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Poetry Chapbook: Red Light Laughter

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RED LIGHT LAUGHTER

Poetry by Marcus Lloyd Rummell
for my Family, all of them, & especially Maynard
“I am nobody; I have nothing to do with explosions.”
—Sylvia Plath, “Tulips”
**CONTENTS**

1 Invitation:  
2 See (Char [ char How])  
6 Alba  
7 After The Key Turns, After The Door Groans  
8 *La Dame Du Temps Jadis*  
10 For Maynard, My Dog  
11 The Fall  
12 Within The Unkempt Kudzu  
   By A Garden Full Of Water  
13 Summer  
15 Whiskey  
16 The Horse Race  
18 Elegy For Maynard, My Dog  
20 Loafer’s Haiku  
21 For Terrence  
22 Now I Am Sure  
23 Nature Poem  
24 Portrait  
27 One Or Two Questions  
28 *Ars Poetica* Act One, Scene One  
30 o  
37 Notes
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INVOCATION:

how to conjure
  that mumbled holiness
I.

February.

the grave? next door, a mortal (foggy comfort: can’t keep its body).

the soul? some old poet howls, a ghost! the cold churchbell smokes and hums false to the clock while old Hearts disinter air.

II.

So ?

if I live:

drawers crammed, documents, letters. will someone’s hair hide my secrets? a cat amid corpses.

grave, come out to feed. raven, rack
crushed roses to dust.

stop.

is slow, heavy weather the fruit of glum indifference? ...

Hereafter, no more. circle, read, omit—
sing only to the rays of setting suns.
III.

I’m a young man.

The alchemist, purge the impure from blood; revive sick flesh through blood.

IV.

the sun pours down daylight.

come lunging through the air;

beat and bump against

the bars,

the basements.

all at once bells break loose to heaven,

like home. no one left.

the end.

—And i, ears with drums,

parade in soul,

weep, and read
t his black flag.
in the morning my ghost folds his sheets

he finds holes where his eyes used to be
& finds air in his fingers & toes

there are stains
there are twenty cold stains

i sang songs to my garden at night

in a dream syncopated with rose
& with lily each note became flame
now extinguished by day & its sun

of cold blood of cold air
in the light
i am nothing a drowned symphony

And they are gone: aye ages long ago
These lovers fled away into the storm.

the dream ended. last image before eyes
opened to find you changed, chill, & pallid:
a single beam of light born of black air.

eyes open: the sun, easy with mourning,
mumbles through the windowpane, “madeline,
return to sleep. you both were closer then.”

like a drunken guard he leers, mouthing clouds.
i turn, eyes emptying & ears waiting
for warm, dreamy silence—only to hear
coming day, its one hundred darkened sounds.
where is the caress that used to simmer
between you & i
our spring lips pursed
each for the warmth of the other?

before
the rainbow had been crushed
into a sky of winter slate
you offered a flower’s bud
pink & purple-tipped.

you’d rest it
gently on my navel’s cusp
lighter
than all the clouds that i could point
out with dumb & pallid hands.

if only a single finger would grow
red with loud heat
linger & arouse
itself to the ruddy clamor of the world.

to touch
& be touched
not by a three-months’ snow
but folds upon folds of delicate feathers
velvet
like the monarch’s wing
wild
as its way among the milkweed.

with unconscious sleep-heavy hands i stand
before the field of hacked & whitened stems.
the wind-ravaged flowers left unblossomed
palpitate against a fallow ground.

i see half a petal
twitching
under the stony sky.
i take it up
& grind its true grit between my teeth.
FOR MAYNARD, MY DOG

the moonlight was a pandemonium
of crackling twigs twigs in face in hair in eyes
they scraped the skin but healed it too in hair
they gave me antlers eyes a path of powder
enclosed above by hanging branch the moon

& i am ten again coyote barks
in curtained night the dog gets up but slow
he drinks what’s in the water dish & dreams
of rivers bounding deer for quiet ease
& windless is it now the blackened sky

THE FALL

in the dusky sun i heard light laughter
it was you & your now obscured light laughter

we weren’t meant to meet we did
on a bench beneath a robin’s brief red light laughter

can a “can i sit here” come to anything after all
i ask you fallen leaf lover should we dread light laughter

& the autumn after will we fall like the leaves that always lie best
these questions we wondered without quivered light laughter

was i a circle traced haphazard
was marcus i just slurred light laughter
WITHIN THE UNKEMPT KUDZU
BY A GARDEN FULL OF WATER

the strawberry you’ve plucked bounces upon my tongue.
in liquid sugar-like death (& i drunk & still drinking),
the berry explodes. i am nobody,
loosed by its flood of dizzy wine.

in liquid, like sugar, i’m drunk. & still drinking
the berry, supple, & quivering calm
is loosed by its flood of dizzy wine.
i am a pine cone leaning toward the liquor

of the berry supple & quivering calm.
the berry explodes & i am nobody.
i am a pine cone, leaning forward to lick her,
the strawberry. you, plucked, bounce upon my tongue,

within the unkempt kudzu by a garden full of water.

SUMMER

I.

My clock
& i
exchange
breath for
breath. In,
out. Tick,
tock.

If not
for some
distant
midnight
footsteps,
we would
produce
monotonous sound.

We have become the single chrysalis
while caterpillars wet dream into golden blankets.

II.

In the beginning of spring,
it rained every day,
& the moon—

the moon that reflected white sun
off bumblebee, lily,
lily lit upon &
lily alighting,
ponds of electric pollen

—would split like liquid birth.

III.

I can hear the hands of my bronzed clock
beginning to shake & shudder

as they click to realize what is now faceless—
to what is vibrating instead

to the night’s watery golden soles,
which skip only to the waxing tide.

Some impossible bell
hollow
constant

peals violently as the censer’s smoky clefs
twine
the bleeding cough

What does not change is
noting this dead ember
becoming as gray as the weightless morning?

What does not change is
the sudden bell
quaking &
forever clamorous
tumultuous

that comes to mute some faint crackling flame.

What does not change, is.

WHISKEY
THE HORSE RACE

I.

in the dusk, at the finish line.
in place is the pale palomino horse.
in place the horse is running.
in place the pale palomino horse is running &
the horse that is running is a pale palomino.

the horse shrieks

in ragged gasps as its dusty hoof
carves into its own eye socket. bone
grinds bone. blood streams muddy
over a grey-yellow coat.

a mutilated cadence, returning, to begin

II.

in the dusk, at the finish line.
in place is the pale palomino horse.
in place the horse is running.
in place the pale palomino horse is running &
the horse that is running is a pale palomino.
you’re running running
through woods becoming whiter
whiter with ringing

The gentlest thing in the world
overcomes the hardest thing in the world.

you’re drinking water
from streams cooler than tin bowls
cardinals rest here

That which has no substance
enters where there is no space.

spring air pets you lulls
you into dream the winds are
all playful whistles

This shows the value of non-action.

soft as feathers your
wrinkled face as your white paws
fall & lift lighter

Teaching without words,
performing without actions:

when the black crow caws
i hear the kitchen tiles they
click under your claws

that is the Master’s way.
LOAFTER’S HAIKU

snowflake drifts to nose
  simultaneous
  crystals like water balloons pop
  the summer storm pours

with nose drifting to snow
  a hooded child sits

FOR TERRENCE

caterpillar, i raise the conch to your ear
  & send you sailing on a brass, beached leaflet.
  as you glide by gnarled oak,

  their grandmother fingers stretch towards touch.
  with the cadence of trees, the leaflet sparks
  igniting in song & fluid word.

  you explode into orange, match-tipped wings,
  unhinging in the daytime sun.
NOW I AM SURE

that my mother is the red-winged blackbird
stitching her nest from dried summer grass
lashed to cattails. she darts across the salty marsh,
birthing color with each beat of tender blood-wing,
the ruffled shudder of her small, yellow stripe.
she calls to me, her egg cradled
& rocking against two others, all speckled with brown.
loosened by my moving, a grassy leaf
alights, hardly audible, on the muddy field below;
a rivulet’s trickle carries the leaf away.
today i will be born, bloody, but singing still.

NATURE POEM

i sit on the curb, too close
to a friend whose eyes drip liquid wax
that leave me scarred, unable to know her.
it is only then that i see it:
half the worm writhing,
the other half
limp & lifeless.
the miniature pink body
is smashed into the pavement, the crushed
ends are wet, purple, & blue.
my friend’s eyes dry, becoming candles—
she & i are not such complicated things.
My mother is sick. She has pneumonia. She coughs & I hear her lungs tear & flood, the crackle of mucus, waves. My brother, who is nineteen, isn’t here. His room, empty, looms like a shadow. My other brother, ten, isn’t ill, but pretends. He gets me a Hot Pocket; my mother, a bagel with orange cheese. Tonight he’ll wedge fingers down his throat for two hours until the Pop Tart he’s eaten for dinner returns as yellow vomit. When his stomach is empty he’ll throw up green phlegm & finally blood. He just wants us to care, like he does.

I want to crawl inside the mouth of the microwave.

—

I find my father, asleep on the couch. His black Jack Daniels t-shirt is bunched above his belly, patched from his recent herniorrhaphy. The bandage is specked with dried, orange blood.

He’s woken by my wandering into his house. Bleary-eyed, he throws off his blanket & begins the story behind his “procedure”: how the whole thing took only two hours; how the doctors had to peel back the skin of his swollen belly button; how they had to pack all his guts back in, insert a mesh metal plate, & sew him back up. When he finishes, he drives up the road to his girlfriend’s house. Before he leaves he tells me how she needs help, she’s spackling a wall. I steal two of his oxycodone, swallow them, & begin to think of how to pack everything I own into a pickup truck, which I don’t yet have the money to buy. I shouldn’t have taken those painkillers. I should have sold them to friends & kept the cash, taken whatever I could get. I want to be washed in beer & flammable liquids.

—

Now I’m alone in my dorm room, big enough for a bed, myself, & little else. The walls need paint, a new color; they are like the last walls.
someone in a pale, paisley gown would see. They are a sickly, lifeless mint, yet somehow soothing. Scotch-taped to one wall is the drawing, made a year ago by my four-year-old cousin. My skin has been colored orange. Each stroke of marker looks like a bloody scratch, while my hair is ten dead & fallen leaves. My head is an uneven circle; my nose a bullet hole. She has drawn my left eye larger than the right, & my thin, crooked lips are pursed. The pupils of each eye are little more than orange dots. My pupils could be miniature portraits, myself in my own eyes. I look like the sun, forever staring at what must die.

—

I should have painted my own portrait, silky like the sheen of a panther bathed in plum light – purple like the pit, bubbling within the peach.

ONE OR TWO QUESTIONS

to V.P.P.

what’s Ezra Pound’s worst advice

if there were a sleepy fire in yr living stanza

read seeds not twigs

would you snuff it out entirely or let its rhyme go free

or make it new?
ARS POETICA ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

[Pome sits center stage appearing “incomplete.”
His robes slowly flower budding orange from his nipples.

Enter the Future a pink soap bubble floating listless & aloft the vaulted ceiling.]

POME [eyes closed]:
The audience is no longer Concerned with what will happen.

[The Past a black diamond is rolled across the stage.
stopped near the edge of the bubbles’s shadow

The ringing of soft bells can be heard
A bamboo flute five finger-holed falls into Pome’s lap.]

POME [eyes still closed]:
The audience is no longer Concerned with what has happened.

[Behind Pome curtain by orange curtain begins to pull away revealing the Present

presenting itself as the smallest gift tucked between a soapy globe & a mountain.]

POME [beholding only empty seats before him discovers the flute]:
The cricket clicks its
Seven sycamore-like notes.
Violet starlings perch.

Seven wonder-filled seconds?
Seven wonder-filled seconds.
pillar, i raise
& send you on:
  glide by!

  i etch to touch
the cadence of trees, the

ode to chipped wing
time.


15 WHISKEY: See also Shepard’s Tone.


Sprang from the fertile earth of Hamden.  
He was banished to the barren lands of Naugatuck,  
For his repeated acts of silver-bestial delinquency  
& then some shit about wandering the Earth.  
He is 21 years old.  

—Conor Coleman
April 2010.

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