MONKEY’S NEST

by

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ABSTRACT

A monkey’s nest is generally a transitory affair; a hammock of branches bent for the night and then abandoned. The thesis title is borrowed from both this nomadic event and from the Monkey’s Nest neighborhood which sprang up in Youngstown, Ohio in the late nineteenth century as a result of the boom in the steel industry. Though no longer residential, Monkey’s Nest was once the place where each new wave of immigrants first splashed before beaching themselves in one of the more prosperous neighborhoods. This collection of poems explores the ocean of circumstance that plays into the transitory nature of both people and place.
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Refugees
Tornado in the news
as her one hand is wiping wetness into jeans. In blue cropped top and pony tail her cell words fly in the electric wind. While her young son says not to concave/vetion currents causing the weather to blow; the levies to break over New Orleans where he woke eyewitness to the news, as a wind god in white Keds slam dunked into the continent — 30 love. Spun him all English. Spit him out, like Yazoo City, someplace else.
Expulsion:
from a low beach chair
(After the Expulsion from the Garden of Eden by Masaccio)

Ankle-deep in a turtle pool
beer half empty in the grass.

Sunset coming on like red angels
riding in for the expulsion.

I close my book and stand
under a billowing mountain of cloud.

One great cumulus knee plows
into the last shanks of sunlight

and forces my bare footed exile
from this little spit of Eden.
Refugees

Urban trouble doesn’t favor the knock; instead it kicks at the metal face of your front screen door three times in a row before your smacked-out neighbor starts wailing; that you gotta open up; gotta take her kids cause their lives are in danger from an alpha male who’s out there somewhere; swinging. And when he gets back it’ll ALL connect. And you know she didn’t sign up for this, would never have come and No, you can’t call the cops cause when that man shows up with her car she’s gonna get right in and drive. Night and day. She’s gonna make her way, home, to Arizona. And you wonder, is that before or after she comes back for the kids, as they start to roll past you like fog; ready to lift, looking to settle.
Fog

Clock on the dash reads
7:58 digital green.
Just 3 minutes fast.

All my past hurrying
slowed when my father’s
illness crept in

(like this low fog
burying the bulk of the park
all but the nearest

stranded avenue of trees)

and erased almost to white
each and every landmark
on my commute.
Do we know what we mean
I yam what I yam, dying with our boots on, a baker’s dozen, Queen Anne’s Lace, Natalie Wood, quantum leap, (ABEE, C D goldfish), dressed to kill, loose cannons, Plantagenet, more than we can chew, E=mc, (L! EM, N, O goldfish), fist a cuffs, push to shove, purple prose, people eaters, Scot free, draw a blank, band wagon, (Yes A R!), poems lovely as a tree?
I’ve heard that Big Horn can disappear into the side of a mountain like smoke

I disappeared like that once. Wilmington Delaware, summer of 66.

Hard to imagine, I was one of seven kids; three to a room

and solitude was a thing of legend – so anyway one day

I crawled into a large cardboard box. Slid back into the shadow side, tucked

my knees up under my chin and poof I was gone. Nothing left. Like a ring of milk.
Toward a Break Down

Late at night on 79
and the car breaks down
under a moon that’s dogging
its way toward dawn.

A strange sound grates over
rock and your mind begins
to draw things out one wet
blade of grass at a time.

One dark berm falling away
from the road. One naked branch
of a bush.Bushes in the wake a wood.
Woods leaving at the edge of a field.

Fields creeping over a landscape
one continent drawn into the next
and then it all just comes to a crawl
under the weight of that room
Bog Bodies

We are the Jackdaw — or what’s stuck in its throat
is our monologue, dialogue and soliloquy.
Sentence by sentence
our last meal reads

of buttermilk and whey.

We were the accidents — waiting to happen.
The unfortunates, the fire, the famine, the flood.
Our offal was opened
to omens

wordless as rope.

We are the votive — waxy with sleep
Peat-flat and tannic with acid red hair.
We are the rabbit’s foot
rigging your world

of milk and honey.
Year

of the Tiger’s Eve and authentic Qin Dynasty fashions rehash their reign of silk across the stage. Pearl scrims, that were designed to obscure, dangle from boxy headgear and begin the slow rotation of emperor red, embroidered with gold and brocade. On the runway history walks, wrapped in an impossibly long river of sleeve. A man yawns into his hand and closes his eyes to this annual and infinite wave that unceremoniously beached him here.
Though the origin of the name is unclear, Monkey’s Nest was the name of a particular neighborhood in the boom-time of steel operations in Youngstown, Ohio. This area was typically inhabited by the first wave of each new immigrant population. The original Monkey’s Nest neighborhood is in what is currently called the Riverbend Area. The old neighborhood, homes and streets, were removed in a wave of urban renewal. That area of urban renewal is now unrecognizable as such and suffers the same decline as the city at large. In this section I have written poems that refer to both the Monkey’s Nest location in particular and to the city in general.
Polka

Breathless as a barb tang I’m spinning backward down Elm past the washed out sign of Lucy’s Tropical Fish. Quick as a half-step I’m back in her shop when the aqua boxes are brimming with life, packed tight as a dance hall and the boys in the band are playing. It’s a barrel of fun and they make out alright.
Babble

Monkey’s Nest is a run-a-way. 
A circus orphan

left to the trees. 
I’ve read it said that it happened

*just so.* Innocent
as Friday fish, but I think maybe

it was more Kipling than that. More
gray or greasy. Itchy as an Old World

monkey knuckling the immigrants
as they waved their god dags

and howled their shaloms, 
their dobriy dens and their Guten Tags.
Brier Hill

Tall grass crowds the house.
Screens on the porch swing akimbo
and a curtain pulled up on
something inside – hangs half open
to the goblin roar of morning
belching out of the valley
on box cars.
Metal over iron

still splits the air
like wood even this far
up from the brown fields
of the old mill works.
Antediluvian

The Wick/Hirshberg Mansion, 260 Tod, is for sale. That is to say it was the Wick Mansion first and then the Hirshbergs moved in after. But that was a while ago and since they were about the same in rich and powerful; we might as well lump them together. Actually it could be called Wick/Hirshberg/Hartzell and who knows who after that. Right now it might be, Nate. The advert says I can call him at 330-747-9323 about this:

6 bedroom (2 of them master) home. It’s got 3 full and 2 half baths, a library, family room, music room, and wine cellar. 2 built-in china cabinets, closets of cedar, French doors, fabulous molding and floors of marble, cherry and oak. It also has 5 fire-places and some bad ass hinges (I’ve taken the virtual tour). There are 2 staircases inside and 1 out;

for the servants. Which is, of course, to say, that it was built well before the flood.
Matins

to the jigsaw of blue
shadows spilled across
silver white lawns

and to the green Alpha and
Omega Baptist Church van
shuttling a hue of its own
Monkey’s Nest

I. Mama and Papa

Papa came, like everyone, by boat.

Mama, the second wife (you tell me figuring)
68 years since she died.

II. Lenore

Not any one day but slowly Lenore lay down under sheets brittle as a china doll

Beautiful Lenore, you slept with her story until the soft click of her lids as they close.

III. Marv

Brother Marv doesn’t want you in the steel mills. Sends letters home from war you won’t obey to leave.

Don’t worry Brother Marv they put separate lavs in for the ladies and besides she buys for you a Stetson and an old now busted black and white TV.

IV. Rhoda and Claire

Sometimes when I catch you at your evening paper, I feel like Rhoda or Claire bursting into the room.
Just for that moment before I sit down

before that rotogravure world goes away.
Back when your hair was still gold, the city
still boom and the blast
bright over the monkey’s nest.
Furnace Town

Rain falls on the ghosts
of trees that fell to the farm.
Falls on a furnace town

too long out of blast.
Darkens the face
of a goliath old sycamore

and runs a course
down the broken swing chain
hanging in its branches.

This scene is lit
by a sudden flash of light.
Bossed by a river of time.
Lullaby and goodnight
now. No more stories here or feet on stair. Just the half-life of shadows that inked the inside first then swam like evening to the rest. Pried the doors and broke the windows. Flew curtains, for a while, like guardian angels into the fray. Then stopped.
After the last big snow
the world was magic. Fragile as a glass slipper. I shot a roll of twenty-four and got everything. The footmen, the horses, the carriage. What I got back was one minute after midnight. All of it running white into white into white. But you can’t blame me for trying to take this sad city out for a waltz. For wanting to sweep her off my feet, for a while.
Circa
Reverend Reid
circa 1940

Full of fire and brimstone, I’m told, you were a nuisance. Worse than a cat under foot. You and Mary were “the renters” in my great grandmother’s dining room — like a couple of roll top desks. Mary couldn’t quite get over the carriage and always called your car the rig. One of you lived to see the other laid out in the parlor and would have foreseen your end as the same. You kept a journal — long gone. And the only remembered sentence left of your life (18 for supper today — this can’t keep up much longer) tells a story with ribs. But not much to stick to.
Golden Rooster

Dawn steps heel first
to the horizon

pulling garments
of mid air

from a waking sky
where blue brushes in

like an attendant god
who lifts the curtain

to flight of golden rooster
above Buddha green.
Radio My Ear
(After William Kentridge’s Weighing and Wanting, Drawings for Projection)

Bob and sinker
miles away from
ocean plover’s edge.
From rhythmic Graves.
Listen again for
wave mike sound.
Radio my ear
to the ham
where rifling is tragic
music and static.
Comes up short.
Somewhere line
won’t reel me in
to the ocean of mean.
All ears, listening.
Realize posture
says I’m lost
in the landscape.
Rook on a map, will
feel my way by Ouija
or some shakes
at the eight ball
with no and then
ask again
swimming to the surface.
How can the oceans
hear us anyway?
The Geppetto Project

I of wood
(wood wood wire wood wire &
a small amount of hardware for rudimentary hinges at my elbows and wrists woooooooooo ankles and oooooooooooooo knees do ooooooooooooooo bend a ooooooooooooooo bit but oooooooooooooo not too ooooooooooo mu ch) oooooooood must wait for the artist to give me meaning of motion. Motion & & meaning have dried in my joints but when I feel the graphite sap of life come run running liquid back into my grain it feels oh so timber
spilling fractals
(after Pollock)

dowitcher
be
Idam
enchantment
cant

napery
laccolith
cervix
spit

bombazine
cuneate
reverberate

quit
String of Pearls

Between dark and dawn, I’m usually up and can be found ghosting the periphery of my windows.

Later, I dress and go out with the dog. Not far from home there’s a broken square of sidewalk, heaved up and balancing on a large root.

Step on it and you’ll sway somewhere between up and down. Once, I dreamed that I lived in a bungalow on the street of the balancing sidewalk. The small house was a stranger to me, as strange as the husband who, for dream reasons of his own, bent and kissed me; forcing a string of pearl like spit bubbles through my parted lips. I remember it, how it felt, whenever I think of the balancing sidewalk, the dream real estate, the here and there.
Glacial Moraine

I live in Spain. In a second floor flat – or at least that’s what I tell myself every time I take the stairs.

I live in Post-Columbian Ohio but dream of large Mayan-style fists flying up behind people and poking them — the index finger pointing out like a nose. I dream of wet hair and water spiders on the wall of the Brandywine Race. I arrive late. When I hear the word ‘hornet’ I see the ominous shadow of black abdomens suspended behind sheer curtains. I draw back the curtain and see their papery nest. I sleep on the four-poster. I wake to a rainy day at the lake. I run my hand over the banister and look down into the living room. See a square glass dish full of black rosaries. I stop in my tracks to watch Abe feeding ducks at the swamp. Bucket to hand; broadcasting corn at the foot of a glacial moraine. He’s on thin ice. I can’t watch. I wander around his house; pass three white angels, they are fixed as still music playing. I lift three gold bells from this shelf. The world is ringing clear and confused.
“A Far Province”  
(After a Chikky Onon Painting)  

cast at the edge of a dream  
needle green mimosa leaves spring  
from a hundred burst of blossoms – white  

four sister islands drift through fog of lake  
their silk gray trees swim in pale reflection  
and deed of symmetry – close as oars  

some clear the surface while others deep  
in the row of motion, blur in memory  
grown faint as that far line of mountains – brushed with sleep  

Title of the painting in English translation – For Haiku Poems in Basho’s “Narrow Road to a Far Province.” The poem goes as follows:  
“In Kisakata’s rain/mimosas droop/like fair His-shin/who languished with love’s pain”
Hyena man come

Hyena man come
baboon too.
Nigerian voodoo stops in middle of Bichi road
and welcomes audience.
Welcomes hyena to snatch red meat held between teeth.
Everybody near in harm’s way.

A long way
away from here. Nigerian suns come
up hot and bite down slow with long yellow teeth.
Hyena eyes shine out of dark bush by multiplying twos.
Newspaper reads one story or another to world audience
that hyena man is robber, on Bichi road.

Some hyena man right now on the road
to jail. This is the way
it goes, hostage or audience
held captive when the hyena man come
with chain that holds humans away from great animal teeth.
Money thrown first by ones and then twos.

Some decide to
call it intimidation. Call authorities. Road
to trouble follows quick as carnivore teeth.
Gun shots follow wild trajectories, find way
to officers and animals. Come
dust settle, several have lost their audience
with the living.

Audience
and animal subject to
tranquilizing voodoo power where clarity never quite comes.
Dust never settles on human road.
Life is always the way
of carnivore teeth.

Long hyena teeth
and great ape canines charm local audience.
Or is it the another way
around? Maybe hyena man chained to bush and voodoo of Bichi road. Promise of red meat and money to come.
progression of etc.

Keep on going was Ward Minor’s way of saying etc.
etc. that gradual extension of everything keep on going.
Ward said it so often that it came to replace the pause
at the end of his every breath. North American Indians keep on going
built the scaffolding of their universe on poem words keep on going that grew,
as poem words will, into the rungs of song. Ward’s lectures grew they opened
like a swinging door keep on going that led less to the real
than the myriad of the possible
to and away

keep on going this story begins
away from but it’s leading up to and leaning over
a small hole in an otherwise perfectly smooth keep on going
square of cement. The hole is filled, rather neatly, with gravel
which could soon, if left unattended, mean
moss, grass, grain of a seed tree keep on going
To Ward twenty-five years ago, now and/or later
hello from one of the many, many
progressions, etc.
Breakfast

Stick legs in blue shorts
you’re the living culmination of lines.

Just like a billion other replicas
lurching toward breakfast

you look like the ones who awoke
with the advent of grasses.

Who leapt from the trees and combed
the savannah with a tenacity kindled

by the sticks of hunger. You with your
slim figure are a ringer for that bronze

by Kentridge. Armless and balancing
a bundle of sticks on its head, its got the lines

of a biped with the deeper encryption
of an earnest stomach caught in mid stride.
Prayer

Save the white elephants
or what’s left of them, anyway.

Save the nail pegged pot holder loom
the irregular splash of afghans

and cupboards that open to an avalanche
of mismatched tableware.

Please, lead us away from perfection.
Help us to see it all wrong.
Uncle

Stoking your pipe
after the axis cried uncle

and the deuces went wild, wild
for the alpha males

striding back home
out of the war.

Unconscious as aces
betting on a future

your free hand was set
ready for the cards.
Balance Check

_The Sheriff has shuffled my deck all week._ Well Cornelius Eddy I’ve been shuffling this deck since the first heavy snow; the first bitter cold. Since I stumbled on the ancient monks of Skellig Michael; wearing a smooth path into the stone face of their ocean crag. Every hem-shadowed foothold leading them away from the mortal world; every balance check over the precipice, closer to the mind of god. I’ve been shuffling through that color of solitude. Like this sand and ocher line of sycamores muffled by the white of snow. The pink dawn slowing into the gray sky, the foggy suspiration of a single witness, rising.
Sgt. Oz on a Bender

The man
behind the curtain
is two.
His split
personality
wears complete
indifference
to whether
left is right
back is
forward
all your calls
and dissolves
before the cue
to two-step
in reverse
to unwind
every revolution
every oxbow
fork and
undulation
finally
to concede
the feet
were bare
but Paul
was never
ever dead.
circa

lucky that way – we
came after the Pleistocene
all ease and politeness

imagine feet running
with flares, where headlights now un-
zip the darkest night

smaller version of me
stood still as old fingers shook dry
white rags from my hair
Punk Moons
motoring along
in the game of life, bunch of
stray pegs in my car
April

odd as a new kid
spring lightning comes dragging her
rumbling wagon behind

mile high drones advance
slow as a Sunday drive bomb
mud brick homes below

late spring frost sends me
out to young tree covering
and uncovering

Passover drawers
opened and junked glass at back
door a brick says it all
stone moors an Irish lake
where ancient kings still knuckle
walk the ruins
Di’a·ry. n. 1. litany (slash) letter storm 2. where buffaloes roam 3. here the caldera.
lunch

monkey mouth  I bite
purple orchid pedals
with my great ape teeth

macy’s manhattan
we drink wine and spilt four ways
godzilla desert
Sifu says we are
alkaline and acid, east and west
we are a compass rose.
red

fabric of crew-cut
red – on davenport between
two windows, napping.

red sun rises as
full moon sets, woodpecker sounds
d-d-daybreak in the trees
fire hole river, where else
would red dragon flies skim, blur
into flame up stream
Words

lock tumbles in car
door, fly buzzes my ear - new
haiku coming?

yellow grease pen
makes gritty sound marking
angle iron

rosaries beads & brown sack
on sandal bare feet, you can hear
the Decalogue coming

man in white shirt sits
reading in rain  under slick
bivouac of words
ohio

once glossy red and blue
mail pouch now shrinks like a tattoo
into the basic gray of the barn

ohio farm paint
peeling red truck sinking in
to a sea of green
fiddle sails in dress
of shadow as lover’s waltz
across wooden floor
punk moons orbit
the lilac – buzz out quick or
hang in low throttle
Satellite

Orion strides over porch
in belt three stars wide. His saber
clears at three steps down.

Venus rises like
some drawn-up cowboy’s cigar.
A needle at the horizon.

Sputnik fades in the
no-zone – Tranquility Base
a wet dream away.
Zoo

dog runs the lead at
dawn, four legs and full moon spread
out across the lawn

bully stray spotted
marauding one block up – me
I hightail it for home

drunk lifting weights spells
t-r-o-u-b-l-e – I lay awake late
all night listening

rabbits don’t chase each
other around garbage cans
squealing like possums
winter

empty footprints weave
out to a grave then double back
grief, the old soft shoe

snow so deep we tunneled
right off the banister  crawled in
and levitated there
in the final hours
something little was said
about the weather