

at sea

Melissa Benham





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precipice

cells unchanged

emerge from

slow molting streams

through saltwater

accretion

hollow structures

for blood

or sea

no longer

occupying just one

point impelled to

widen

plating the expanse

impermeable

a fabric interchanging

fluid for stone

held together

an impatient wheel

of dawn

spreading

corridor of sky

spread a shelf

for birds

exposed to our

persisting view

this assembly

of bodies

buoyant &

unfinished

all at once
not alone

jutting out
from the brink

so much so to forget
we were flung
into form

by which
capturers

the swarm opened
dove & sailed

then shrank
as apparition

how to puzzle
out days
before birds

& when the precise
hour began

drifting they fell upon me the first to be covered in trees tracing parts for
memory muscular looming the way the eyes come out like sleepwalkers
in pursuit of a thing that was once another absorbed by light blinking in
unison

here we met through
love of order

portrayed as
early stages
of going under
entirely

first bright flashing

all burns outline

any actual thought
of water uncanny

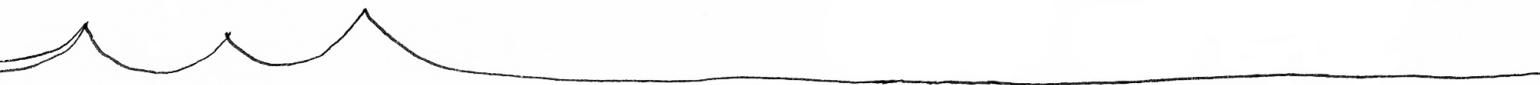
we historians imagine it reversed

a blackout a jinx cast

the pitch had come
our settlers from night

to find us

shut in
by sun



repronounceable

there was this
not speaking
in afternoon

appear disrupt amid
nameless influences
of mislay

all my shards
unmarried

multitudes swap out
a crowd of phantom

lakes—?

in the frail rip
bleaking the same year

visit a thing broken
not repronounceable

reckoning a dense shudder anti the man wave from trucked window

gray rush of location sprawls down to one's deathday

I could not bear the fastened
lens simply to construct up
the fact of ceiling

every day's
surgical attempt

to hitch up color
with weight

addled
grasping

from under 1000 layers
burdened nomenclature

chronic deafens drones
out crush

breath always
pressing against

platonic irritation

gave way

adjacent to noon

& rising

a dull loll

tongue out-kissed

that in the dream I

something like severed

but—

bloodless

hysterical

blooming

in some invisible action

that there is—
that there is that

all bodies
of material

seeded catastrophic

who retreats
in dream

its delayed time

what counteracts
an aimless loop

of waking to nothing
but this

burgeoning cavity

no-
canyon

intent on sky
building

nearly sprung her
branding made splendor

skeleton flower bore up
the shock tendons

suddenly tight even
the sea indentured

seamed by wire
& left to waste

another receding sun settles in grids

unable to
cloister or cast
a second

shadow
dearer & dear

pray a coincidence

notable angel
beaming

down someone
to please me

put me to sleep in the evening

birds tremble in
windy red pattern

transcribe morning
hear morning cast

an algorithm sallied
cloudful
gathered
a pail of
open sea

which liked its travel
from nowhere
to nowhere

lifted at length
uncertainably

stillness
which is a field
of green panic

water drawn
upwards
mysteriously

I cannot hold
a bottle or stem
thinking this way

solve this equation
of sleep with oblivion

charm or threat
of sun

ravaged
banqueted

an inconsequential
voyager sputters

onward
heart wired

all red
& circular

spoiled this &
that with shaky gait

gaily fishing out
difference's smallest

seed exchanged
for one

square inch
of horizon

call me truant/diviner
gift of soft weight

amongst the steel
ripe metal curving

we each love a shield
resisting fleshly

erase a posture
still holding

to adore a gap



chromotherapy

both appears

not the wavelength
or misconception of it

but the system areas a specific here

alarm intensity
to red then
change

be one light defined of

numerical color
present in its opposite

they from emptiness painted closer

scaled spaces resulting this
break in reflection aspect

watercolors which form
frontage light

at the hour
yellow/blue of a

should I even have to say sky?

here the terminal wall
largely green & recede
an arena less body

no intention of quarantine
though longing for it

what forms
a fever a response

the whorls of its flight
a strange nursery

not especially visible

we atmospheric of units
from any dark
stimulated into

completeness/what structure
in a blue ceiling

which wilderness becomes
a schematic of travel

air, air & too much contact

strip ascend
refer to owning the organs

its harmony shackles
an influence on fortune & encouragement

how to make a place begin
given we are separate

even a simple gesture of placing marigolds
it can help to wear something orange

wish a tender archive
dappled in clarity



new present time

the birds are
just beginning

out from reds
unknown arteries

each element contains
a ground beneath it

airfield diction
of flags its wayward

cautioning
mobile & chthonic

today we count
out empty lots

tending to steps
as psychic repair

blue or something falling
especially water

absorbed by iris
by filament & lonely

membranes take them
down into this troublemaker

body boxy unlocked
for casual entry

gave up the mark
& acceded to

dreamless walking
the yard out

to have created a simple
class of green objects

crowded in
slender stalks

replication by earth is earth
the summer complaint

of everything
is rife & incurable

rotted teeming
so well forgotten

in advance this city
could not return

to its inhabitants
their sordid window grieving

contract the agony
of machines &

railway lingerers
their resonant blur

yield oneself
to high building

too stunned to
counter the decree

to go hatless
amid the regulars

whose real bodies
made a binding

of furtive knots
to go out at all

in the green
& metal clangor

unsolicited
flattened

memorizing the way
back through the trees

all signals divest
the sun our light

& try to make
out those arrows

spun to no end
all points distracted

by calculation
of longest flight

to shine against blasting
just a little ash & fibers

unable to reject
absence of field

of diversion & alias
to say the world

is this or that
because you can

& will a chronic
forward motion

for cover
of weakness

to link myself in
covet a single line

calmly act as if all
land is blank under

its particles
it's not

corresponding to
new present time

finch of blue body
sealed within the graph

to perform us
conditioned between

celestial events
golden mean decomposing

I ask were you
designated as well

given permission to
to breathe

how we seem to correct
slight rips in the portraiture

recanting the future
uninterrupted what

actually stands still
but will go on

name this expanse
of skin my decoy

& mar my outer shell
with solvents

let us not repeat
“this is what we get”

depending on merely
good working organs

these are only
ways of talking

automatons crudely
performing the plague

whatever bears
invention little

more real
than miniature

between me & me
I cannot choose

this modern
line-drawing

constantly renewing
itself without interruption

without tissue or
accumulation of hours

settled in the one big night
we were to adhere to feathers

temporal landmarks
holding no space

for endeavors of giants
faster & fast they hid its light

passing the machine
I saw with its eyes

a reverse dissection
of I & the bird

in the diagram
a forest springs up

we watch as
the scientific object

smashes its scales
to remain asleep

cut the longing to
behave imperfectly

to attempt the act
of turning a sea

weightless sleepy satellite
not taking place

panicky collision
grained into approximate

vessel & breath
bred in equilibrium

escape this
blue error

nothing escapes forgetful
little sprawl dreams itself fast

a transformer of wood
run the joy into

extinguished shapes
in order to stay

were we flawed
varying on time-space

latticework not
the other scar spread

out to day narrowing
down to zeros

makeshift threshold
on repeat

fuse tomorrow
with its terrain

imperfected
shaking us off

in time heavenly
bricks will pass through

poke a hole in
unwieldy gravity

arms rejoicing
sensible numbers of forever

who made those astronauts
disappear from the trackers

swift things this array
completing a full planet's arc

miniaturized gathering
stray light off the trees

over-oxygenated
accidentally

we cropped ourselves
nodding out of focus

cross every escapee
the gone forever

splits out the earth's
side door gladly

inactivated island
spied the shut

down ending its
interference

whose spiriting
goes silent

in the spray narrow
to see it swallow up

the uninhabited trees
axe-makers asunder

revelation was one long dream
invariably played

over as calamity
vixen numeration

was I numbered in
the journey voice recorded

too weak to handle
a built purpose

this sounds out a secret law
unkempt unregulated

an infinite consent
to dormancy

I should like
I should sudden dislike

all agape
in westerly loneliness

abetted
by floodlights

airing up the place
to an improper size

maligned
consumptive

here I have
attempted to avoid

this with properly
angled etiquette

of creaturehood
& decline

chartless after
all this

one stands at a point
measuring out from fingertips

two things have changed
a light & a voice

abrupt paralysis
at daylight

unwilling in this skin
which ghost

recognizes its face again
& again



a series of paradises

what the sea takes away

measuring out weight
of disappearing things

the light makes a name across the paper

how small a traveler
against the shore collapsed

a keyless break in the field
a breakless dark covers it

the wrong question is asked
of the living we're awful forgetful
losing ourselves among the tide

they cannot come back to us

no longer known as we
but in between

halved we might
pass ourselves off as

another country
another kind of fish

that's what we're made for

the shine could no longer contain it
bursting the correct term
for anything

meat resembles the flower
attributes blending under glass

drawn up by
nervous workings
of sun

how is it possible
to remain whole

while appearing in
so many places

in diminishing light
we observe tendency

to wish a thing out of
predestination impossibly

undesignated as joy
mislaid with effort

flung to the rushes &
lashed out this town of
conspicuous melancholy

which of us speaks
first of the trap
before falling into it

an hour opens
as a screen

a wave of pixilated
birds hitting the earth

a warning
a breach

assumed we could just
go inside the ground

admittedly it was
a kind of invasion

it's not the test
or how complicated

staying intact is
over multiple night

we don't try
to open it

trembling inside
the actual body

in the commotion
unmoored so much
the less complete

console yourself with
fortune telling &
transmutation of defeat

had you only recognized
the wager was a clue
to the plot

sensed it as shadows
heaped upon us

take apart the desert
until nothing is audible

the mirage reassembles itself
explains maps as disposable

a way of excluding
me from the future

half the landscape
of event is ours

wrench the story
its breakup

its supple gift unfêted
helplessly unclothed

it was accurate we existed
without formula
shone awry

thus we wished to relive
a series of paradises

choosing not spectacle
or flimsy endpoints

to want & want & gather all
as dropped parts of oneself

blotted by continents
foliage & cloudcover

why explain it this way

let this placebo
cure the difficult parts

the subject disqualifies me
answering this spill

it's become clear
nothing has followed us

into the night of
no monster

still everywhere expanding
into broken lights



toward the blue peninsula

at the light
overlapping

assembled a more
excessive aviary

blue peninsula

leakage transfixed

even this slight
banishment

of land
of air

scours the retina

nothing visible
in the soft

border of orbit
but a magic

field of lights
not yet lived/no

blue pane/bells or
owl cut out

so parkway as
to be strangering

outside the window
strung up

the homing perch
dangles disagreeably

switch us into enemy
circumstance

trick us into
the enemy
kitchen

unearthly wind

drew upward
exceptional parcels

seashells arose from plastic
map tracers

admitting no ill attempt
or antidote

watch parts slips of foil

distance testing
by proxy

longing uphill to
weather only

a fraction of
possible hours

keeps us
in mysteries

adrift
this path does not
call as kin

a drop in the air

what of that
room the slightest
 slant underfoot

aboard &
boldly wrung

to guess a conclusion
as an archivist

what sumptuous
pattern holds
 indefinitely

leaving a single
mark of rain

no there for us
to travel to
in the—

something remembered

a shameful hostage
or explorer

fearing depletion

unable to plot
escape or major
public landmark

no matter what fills us with accident

reconstitute this first
light into fortune

little by little suddenly
the same emptying sky

let the sparrows fly in
as is your custom

seeds all
falling aground



Melissa Benham is the author of codeswitching & various chapbooks. After graduating from Naropa's School of Disembodied Poetics, she founded & ran the Artifact Reading Series in San Francisco & Oakland for six years. Melissa lives in Oakland, CA with poet, Brent Cunningham & their children, Mina & Jules.

This book is for them.

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