

Maya Janson

Pushing the Dead Chevy

I'm trying to remember the name of the mountain  
where the monkeys lived and how it looked  
from the window of the train. Seasonal bonfires stacked  
and burning in the shape of the Chinese character for "luck."  
And perfect, in the time that remains, the corpse pose,  
also maybe the frog and the wheel and the boat.  
While visualizing the goldfish in the bowl on our table—  
O O O, her perpetual look of surprise.  
Like me are you surprised to find yourself  
in this chair/bus station/ room by the sea?  
Walking in some city on uneven pavement wearing clogs.  
Wondering whatever happened to long summer nights  
listening to Dylan's bootlegged sessions complete  
with barking dog. Whatever happened to the dogs,  
the string of cars with bad batteries and the hills  
we rolled them down waiting for the engine to kick in.  
As always the paper lantern hung in the garden stands for  
that which is unblemished in us.  
And the wind blowing west to east across the river  
has cornered the market on endurance.  
Queen Anne's lace grown chest high gone flagrant.  
Beware the urge to haul everything you own  
to the top of a mountain in order to hurl it.  
Like the pink tint your white socks turned  
in the wash, something was there in the background  
waiting to be spoken and now isn't.

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Prior to Being a Cloud

I was the calcium and dolomite of a kneecap.

Blood nest for the thickening

bloom of a fetus. Her aortic root, my tree,

little blue thumb in her mouth in me. After that,

when ankle deep in a rain-gushed alley

with crickets and the low hiss of taxis

on hot pavement, I was a fault line ready to give.

I was wires exposed, open circuits.

I wanted to be the ground, good clod, ore.

The stump that remained after the oak

came down in a storm. The storm tossing,

uprooting whatever collateral was claimed

while living in a small, unlit house during

a power outage, all the streets flooded,

every rowboat taken.

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## The World's Oldest Cherry Tree Is Alive and Well But Barely Able to Walk

Word is, the villagers have fashioned special sticks to prop it up,  
to keep its 1000-year-old hat from falling to the ground.

Everyone wants to picnic beneath its waterfall  
and laugh about the petals that fall into their drinks.

There's a Japanese word for that, for the progressive and manifest  
degrees of flowering and drunkenness beneath the boughs.

Another word for, roughly translated, *you-must-put-your-nose-  
right-into-the-blossom- to-practice-and-perfect-your-bee.*

When I visited I rode my bike past narrow canals and thought –  
just like Holland, where I've never been.

Pedaled right through the middle of a discourse  
two young scholars were having about flexibility as they leaned  
against the smallest tree in the orchard. Underfoot,  
the spring grass was an animal whose fur must never be cut.

This by Emperor's decree. It rubbed itself against  
the ankles of the revelers, the loud, red ones and the quiet ones  
who stood there looking straight into the swirling cascade  
and saw up close how the world was made.

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Maya Janson

Lines Spoken Within Earshot of a Tree

High praise for the quail and the family of fox  
come to the lawn at dusk.

And the sisters reclined there with books,  
pursed lips against cups.

Things that fall from the sky.  
From the talon of a hawk. The sky itself

an elaborate embroidery, the horizon  
its hoop. Ambivalence means

strong feelings in opposite directions.  
Should we cut it down or put wire

around the trunk to keep the deer off. At bay.  
In times of adversity the deer

will take to the water and swim.  
Dogs wander in and out, sleep beneath

the limbs. Things that can't be restored  
to their previous states.

At least two versions of the same story.

Maya Janson

Liniment

The retreating backside of a small, black bear  
ambling through the yard makes me happy,  
thankful that *amble* is a word. Ditto *goozle*  
and *nuggie*. *Syzygy* is all about alignment.  
What a miracle is life and too,  
some disappointment.  
A fresh batch of clouds drag their clean cuffs  
along a treeless horizon. A dog, coy  
when you least expect it. To be expected:  
resistance, suffering, pain.  
Snakebite, nettle and knife.  
Prepare to be bothered-by, driven-to.  
Look, here comes another downpour,  
the sky fractured by lightning's unstraight zag.  
Anyway, straightness is overrated,  
you could even say nature abhors it.  
Ill-fitting by nature the person I am  
puts on the person I was. Like a pilgrim,  
a wanderer who goes from hut to hut  
in sandals and conical hat. Perpetual asker of—  
*are we there yet?* We are not. Not there, not yet.

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