

LISTENING
for
EARTHQUAKES



JASMINE
DREAME
WAGNER

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Runner-Up, 2011 CAKETRAIN CHAPBOOK COMPETITION

ROSMARIE WALDROP, *Final Judge*

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BLACK SWANS

It has been written, is written, will be written
That the first rule is that there are no rules; nothing is forbidden

All that has happened is happening now
All that will happen has happened

But what of our poor view of what it is to see
If all we have to see has been seen

If all we have seen we will see
What of our bifocals and contact lenses

What of our cinematographer
What of his union pay

And what does this lack of love do for the image
Baby, I want you to be all mine

Baby, baby sweet baby
Since you've been gone

Listen to me, unknown unknowns
Image takes no shape other than its own

An image that changes the image also changes image itself
As an image elevated into a stadium alters the stadium

As an image elevated to a wing
Is the process of an image coming into being

And *being* is a domestic creature
Cage-free and grass-fed of image-seeing

O white sheet
On the brick wall of a general store

Elevated into the constellations
Baby, I want you to be all mine

Since you've been gone
Since you've been gone

Now listen to me,
Unknown unknowns

Because we love, we are pickled in horrors
All that has suffered is suffering now

All that will suffer has suffered
As an image elevated to its concept

Is an image curdled by its past/future context
Keys left in mailboxes

The radium girls, their cool mint fingers Timex-blue
Chimneys, spires, steam pipes, satellite dishes, equivalent and unconnected

The tollbooth unmanned
Its song of minor traffic violations

Because we love, we conscripted this innocence
Are we strong enough to strike our own matches?

E X H A U S T

EXHAUST blears the sand on the underside of the acacia, the
umber side of the umbrella, the yellow parchment, thistles slicing
the tarpaulin. We drive to a place and perform for it. We clatter in
caravans. With cameras we graft the buffalo to the impala, the dik
dik to the oryx. Our elands spawn hyrax, genet, civet, serval.
Gazelles ignore us. Become contortionists. Consult thesauruses.
Expend their whims, weave, bow. Topi break into couplets, vervets
scrape under crowny tomes. Dusk peels back a sky dark as an
amethyst. In the crust, I spy a warrior. He extends a spear to see
how deep the water, how strong the torrent. A native woman
cradles an unknown object. I'm spooked. So are they.

CHECKS AND BALANCES
HAUNT OUR ORGANS

A pencil break, retirement,
adjacent monuments. As if history
stuttered brothered objects

sunning to be ventilated and released as mud
dries, desires to be brick on all sides. As we wish
to be useful as leaves are new. To be felt

as sun on a rug by a lover's cat. To be silver
deer in moonlight on a hospital lawn
and equally as quick. These things are the same

thing as heaven. Otherwise, the crowd
would be empty space. The camera's shutter
cuts the little gods out of each of us, and tomorrow

when the album splits its pages into anterior
and antecedent, objects will be likened
to spirits again. The odor of cough syrup

on a napkin. Each written confession
further from its transgression but closer to coffee
as the venetian blinds sample the sodium

streetlight in measured portions. The room's
shadows, like sentences, tell it slant. Listen,
someone inside is about to explain

in present tense, as though understanding
context ameliorates rift, as though meaning
adjoins to echo in the operating theater:

the nurse washes his hands again and again,
untangles gold chains of stitches
as a bar code scanner at a checkout releases

my belief in numerology.

There must be a reason why
this dream of the nurse pursues me,

if I could shame its keys to my hand, I would
never misplace them again. I might patent a method
in which digitized bells and whistles apply

myth's adhesive to the instant replay
of my mind in my fist. Like a prizefighter
downed in a corner, the future

isn't what it used to be. Its wet dog trembles
in the autumn wind, its day-glo poplar
curtain parting like the scent from potpourri

that with luck and thrift outlasted
the transplant of its origins. Proof
that hunger endures a body,

then shifts. Our great tectonic love
digitally remastered to stream at a faster frame rate,
and in its gestalt, somehow, I see my nurse

better now that the towers rust together.
Gray light will come and plait the room like a skirt.
I won't recognize dust, even if it asks the right questions.

I won't fast-forward to bring the runner home,
or a distant helicopter spectacle
to the tiny shuffle of envelopes

where a smoke tendril spirals into a peacock's tail
above a rock crystal ashtray. Already, I know
what will remain with me like fuzz

on my knees after I have stooped to retrieve
something he has dropped, like a lancet,
or an atlas, or a drum stick, and I pause

the playback long enough to consider his wrist,
its contiguous pulses, how somewhere in an arctic forest
there is a warm clump of earth for each of us.

G R E E N P O I N T T E R M I N A L M A R K E T

Follow the yellow line to
the yellow weeds in their
yellow ditches: gasoline,
one rosebud match to spark and
burn like a television.

Paranormal glow of the
Citicorp Center, aqua-
marine of a caged parrot.

Ruin is a cultured pearl.

Rain comes as requirement.

Requires we submit to
its loose, fluted memory
fluttering like a receipt

in the incision, human-
colored haze in the hollow
sector. Iron sleeves of drain-
age where pigeons in wire-
less slate skies return to roost,

lucite-winged moths narrowing
beneath sodium streetlamps

dim

as the maples in the park
turn

on—

Sleep without memory, our
ruin.

Past deferred from becoming
passed, from emerging legend
in the foreground of trauma,

ruin itself, traumatic.

Its fingerbone begs us to
unearth its contusions from

corridors of lightning-singed
Christmas holly. Ruin is
forensic, identity
as many forms of erasure

as preservation: coin-toss
distribution of spiders,

dandelions in bluegrass
where bulbs of black brands curl from
milkweed sown in sow-thistle:
waxmyrtle coils, smokestacks

titanium light has cursed
with specificity, each
raw wire, each cinquefoil
chrysanthemum equally
alight in terse, unrehearsed
testimony that marks their
place as *site*.

—from the northern
whirlpool of Spuyten Duyvil
to the southern breach of time-
lapsed barges' haul, the Narrows,
the East River under gold-
leaf, rippling, oil-steeped welt
coal-thick with potential, its
pillars of pyrite, jagged

skyline hazardous with zinc,
cadmium, thallium, lead,
benzene, silver, osmium,
nickel, carbon monoxide,
sulfuric acid, rubber,
asbestos, arsenic and
fiberglass—

—from the open field to the
curtilage, to the tag-pocked
hull, stripped with chemical wash,

from desire to rumor

from dynamite to fiber-
optics, from arson coeval

to vagrant, to armed guard, to
hex, to diode, to copper-
barred bales of synthetic knits,
polyester butterfly
collars, silk crêpe ruching, shirred
crates of marjoram rot

burnt—

In the end, a fly dies as
flies die.

Our rust, not our fear
configures the elements.

Ruin is a misspelled word.

Our ruin comes second-hand,
like clothes.

Radium buried
in an ingrown nail.

Footprints
like neologisms we
cannot reverse.

Ruin is
a cask of flies.

Neither dead
nor alive, the mass.

In the
end, a fly dies as flies die.

When a body moves within
ruin,
the body becomes
the impasse within its core.

The ruin becomes a cask.

The body becomes a cask.

All that becomes,
becomes a
cask.

All that becomes,
becomes
a core.

Ruin is not meant
to be amplified,
though it
is bought and sold as more,
more.

When a body moves within
ruin,
the body becomes
remains.

Not meant to be named,
a body is not a name

for a body is not meant

to be covered.

Ruin is
not memory,
though it steeps
its ward *in memoriam*

more often than not.

Ruin
is *naught* and *knot* and \emptyset ,
as
ruin *should* and *could* and *ought*
and when in the scabbard of

kite and *cot* and *caught*,
is wrought.

Dust filming the lung of a hepafilter. Clotting the blades of a white plastic desk fan. Red lettuce leaf, heirloom tomato. Cloud oil, cider vinegar. Satellite in a stone statuary. Drywall between iron pylons accreted along McCarren Park. Meridians of cathedrals cached under glass atria. Asterisks. Camels along the Dead Sea. Bauhaus. Dried mackerel strung from coarse hemp twine. Green vireo born with one bent wing. Cellular transport. Cubed Styrofoam. Charcoal.

LISTENING FOR EARTHQUAKES
IN A SHADOW ZONE

The moment the brass button
vanishes, the lemniscus
of lemon root turns leitmotif.
A white towel dries on a hook.
In cirrus, sycamores
loaded with minutes. A blue orchard
sinks its anchor and steepes.
A name for a zipper is closed to the soul.
Trapped in a room of red sand. A blue
pill capsule lifted into a train
window becomes a lemon
the way wind in lemongrass harbors
blue light. The way a rifle
smells of pink snow and tobacco.
The way howls affix ravens to
glyphs. Given Lepidoptera, Lepidoptera
dehisce. Given index, a desert
aerially strafed. Given alphabet,
a gray flag of rain, a tenement
strewn through it. In a life,

one pours milk
into a crystal vase, naked
as a number. In a life, pines
devour starlets. Sand
whipped in a hurricane
lamp. Given forgiveness, Lepidoptera.
Given forgiveness, black mulberry
lipstick scrawled
the flight of cranes in a train window.
A church organist pens the word *parasite*
on her wrist. Maples blow
into orange cysts. An autistic
predicts the fall of an ice pick.
By the time words have been liberated,
books will know the absence
of books. Will know white
annuals. Uranium tailings. Bullfrog eye
clotted with maggots. In a life,
a lime, a rivet. A camera
tucked into a spine.

“In *Listening for Earthquakes*, Jasmine Dreame Wagner reveals how ‘terse, unrehearsed’ tunes of phrase turn one’s ear. Wagner’s ear trumpet is attuned to sites of aftermath and decay—the Greenpoint Terminal Market, the V.I. Lenin Palace of Culture and Sport, and the Champion Mill—if not to amplify decomposition, then as observing mechanism, transmitting a palimpsest / transmuting an impasse. Aglow amid the natural world, the remains spring memory, spin mnemonics as recyclic gestures where ‘ruin is *naught* and *knot* and \emptyset .”

E. Tracy Grinnell, author of *Helen: A Fugue*

“With verbal fire and range, these poems move easily between the sensual and abstract planes: ‘loose, fluted memory / fluttering like a receipt / in the incision.’ The incision is mind; the instrument is language. Within the provisional play of words, the depth note of the eternal emerges: ‘all that has suffered is suffering now’; a ‘green vireo born with one bent wing.’ All is at once timeless, sad, and to be celebrated.”

Paul Hoover, author of *Desolation: Souvenir*

“*Listening for Earthquakes* does listen—hard. It also watches, sniffs, tastes, and touches. The result is a series of extended love songs to the natural world, human products, and human-ruined landscapes. You’ll want to spend time with and in this book.”

Kathleen Ossip, author of *The Cold War*

“Wagner’s skeptical romanticism invests in a theory of the image coming to self-consciousness, asking, ‘who will sing the songs // of immanent objects?’ She do, she will, in different voices unfolding bleakly beautiful landscapes as the book progresses toward its rough apotheosis: ‘to describe dance / as curve of pursuit.’”

Joshua Corey, author of *Severance Songs*

Listening for Earthquakes was the runner-up manuscript in the 2011 Caketrain Chapbook Competition, as judged by Rosmarie Waldrop.

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