

Shawn Nocher

Vernal Communion

He relies on her to save him. But every time he pumps a dream into his arm he is disappointed in her again. He is squatting at the edge of a muddy pond. The sun is warm, the water still except for the squiggling at the edges. In this dream place, words are things he has a feeling for, but no mastery over. They wiggle in and out of his brain but are especially slippery when he has much to say. He cannot name the flagellates at the water's edge, but he would like to hold them in his hand, feel the tickle of them. He has all the time in the world, time to watch them change into another creature wholly unlike what they are now—would like to know the magic of it. The spring pond is an alphabet soup of lowercase frogs.

Oh, she would have something to say about this. She'd be angry, maybe even *herstorical*. He can find this word because it is theirs. He made it up the first time she screeched. Enough is enough!

When he rose from their bed in the early morning, the taste of her still in his mouth, he had been surprised by the bumping up of another longing. It hadn't occurred to him at all to want for anything other than the slip of her skin against his. Until it did.

When he texted his guy, there was a strange satisfaction that came from the act of sliding the phone from his pocket, all the while watching the back of her through the crack in the bathroom door. She had a baby shower to go to, a luncheon in the city. When she came from the bathroom, he had tucked the phone in his pocket, smiled at her, at the blue of the dress she wore that changed the color of her eyes, and she swirled her back to him. Wordlessly asking him to run the zipper. The fine line of her spine that had curled to him the night before disappearing beneath its track.



He isn't bothered by his inability to name the things around him, the crispy-creamy spirals that slime the muddy banks, the jeweled wing-broaches that dip and tickle the surface of the looking glass, the arrowheads that dart the sky. He is confused by this failing, but not alarmed. He thinks if he tried harder, if he were so inclined, he could dig the words out, shiny them up and hang them precisely in the sky—but why bother, when he is just as happy—happier, in fact—with the raw feel of them.

Long time no see, said his guy. He wanted to tell him it's been sixty-seven days, sixty-seven goddamn days and isn't that enough? But his brain quickened. With so much time in between, he has forgotten the ruin of it all. Thinks instead that this is the reward for his efforts. He has tamed the beast and will ride the swell of it. And at the end of the day, he will stable the monster. Another unfettered flight in the books. That was the plan.

Here comes the willow, her dress so blue it fades into the sky and he wonders if she is only the pigment of his imagination. She is pounding through the furrows, throws up the subjects at her feet so that she moves in a cloud of animation, sending up scatters of the words he tastes and swallows, flutterflies and glasslippers and a single fat pheasant that rises in a clump, spreads its cloak and swifts low across the field.

He has a sudden need to be lower to the ground, lower than the squat he is in allows. Deep in the earth. Why, she asks. It is a herstorical question that she will ask again and again until it sounds like one long word, like the incessant night-barking of a dog that becomes a howl. And still, on this sunny day that he has ridden, the moon hangs, unfazed, somewhere.

If he had words right now, he would explain to her the draw of the ritual, the anticipation that he had savored, driving home slowly, parking the truck so perfectly in the ruts of last night's rain that it looked like he had never left. The way the heat crept up the spoon, the pumping of his tired veins which, by the way, didn't look so bad anymore.



The beast has dumped him to the ground. His mouth is filling with the coppery taste of earth.

If he could dig out the sorrowing language, he would ask again for forgiveness between the two of them, and he knows the graveyard feeling of it, but cannot uncover the words. It is only a too-late place. He would ask her to sit, wordlessly, in the too-late place with him. Suffer the feudality of his request.