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Acknowledgements

See pages 92–94.

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for my brother, Asher

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“the appetite
for comfort went looking,
inner, tonal,
for where the green begins”
Fanny Howe

“A thousand needlesful of green & blue thread”
Francis Ponge



The Grasses Unload Their Grief

Our feet didn't touch the ground all year, but we marched, gray smoke, one leg following the other curved like scythes, turning with the measure of blades rippling in a field.

The three of us our skin removed laid away like winter covers from a bed. Underneath wasn't flesh, bone or blood, though all our organs kept.

I could see right into my mother and father. In each of their mists a coiled chain. Then, shame or no shame, I knew I looked the same only smaller.

A son, a brother.

By the time we slipped back into our bodies, the chain had shrunk like an umbilical cord.

Instead of words, my mother uttered syllables that fit onto silver teaspoons whose glossy oval backs flew into the sky.

Instead of words, my father blew cinders.

The Wind of Madness Has Broken a Skin

Something at the edge of danger
Turns into its opposite, and circles:

Frigid wind, now blue flame,
Curls a rind out of the night's air.
Black space a springy trampoline.

The void is unusually still, like a lake
With nothing pulling on it.

Mania's headdress
Is a thin, lilac gauze.
The back of her toes (as well as the cracks between)
Are wiggling ligatures disassembling.

Whirlwind upon whirlwind upon whilwind,
A petal falls off the black-mum sky.

Mania's many heads wheel around.
A spider sticks to her mind. Not something she knows.
She's only hanging the receiver from the pay phone on the windiest hill.

The day after is colorless as Antarctica. Trees static at forty-five degrees.
Just before sunset, the landscape straightens.

The pink that rubbed off my bedspread onto my pants
Has rubbed off on a cloud.
Chinese sounds are snow shovels.
French vowels, water sullied the color of cheap topaz.

Limn

I felt the painting return when the phone rang and I was called upon
to speak.

My arms stiffened in its rectangle.

Perched in a mad dash, not yet set flat against the wall.

(The thing itself merely expedient: early Renaissance,
a portrait of a woman with long, wavy, chestnut hair.)

The vibration of my voice within the frame tilted the painting
hither and thither.

Only in the flap of hindsight a glimpse
of what I had been: the exposed wall,
whatever holes, smudges and patches were made over time
(the visual equivalent of the sea in a shell),
where safes are rumored to be.

Flowers have lips—their petals,
dispersing phrases as they die.
What's left is a hum, then
silence: black boxes in a crossword.

Amnesia pedals up a lake, takes its place in a grassy swamp
where the most weightless of insects twitter.

Numbness and shade

Voices supple as leaves in their prime,
drying here and there, unstemming,
partitioned into heaps before
decomposing.

The odor of burnt rubber. Spicepackets of my father talking.
Some words are elastic, pale rubberbands
in the mouths of people who produce extra-amounts of saliva.
“I don’t find contact with you satisfying anymore,”
writes a friend whose husband is a hanging ivy.

My eye fuzzy as a shopwindow at Halloween.
A cobweb answers the doorbell.
The old lady who lives inside my eye crochets a shawl.
She huddles in it now.

The Existing Lover in Everyday Life

I will appreciate disconnected bits of form

Leaves closing prayerfully

wings

a duck wading

A swarm of birds revising its character

like a flame

Here

Singing *I wanna hold your hand*
with my brother, and holding hands.
My own thoughts, thumping in me like a heart.

The sound of the mixmaster, yellow and lumpy.
“Boo!” always moved pigeons.
Wanting more than anything to make music,

for concertos to open their wings from my hands.
My father’s davening voice: plains, cliffs, precipice;
operatic, I suppose.

An anonymous male voice: “Ahhh” loudening
by increments into infinity,
scaring me, waking me up.

A 3rd grade teacher reading An Enormous Egg
outdoors; beginning spring,
E.

The sound of Hebrew, foreign and mysterious.
No music, except on the car radio.
Kids’ voices: “Ma!,” “No!,” basketballs clanging

on metal hoops; turning sounds,
like jump ropes coming through the window.
The vowels of my brother after dying.

Autobiography

I was afraid my life would be like visiting my grandparents
when I was little: green carpet, big ugly sofas, and no one
having anything to say; my grandfather seeming not to
be thinking; no one wanting to talk to anyone,
just no one having anything to say. Sitting there
like mummies, out of duty, no other reason.
I sit and look straight at the hollowness: a bullseye.

I want to say my life has
been a pipecleaner, beautifully twisted,
in tandem with others like it.

Or, not beautiful, a known-by-name shape;
nothing to do but let the form of things take over.