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Hands Madly Open

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Hands Madly Open

James Anderson

Prison.

I wake to the concrete anger
of a grey cell, its blue steel door.
This cube of cruelly transluzed
and eternal bluish ice. I wake
to the Hate Factory.

I wash my hand and head,
the steel basin mirrors
my dripping, voided face.

I stand barefoot on concrete stained
with visceral shades of premeditated sin. I stand
in grey state-issue boxers
made of moth wings
and longing. I have to laugh
because it's funny how terrified I am.
And because of the concrete
reality and the skin of my feet.
There is no altar in this temple,
only rose petals in the jet engine.

I make coffee then wash my hands
in water tepid as my bones.

Massive and sick
with the vertigo of a single ant
I slump to my plastic chair
weak before this one day awake,
raw tendon-drawn-taut awake,
at the heavy foot of darkness.
A thin shaft of charcoal through my window,

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daylight primes me hard, crowds me
with terminal virus: Life,
this astonishing. I swallow coffee,
I lean back, I close my eyes.
I remember last night I dreamt
I was with Amber Skye.

We were naked
in the ocean,
In my dream,
in language,
things swam below us, our breath
was ink. We exhaled stains
and sank.

I was still in my cell, still in prison, still
stilled, but above us, above the ocean's skin
an albatross turned circles in the grey,
we in its underworld. Light
clashed lemon fins on water's curve.

Amber Skye touched her collarbone,
looked at me with surprise. The sun, she said,
makes our shoulders walnuts
polished smooth in emerald liquid.
But her eyes were pale gold.

Something streamed from the albatross
so clearly from its silent wing,
we below made of shining.
We watched the light move.
We watched each other
watch the light.
A stingray brushed her wrist.

I wake from remembering a dream
to the sound of keys I would never touch.

I stand
I wash my hands, I arrange meticulously
the hygiene products on my shelf.
"Maximum Security" shampoo makes me smile.
I wake from remembering a dream
to the sound of keys I would never touch.

The cell door opens, we each of us
from taloned womb, state-issue
brogans laced tight as nerves,
ease into the cell block.
Downstairs, we gather in a clutch
all fists, braided hair and grease.
We stand together, fallen, American refugees,
citizens of the fourth world.

I love us, I must tell everyone
I FORGIVE THEM.
They will beat me bloody.
I smile and feel the rhythm.

We walk along the fence in single file,
a red-scarred sun anointing razor wire,
crowning cruel snarls in myth and dancing
red light. While eating a bowl of oatmeal
I watch a piece of steel shoved into a man's neck.
We walk back in line, single file,
roiling sun icing razor wire
in sky blood.

Back in my blue cell
I wash my hands, find my desk. I plunge
into belief without faith: I write
paper aircraft, folding them
eloquently into the sun.

I shudder--all the electricity of my body
has left me. I am two bright eyes in a shadow.
Damaged hands drag,
black as rotten sunflowers
across my face, behind my knees
where that soft skin is.

I no longer know
whether what I hold
is pen or blade.

Just keep cutting, I write,
trying to stay human, keep cutting
with cheap state razor blades.
Turn this blue apple into rose petals
here alone in the blue temple of my cell.

Lunch comes at 11:14. The brown paper bag is filthy. I shiver
I am
In deep.

I wash my hands, I open the bag to see green bologna juice has
soaked into the cookies. I cannot wash the food or my nausea.
I flush it all down the steel toilet,
and the swallowing
and the hunger
reminds me.
I don't know of what.

What happens? The light is in pain. Another march to the
chow hall; maybe someone is hurt, maybe I don't remember.
The day milks away. There is blood in the milk, cream
running from sunset's wounding.
Through the Plexiglass archer's slot
of my slender window, I see,
out beyond the fences, solitary
in the relentless attention of absence, of space,
a ginger gold pear cactus,
hands madly open. The night opens.
I shroud my freshly-shaved head. I fall
to the concrete, I fall with my words. We lie there unmoving
on concrete. I feel the stain and think. When I encounter
people I am afraid and ashamed by the galaxies in our eyes. So
I keep secrets: in my pocket the flesh of a very fresh
yellow lemon. I hunger for the light you spend
in reflection; I hunger for colors I alone have words for; I
hunger
for the white eyes of my sleeping daughter.
My silence is
hunger.

If Amber, or Paula, had come today,
the guards would have summoned me from my cage
escorted me along a fence
brought me to visitation, released me
into a mockery of release, to her at a table nervous faced
smelling cleaner and softer than forgiveness
across from me but machined
into some other and brighter cage entire.

We would have sat silent a moment,
clutched to each other by need. "What do you think, Baby,"
would have been the first
and only question, "crucified in a single day, or a lifetime in
prison?" I would have touched her soft
palm reader's map and thought of nails. Holding a book
not reading it, I am

in my cell, face to the wall, eyes
dark as fresh bruises my body
like a spider's web: all sense
and drawn out
delicate white genius.
I get up a last time
to wash my hands.

I lie back down,
deep down,
to suffocate
in air, sweetly, because the air is honey made of glass that
suddenly
eats itself in flame.