, for tangibility, the chunk of gray

nothing but flat grayness, black flat blackness.

It didn't work. Some patrons said he must have painted a blurred black-

and-white photo, or, given the year 1969,
a lunar landing, that he painted that cold gray

surface of nothing to critique such a finish line.

It is late winter. Thursday. Your friend died eleven black

days ago. You don't know where he is.

Rothko wanted to paint about death, huge gray

under huge black, but it never would have worked.

At the exhibit tomorrow, you will see the slabbed black

over slabbed gray, and you will stare with suspicion

for a while, a long while, and studying that thick grayness

you will swear, despite and through Rothko,

that somewhere off-canvas, maybe in the darkest

corner of his studio, Rothko painted a moon,

not the idea of a moon or mood of a moon but a moon, huge white

and pushing light through low fog,

the painting around you gray, in some lights, silver.

Instructions for a Painter

In the center of it there should be a thing (a Mother, a Fire, a Yellow Flower, a Nothing, whatever you feel like – it doesn't matter) and this thing should be in a place (a Desert, a Mouth, a Poem, a Nowhere – again it doesn't really matter) and then somehow show that the thing and the place are enjoined, that neither the thing nor the place can possibly imagine another painting or another world with another thing or another place – Now make it all vibrate (as things do before they happen)

Some Wound of Color

The strawberries here are picked fat in the summer. Rinsed
shining under the steady flow of cold running water.

Slicing them scents the air in the kitchen for hours and colors
fingers like childhood firetrucks. The wind keeps the air

from bugs except dragonflies which glide easy
cyan and gold at soft angles barely buzzing.

The strawberries will be used in a pie.

This time last year the sky was a chunk

of amber torched with ash, which is like dust

but thicker. Fire is such a familiar word, it has lost something:

somewhere else always an alive thing is on fire

which is also strange because it seems alive things

always appear to be *in* the fire, that fire is

always *on* the thing. The forest floor neoned,

the sequoias old as Christianity neoned, bald land soaked

in something like orange but greedier, the spilled internals

of a blood orange. Neon as a verb,

as dynamics. It was because ash

particles in the air are large and only let pass colors

of large wavelengths: red, red-orange, bronze, amber,

and ash is a dead thing.

That is not a metaphor.

How a whole state tears into shades of heat,

endures or surrenders to the distance

between word and color: roars, energy, juice. How color,

amidst no field of counterevidence, seems to be the only

prerequisite for death. How things are colorful
and then die. Ocean Vuong saying to be gorgeous

is to be hunted, and Christopher Smart illustrating
a thousand worlds between white and silver. Between that

and this, between that home and this heat and that heat
and this home, between fat strawberries under warm

piecrust a dragonfly angling mosquito flight fire
neon and sweetness, so much happens so slowly, all at once.

What I Sing About When I Sing on Accident

To say “wound”
is to tighten your lips
into whistle, into song.

The body gives nothing
but hints. Every morning
I wake up sore
and don’t know why.

Other songs:
doom, tomb, fruit, truth,

and it is because I forget
the dream I have every night
where I am carrying myself,

the dream where I don’t know
where I am or where I am going
but I, my arms singing with pain,

am trying to carry myself there.

Also, the shape of a kiss.
Only hints.

And language gives everything
but what is asked for. As in,

I said “sore” and, dear listener,
you might have heard, if only for a moment,
that I was flying.

As in, I said “wound”
and kissed everything in front of me.

As in, I said “doom” and we danced to that music.

Dancers Call It Texture

The ways movement moves.
 The difference between walking away
 and walking towards.
 A palm placed on a cheek is caress.
 A palm placed on a cheek is slap.
 Someone says 'sing' or 'fuck' or 'float'
 and it fashions a castle admired from the outside.
 But if only the ghosts on the inside – breaking
 vases, appearing in dark mirrors – were accessible,
 what couldn't you say to me? Under the water's surface
 in Mallows Bay, hundreds of ships abandoned. Stripped
 down, wood creaking
 and no noise in the cold water. Some thin steel
 nails bent and straining against
 pressure and time. Everything soggy and cracking.
 The Ghost Fleet and the deep green moss shading
 old wood and white perch gliding
 between cracked planks and blue crabs marching
 the distance of bow to stern each day,
 stern to bow each night, marching
 like each day and each night, turning
 like the wind and currents blessing
 and blessing and blessing
 and blessing and rotting wood detaching
 itself, passing from this structure
 and into another and
 what is the word for the shape
 of this shape transforming? How many
 slight creatures dwell in an action?
 A kiss on the forehead is hello.

A kiss on the forehead is

Ritual Dancing

Sleeping, one turns
and faces the other.

A moment later,

the other turns
and they are now

nose to nose.

All night, each night
turning and shifting

and turning in the dark,

towards, away, towards.

My Issue with the Concept of Reincarnation or Simply, A Poem Titled Birds

Do you know how exhausting
it is when every bird singing
into the plain morning air

Might be a love from a previous life
speaking with that gentleness
they know only I know?

How can anyone get any work done
with all of this sweetness
to shoulder,

When everything can be special?

A Love Poem

A love poem in a windowless room
on the highest floor of the tallest tower.
A love poem under a massive stone
in the deepest cave within the largest mountain.
There it is, taped to an arrow, flying over
the beige smudged sky. Wandering the desert,
feasting on itself. Do you know
where it goes? A love poem wrapped around
the Devil's horn, making Hell all windy and
foggy. Stuck in God's long white
beard, making heaven loud and wild. Blown
onto the Buddha's lap, making him lose his breath
for a moment. A love poem sleeping in,
taking the day off. Do you know where it's been?
A love poem crumpled up, found in
the right pocket of your father's hand-me-down
jeans. A love poem in a box you and I saw in half,
then miraculously put back together.
A love poem messing up the bed, disregarding sheets
and blankets and pillows. A love poem making the bed
again after. A love poem out in the cold rain, on a train
platform, smoking a cigarette. Do you know what
it does? A love poem painting flowers. A love poem eating
flowers. Eating coal and steel and fire.
And the moon. Look closer. A love poem the length
of a collarbone, spelled through fingertips. The depth
of a chest, spelled through heartbeats.
A love poem forgetting, and then luckily
always remembering, or maybe it is a love
poem remembering, and then luckily
forgetting. A love poem with huge white wings.
With huge black wings. With no wings at all,
just two feet and a t-shirt. And after the bombs
have dropped or the wrecking ball has had
its way, after the tallest tower has fallen
and the largest mountain has crumbled,
a love poem under so much rubble.
But a love poem whistling calm

from under the wreckage.
And everything –
a day, a kiss, a tree —
following the trace of the song
and helping to clear the rocks.

Shades

Between blue
and purple, how

many little kingdoms
fold and unfold?

An origami
of shades and stages
where waits

a steadiness to stand on,
where forms
the shape and the color

of a moment
I can hold

in my extended and open hand.

After our first night,
I woke beside you,
before you,
and tiptoed to the bathroom.

In the window,
early morning moon.
Your sleeping breath
opening slightly, closing slightly.

In the mirror, I found
a patch of touch still
warm, settled

on the ground of my neck,
at the crest of my collarbone.

Shaded indigo.

Tools // Hands

Splitting, Gordon Matta-Clarke, film, 1974

English flaunts many words // for ‘breaking’
so we can be more precise // about what we do

with a chainsaw // in grainy silence
Matta-Clark split a house // in two

Splitting, yes // that is one of them
but also tearing, smashing // cutting, bashing...

“...And when I said // ‘the limits of my language
are the limits // of my world,’ you laughed.”

Laughing // breaks things too:
silence, the tension // a heart

ignite – to break a thing into // light
chisel – to break a thing into // art

‘Anarchitecture’ – to break a thing into // building
to break quiet into // groan

to let light fill // a house or a home
a house // or a home

//a // //house // //or // //a // //home //

for English gifts distance // between the two
and to touch a thing // is to wander it alone

Shortly after Matta-Clarke split // the house
the city *demolished* it // which is to break

a thing completely // which is to touch
a thing more // than it can take

My Ghosts // break me into a house

My Love // touch me into a home

My Language // hide closely
for a break of breath // a touch of moan

We gather here tonight // at the table
of a house // split in two

My Ghosts, My Language // My Love, My Hands
let us pray to be precise // about what we do

II

Somewhere Else Doing Strange Work

Every poem is jealous of paintings.
Envy their apparentness, their force of color.
That a painting can extend its open hand
and offer you yellow to hold.
All a poem can do, the poem thinks
self-consciously, is whisper you 'yellow'
which will travel about halfway to your ear
and inevitably get lost, picked up by stray breezes
or a child's laughter, and find itself stranded
in the memory of your mother's lemon trees,
or worse, someplace far off
from anything you have learned to see.
Wandering the streets of a faraway city
you learned to walk in but barely know,
holding up the word "candle"
between its little fingers
and proceeding slowly, yes,
go now, forward, but slow.

Voice

I am reading Linda Gregg. There is music
in the background.

I have heard this song before.

I raise the volume the moment
the singer and instruments
collect and rest.

I listen.

When the music comes back,

I lower the volume and go on reading.

Pulchritudinous

I encountered this word in a poem for the first time
the other day and instantly hated it,
its staleness, how it sounds
like dust-crusts flower petals and stone
pomegranate seeds and a moment
in Santa Cruz last November: wandering
through the long Monarch trails under
California's soft winter sun, air
warmed in the voiceless honey
whispers of hundreds of little honey
wings, and how I couldn't shake the desire
to snatch the butterflies
out of flight
by the fist-
fill and stuff them
into envelopes
to mail back home to my mother.

How it sounds like the color of crushed butterflies
How it sounds like the bulging envelope's thickness
How it sounds like my mother's crumpled smile
as she empties the envelope out onto our
small wooden dining table.

Little Game

Amidst a littering of peels,
God and I sit out on the porch
wearing big straw hats,
eating oranges.

“It tastes like squeezing candleflame
with cold fingers” I say,
looking over at him with a
mouth full of fruit.

“No no, I don’t think that’s it”
he replies, looking out
at nothing in particular.

We have been doing this all afternoon.
Our little game helps to pass the time.

Now God takes his bite,
chewing and smiling just slightly.

“It’s more like frozen honey
melting under morning sun” he says
and looks over at me
to confirm, his beard
stained sticky with juice.

“No no no, that’s not it either”
I reply, peeling us another orange,

no one able to find the proper words

as the air continues to fill
with that clear, indescribable scent.

To Comprehend

After Jack Gilbert

The heart is a foreign country
who's language none of us
can speak nor write, but
at times, when listening, can hear. Out there,

the consonance of rain clapping
against a thick-trunked redwood,
and the assonance as each drop drips
down that distance into the wet earth. Out there,

the sound just below the sound
of the young boy whispering into the ear
of his mother on the crowded train,
and the sound at the tips of her smile
as she listens and nods her head. Out there,

the orange sound of a candle against
the night, and the soft sound of fingertips
brushing dust off the skin of a peach. Out there,

the sound suspended in the silence
as sets of lips separate, remaining
until just before they revisit again.

To comprehend a meaning in all of that,
or worse, to attempt to translate
that language, would be too much.
Would be greedy.
Selfish, even.

On Woodpeckers

All they want is what is inside.
That music bearing through the woods
is purely incidental.

Off Laguna

Start the poem with a simple fact.

We are surrounded
by windows and mirrors.

This is to say

to look at a thing
is to be unsure

if you are seeing through
it or back behind you.

And regardless of season,
snow is always falling
in slow light

handfuls on the mountain
behind these mountains.

This is to say

a memory can be both
cold and soft
to the touch.

All of this is to say no,
I am not coming back.

All of this is to mean

that on certain Spring nights,
I stand upright and content

to listen
to the easy arriving
and leaving and arriving
of the waves off Laguna

and swear they sound just like my father crying.

Even if they do not.

Even if they are silent.

Upraising Heaven

And the walls are giant, of glass and gold.

I am seven years old and crying
and my Grandmother, in an attempt to calm
me, is holding my hand and describing Heaven.

*And the sky is more open than here, and sitting atop
those shining walls of glass and gold are the angels*

we know, she keeps describing it, *all of the angels
we know singing songs for us*. Her heart is an emerald
the size of a small Bible floating atop
a slow river, and faith is sadness
perfected. She is upraising heaven
and doesn't notice that her voice has calmed

my crying fit, so she continues on, now in a calm
whisper, no longer looking at me. *And none of the angels
ever cry, Nathan. Nobody cries in heaven
because nobody needs to*. Her heart is an amber
chunk and in its cast is the name of a sadness
spelled with small feathers. She is now looking above

me – I am smiling in silence picturing gold
walls and my Grandmother is looking up
not at heaven, maybe just below, just behind it.

Self Portrait Between Two Ghost Stories

I do not look like the moon's reflection atop a river.

But one night
walking along Minnesota's piece of the Mississippi
I watched that worn image for a while, a long
while, closing my eyes, opening my eyes,
closing my eyes until I saw a pearl
from my grandmother's burial necklace

just sort of dangling there.

My mother,
who shares the same birth name as her mother,
mentioned only once
that she can't seem to bring herself
to visit her anymore.

*It is strange, she said, It is strange
seeing etched across a gravestone
your own name*

just sort of dangling there.

The Definitive and Objective Explanation Regarding the Ways Things Touch

There was a book titled *The Definitive and Objective Explanation Regarding the Ways Things Touch* which no one will ever read again because it was torched in one of those ancient libraries that got torched or because the ship transporting a million of its copies sank in the center of the Atlantic, some say torpedoed, some say ran out of fuel and just sort of lazily gave cold, or because, of *The Definitive and Objective Explanation Regarding the Ways Things Touch* only one copy was made which the author gave to her husband who loved turning the heavy pages and reading it aloud in the dark empty house who then gave it to their child who couldn't bring himself to read it more than a couple times and only partly and who gave it to his child who doesn't read books and resented his father and sold it at a yard sale to an older woman who liked the hand-painted dandelions on the cover, each soft white tuft just thicker than the tick marks on a watch, and she imagined the way the author's hand, squeezing the tiny brush, hovering slightly, must have trembled like her own as she extended the five dollar bill for purchase and the odd comfort of this image compelled her to display the book like an open secret on her coffeetable until her granddaughter knocked over a glass of grapejuice on it and she tossed it. Either way, the book wasn't that good. A laborious and unfulfilling read. An odd book indeed. Full of apologies and names of ghosts and sketches of birds. It is better this way.

Noon Near the Santa Clara Mission

and the bells stroll huge gray air
in steady half-note stomps on the roof
of the brick church, dust-shaking,
wind-making, and then the silence after,
bulk of ice melting into the apparentness
a little after that, that almost silence
that rises clear as the sound of feathers falling
through the space the sound has left behind,
unheard by the men at work maybe a hundred
yards south in the dirt lot where they dig
and dig at a square of ground for two weeks
with little progress, for thousands of seasons
of rain then sun then fire has packed
earth hard as screaming
teeth, as history, so on the third week
they double the men and employ large machines
with loud motors wheezing oily smoke
the men shout commands over to be heard and beat
and beat for another week
until one's jackhammer knocks into a chunk
of tablet or perhaps a piece of a pot,
so he calls over his boss
who takes the relic in his hand and up to his face
and squints to see its surface inscribed faint
and fine in the shinelight and no one,
not a single one of them
can translate it, can say
what it is saying.

A Long Story with a Straight Line

Painted in permanence across cave walls at the base of a cliff in deep Patagonia, hands, hands, thousands of hands ten thousand years old, one after another. The hands and the surrounding scene tell a long story that gets longer as archaeologists and anthropologists continue to translate. For example, we know how the handprints were made – hunter-gatherers filled bone pipes, found scattered in the dirt, with mineral paints, dusts of crimson, white, purple, and ochre, blew into the tool, and sprayed color at the back of their hands and the surrounding wall – when they lifted their hands, a hand remained stained onto the stone. We know ten thousand years because those bone-pipes, sculpted from the leg-bones of large rodents and small deer which wandered what were then wide beige grasslands, could be taken into laboratories, observed by machines that count radioactive isotopes of carbon and spit out dates. We know for certain that there are eight-hundred-and-twenty-seven left hands and thirty-one right hands, meaning most of the artists were right-handed, feeling more comfortable with the ingenious device in their dominant right hand. We know some of the hands are missing fingers, but we can only guess why – maybe from infection or amputation, or, as some of the more daring anthropologists have offered, these hands are performing a lost form of sign language and thus sending a message we, even with all our data-eating machines, will never translate. When I was not much bigger than two hands and crying, my mother would pick me up and hold me in one of her thin arms, switching to the other arm when the one got sore, and would twist slightly at her hips and shoulders over and over but softly to create a gentle swaying motion, partly, maybe, because she was a young mother and nervous, feeling powerless at the sound of her only child wailing, partly, maybe, because she was tired and tired from working her late shifts before her early shifts before her late shifts, the type of tired that surpasses physical status into emotion, tiredness not bound in her arms and legs but inside her skull, behind her eyes and pushing out and partly because after a while, sometimes a very long while, this rocking motion seemed to help, and I would quiet into a steady breath, my eyes not so much closing but floating shut in that slow wind only a tired mother can produce, and sleep again. Of course, I don't remember any of this. My mother smirked as she recounted this little ritual fifteen years later and early in the desert morning, both of us cold as I stood before the front door to leave for school in a beanie and oversized backpack, when she saw that I was just sort of swaying, idle, swaying on my own, turning myself at my awkward hips and broadening shoulders, slowly, slowly. I must have been nervous. From layers of findings from layers of projections of past touches touching, perhaps the most remarkable finding is that some of the handprints highest on the cave walls belong to the smallest hands. As I said, this is a long story. It keeps getting longer. Here. Sit down with me. If you know it, sing. If you don't, listen. Once you know it, please, sing.

Compression

Grinding down the moon
to access the light

or an emerald to free
a forest:

this is how history works,
by compressing and making things

small and manageable,
barely manageable,

the way a candle is barely
burning in the center of a dark room,

or the hum of bees from the far side
of a field muted with snow,

or the way all of a man's memory,
the happenings he can fit into

two clasped arms
and carry distances,

compresses into a photo
in a closet

of a mother,
of a child,

and that rhythm between them.

Notes

Page 6 — “How to Grow Blurry” *Layer VIII* is a creative paraphrase and expansion of Frank Jackson’s Mary’s Room thought experiment proposed in his articles “Epiphenomenal Qualia” (1982) and “What Mary Didn’t Know” (1986) in defense of the existence of non-physical knowledge

Page 8 — The title “Slow Swirl at the Edge of the Sea” comes directly from the title of the painting by Mark Rothko with which the poem enters a conversation

Page 12 — The title “Some Wound of Color” is borrowed from the final line of Robert Hass’s poem “Time and Materials” from his book with the same title

Page 22 – The poem “Tools // Hands” integrates a line from Robert Hass’s poem “Happiness”

Page 26 – “Voice” is after, at least formally, Linda Gregg’s poem “Growing Up”

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The AWP Intro Journals Project Award, Honorable Mention – “Some Wound of Color”

The Racket – “Some Wound of Color”

The Owl – “Trying to Be More Specific When It Comes to Movement”

– “Instructions for a Painter”

– “Noon Near the Santa Clara Mission”

– “A Love Poem”

Zaum – “Compression”

– “To Comprehend”

Hawaii Pacific Review – “Shades”

Translations

Two Poems from Tan Taigi (1709-1771)

from the Japanese

placed within her hands
firefly
light through her fingers

I tried but gave up
in the end –
sweeping fallen leaves

Two Poems from Arakida Moritake (1473- 1549)

from the Japanese

was that a blossom
returning home?
nope – butterfly flight

summer night opens
into dawn
my eyes remain closed

Eleven Poems from Yosa Buson (1716-1784)

from the Japanese

path of thorned roses
reminds me
of where I call home

in the citrus scent
of autumn
ancient mansions loom

After a meeting among poets

wow, how these fallen
leaves gather
and float together

a pair of lovers
grow muddy
splashing in a stream

springtime rain pours down
I realize
I can't hold a thing

spring rain falls steady
day grows dark
but I still exist

cherry blossom scent
grows sweeter
as Saga's lamps dim

shimmer of summer heat
insects woosh
I don't know their names

mist across the moon —
she and I
gaze at the palace

childhood temple —
nostalgic
for those golden trees

some happinesses
have no end —
handfuls of picked yams

blown down, stirred, blown down
all day long —
scarecrow in his field

Two Poems from Monk Ryokon (1758-1831)

from the Japanese

those thieves couldn't steal
everything —
moon in my window

lots of men talking
nobody hears
the bush warbler's song

One Poem from Kobayashi Issa (1763-1824)

from the Japanese

This moon, these blossoms –
My whole life
I've walked, and to where?

Lyonel Twouyo – I Dream Your Naked Body

from the Haitian Creole

I dream your naked body
a single dream shatters all boundaries
that separate man from love

I tear off every rag
which binds my hands

amidst the night and death
on the sea (mother of all desire)
I scatter the remains of my mirror
to enter my truth

I wonder the bottom of your eyes
I find no end to life
my madness makes your friends choose
the big-headed little man in the moon's belly
my friend Tezen, who knows how to love better than us all

I build a city of dawn
without guards or scrap iron
so I can wait for you
so you can wait for me
so that in the end
in the scent of revolt and jasmine
you'll hold the power you had at the beginning

every day I bet on a secret light
alive underwater
my muse the Earth's spinning toy
dancing on the sea

at night I come to sleep in your hands
you teach me to speak in the flow of vodou rhythms
to ride bikes across the roofs of clouds
I live in the words in your mouth
all darkened lamps shine in your hands

Lyonel Twouyo – Writing Page

From the Haitian Creole

you stand in the margin
you are playing in the dreams of words
page by page
we are making love
on lined paper

Nounous (Lenous Sipris) – Little Love Kiss

From the Haitian Creole

(For A-F. L)

Sundown
Your lips
Are painting
Sky the seeds of my eyes
Makes my teeth tender
In your teeth
Makes your teeth tender
In my teeth
Makes me fall asleep
In your arms
Makes you fall asleep
Under me