

EVERY
HUMAN
ANIMAL

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*Is today nothing? Is the beginningless past nothing?
If the future is nothing they are just as surely nothing.*

—Walt Whitman

MOSS

One time I found a huge rock
in the middle of the woods
that was completely covered with moss

I heard somewhere that moss takes
a really long time to grow,
decades or even centuries to cover
a single square meter of shaded earth,
not like sun-loving dandelions or deciduous
trees that can take up residence
just about anywhere, anytime

It made me wonder—in whatever scale
actually matters (human, geologic, cosmic)
am I moss or maple trees?

I MISS VINE

They keep saying that in the future
it's going to be all robots

But I think it's going to be vines.
Let me explain.

Once we figure out how to conquer time (which
we will of course—we have to—if we don't,
we're screwed)

the urgency of everything will cease to matter—
what will remain is finding the path of least resistance,
the goal must be to conserve the most heat
and prolong each and every quanta of meaning to the last
breath of the death of the universe
(when everything will be motionless)

Vines are really good at this
they always find the smoothest course
and they don't care how long it takes

Imagine it—every thought a green tendril,
Every utterance, a leaf
Every expression of love, roots tightly encircling each other,
with measureless depth, every epiphany
a morning glory, gently opening

Sometimes I'm honestly really worried
about the animals that lived eons ago

Did their friends arrive on time for coffee?

Did they have mothers and fathers?

Was their shopping list too long sometimes?

Could they imagine growing up before it happened?

When they got married, did they cry?

When they got unmarried, did they not cry (and wonder why,
and if it was some moral failing that they didn't feel
more sadness, because that was supposed to mean something,
wasn't it?)

Did they want to sleep in a little longer on Mondays?

Were they okay? Did anyone check on them?

A long time ago they say
birds used to have teeth.

No one quite knows why they stopped,
most people think it's because
they started eating seeds, and
I guess you don't need teeth for that.

Or that teeth take a really long time
to develop in the egg, and the less
time you spend in the egg, the better,
which seems counterintuitive,
inside an egg seems like a really great place.

And then there's an entire other conversation
about seeds, and why they exist at all,
and whose responsibility they are.

Is it the wind, or the sea, or the animals,
or something else that we don't even know about yet?

BALLET

This week I discovered that I was sharing my home
with a small grey creature
who exhibited improbable grace and tenderness
and whose ability to travel quietly
cannot be overstated.

This mouse entered the room a supplicant,
small tufts of fur, gently encircling
tiny black eyes, and she moved (that constant
among all life) with absolute silent deftness to the pantry.

Like a ballerina dancing *Swan Lake*: when huge leaps
taken by a hundred dancers at a time
from one side of the stage to another,
underwhelm even the softest flute—
not a single footstep is heard, not even
a faint wisp of a brush of fabric on skin
or shoe on wooden floorboards

Astonishing, this remarkable, resolute competence—
no—mastery—
of the geometry of the universe
the ability to move through it effortlessly.

I put the potato chips into tupperware, and
graham crackers into ziplocks (I was very noisy about this)
and waited for her to exit the stage with grandeur.

I never heard her go.

NO SHADE IN THE SHADOW

In the place where the oak once stood
there is no shadow.

Families gather with picnic baskets full
of fruit and bread from the store;

They spread out blankets on the wet grass
and give thanks to the lake breeze.

At noon, the lilac trees give no shade,
they hold their arms to their bodies in silent protest.

Oh, to feel the cool earth in the dark spot
under that titan, just four years ago he stood firm.

One day some tiny sapling will replace him,
On a distant morning, when the city is centuries away,

When no one except the beavers
could cut him down.

NIGHT GAMES

I learned last night that for a long time
(give or take thirty million years)
all the mammals on earth were nocturnal.

Apparently the dinosaurs were morning people
and it just worked better that way—
when you're a proto-shrew, you can't be
caught grazing at noon, assuming
that no one is looking at you with
simple eyes that detect mostly patterns of light
and of course, movement, upon which all life relies.

Which leads to how we know this:
it's because their eyes were so big,
so of course they were out at night,
because why else would you need big eyes
except to capture moonlight, and hints of
reflections of the stars, and maybe
a faint flicker of fireflies

And I'm just over here, in my apartment,
somewhat well past the equinox,
eating a piece of bleu cheese (in complete darkness)
and feeling really sort of blessed to be alive.

You never really notice
how quickly the sun is moving
until it is just about to dip
below the horizon

And it isn't so much astonishment
that the sun was moving
that fast the whole time,
(which is a wonder all its own)

But more that the sky was so big
that we hardly noticed
a ball of fire, speeding
across it all day long.

What,
if anything,
surprised you

about the slow
growing of the oak
three centuries or more

or the gentle curve
of the hill where it stood
thousands of years hence

or of the millions of creatures
who inhabited
its wooden houses

THE CASE

Tomorrow we will not
find out the truth
about flowers

Specifically, if they belong
to the sun, or to the air

(the earth lost her claim on them
some time ago)

This case has been before
the holy courts

for eons, and tomorrow
deliberation is likely to continue
for at least one more day.

VEGETABLE LAMB OF TARTARY

I am a body covered in other bodies:
the hair of sheep,
the skin of cows,
the children of cotton plants

I am a body filled with other bodies:
the milk of cows
the belly of pigs
the faces of sunflowers

I am a body breathing other bodies:
the molecules of air
the fragrance of flowers
the heat of lovers

I am a billion haunted atoms
consuming one another.
Let us rejoice.

I don't know what it's like to be a cedar.
Or, for that matter, a tumbleweed,
or a cactus or a jack-in-the-pulpit, or a strawberry.

I think it is probably far beyond my imagination,
but if I had to venture a guess
I bet it is all about waiting.

Every human animal is fixated on moving and doing
and getting and consuming and persisting,
catching, hiding, running, coming, and going,
as effortlessly as possible, as fast as possible

I think the soul of a tree is to wait.
Wait for sun. Hope for water. Remain
until goodness comes, or until death,
which is another kind of waiting,
or whichever one comes first,
because both will come eventually,
wait and grow. Every day. Wait. Grow. Wait.

I want to learn how to be more like that.
I want to learn to wait
in fullness of knowledge
like the morning glory waits for the sun

AGAINST ALL ODDS

Congratulations, reader
you have been selected
as one lucky winner
of existing in this miraculous sphere
upon this day
against all odds,
in spite of the fact of the entire universe
making this event so astronomically unlikely
that it happening at all
today, of all days,
should be celebrated
with utmost joy
and abject disbelief

To claim your prize, please reply
THANK YOU
to this message

SEEING THE LILACS

“When is the best time to see the lilacs?”
seemed like kind of a big question,
since we had only just met.

Well, it depends on a lot of inconstancies
including but not limited to:
the rain
the wind
the sun
the sea and its motions
the earth and her motions
the birds and the general state of their souls,
which has a direct impact on
the measureless motions of stars,

and it also depends on many distinct, albeit remote
possibilities that are present at all times,
such as:
whether or not a meteor impact starts a new ice age,
whether or not our sun goes supernova,
if extraterrestrial invaders raze the earth,
or, less likely
if extraterrestrial visitors revolutionize
the earth with measureless love, ushering in
a new world order based on adoration of nature,
in which case
every day will be the best time
to see the lilacs.

SAVING THE WORLD

Today my father told me
that he heard about a new plan
to stop climate change.

The idea is to take DNA from
the carcasses of woolly mammoths
and insert it into elephant embryos
to create a new species of titans.

Then they will send the creatures out
by the millions, in great herds
into the tundra.

There they will wander the desolate fields
stomping down the permafrost,
compacting the soil,
locking in methane gas for another eon.

We agreed the plan could never possibly work,
but it's no less likely than our best fighting chance
to save the world, as of today.

October opened her arms
and issued forth messenger birds:

Ravens, for carrying the leaves
to their new homes upon the earth

Finches, for gathering the seeds of winter
to plant them in the gardens of time

Cardinals, to declare with the song of their bodies
the splendor of the color red

Gulls, to take daylight to the edge
of tomorrow, and to borrow it
from the edge of yesterday, and drop it
on the other side of the world.