

I N V O C A T I O N

So I arrive out of breath and I'll word below a whisper throughout the here and now, the mobile here and the disappearing now, and I'll pray, invoking a version of myself that is more than myself, to be worthy of the now that is gone and the here that is coming, the past heres and the approaching nows, locomotives out of the temporal landscape, hauling memories and aspirations, fantast and nostalgia.

I ask for guidance away from the shadows of metaphor into the open sunlight of observation, away from self-removal toward the abiding self, not one of denial but of availability. I pray for awareness of all of history, every tick of every clock, every terrible moment and every glorious breath, mysteriums and tremendums, omnipresence without omniscience, a fly on the wall and the atoms of the fly and the spaces within the atoms of the fly, every angle upon every action, every clarification of every thought, with the specific influence of boundless limitation. I believe in love despite it all, the whole horror, hate and rape and torture and negligence and banality and entitlement. Love endures as renewable energy. That's obvious. Hate endures as renewable energy. That's obvious. I pray for love and hate, for contrast clear of dichotomy; I pray for the open and shut, the one and the zero, the there and then. And then, there where I will flounder, flounder as I must, I pray for water attributes, for the grace of words to build beyond my carpentry, structures like trees, structures like clouds, structures like the wiring of mind.

When I pray, as now I pray, I pray to paradox, the harmony of chaos, not to energy or truth or matter, truth magnified to itself or truth magnified away from itself, energy and matter indistinguishable, the quandary of discernment; I pray for the humility of limited scope. If I can't know everything, grant me a tour of creation so I can comprehend and accept my place, my private vantage. Our world is a trainwreck of collaborative effort, the rumble of mortal ambition gone silent, the one and the zero without the two or the void, the momentous lift of downtrodden whimsy, the splendid apprehension of self in other, the softer visage; I pray for electric failure and the restoration of the wick. I pray for absolute control over absolutely nothing, the fearlessness of driftwood. I pray for a cessation of all prayers, the grand finale of amens, the clogging of the leaving aisles toward penetrating shine, the oxygen of individuality. Life spreads itself across our experience as the aftermath of birth, the aftersound of effort, the afterimage of desire, the aftertaste of violence. We possess the power to eradicate potential, the awesome press of uncare, and I pray for the shelter of devotion, devotion that raises the wind and develops the roof; we await the rising of the wind with the bridefulness of our pulse, the carnal knowledge of differentiation, wind from blown will, we are the train even as we are the bridge over the gulch. Analogy is suspect, projection is lord, nostalgia is prostitute, the unfolding moment is check, memory is mate.

To whom I pray, to whom it may concern, to whom concerns me, and of whom my concerns are mine, I pray, when I pray, because I

believe I'm more than myself. I suspect my voice, when silenced, will stay silent. I yearn for a voice not yet silenced. I want a voice not yet too amusing, not yet unamused. I pray for a muse as I muse on prayer, prayer to paradox, prayer to one of the gods, prayer to the one God, prayer to nature, prayer to self. A prayer for me and mine, for you and yours, for every one of them and every one of theirs. We, ours, all of us, in the unleashed now.

Our nation, our fleeting nation, fleeting like all nations upon this planet, our blue home, fleeting like all planets, all galaxies, our milky confluence of lights, this fleeting heart of mine, forty times around the sun, our fleeting sun, fleeting like all suns, our nation burns from neckfire, from chestfire, and will collapse not from outside aggression or civil unrest, but from obesity. Our nation, under which we stand, collapsing down upon our lifted heads. We have filled liberty's torch with blood and the sky glows red. We, as species, self to self, global tinder, one bellow's squeeze from inferno, our supersized nation, our incendiary self, selves in the here and now, this ever changing here, this unchangeable now. The fall of our entertaining empire will drag capitalism into its new hole, the suffocation of a republic and its ideological imperialism. Produce rots in its garden of bombs, bombs too smart to be kept on the farm, our fleeting nation, damaged and proud.

To whom I pray, as I pray, forgive me my doings as if to undo my doings, confessor self, a miracle of reversal unto the better self. My voice wavers, falters, is sustained. I pray for improvement, the betterment of all selves; spare us sanctimonious greed. I pray for

abandon, I pray for discretion, I pray for discretionary abandon. We kill one another. We ignore one another. We give our lives to one another, for one another, self to self; spare us manifest arrogance.

Prayer, like confession, like apology, comes as easily as words. One can do them all on one's knees with wielded language, with sincerity or not, eyes lowered or shut or wide open, tone lyrical or to the point, blunt, penitent, beseeching, self-oriented, feverish, confused, heartrendingly authentic, coy. I pray to become prayerless, to be freed from syntax or spiritual doubt, to accept with blissful fatalism the actuality of everything as it is, as it appears to be, as it must become, within cognizance or quarks. I pray to be unprayed, to be outside of prayer, to believe prayer charming and quaint. I pray for peace, everywhere, forever. I pray for all of us, everyone dead, dying and unborn. I pray for a lobotomy of the divine will.

Our nation, at odds with other nations, like most nations upon this planet, rogue leaders and festered egos, elected or self-imposed, raining upon weaker peoples the awful shock of their military might, honed and flexed, greased and potent, making up in empirical power what they lack in metaphysical truth, launching matter that can be delivered with the precision of ideas. Bombs—chickens in the yard—enough to put one in every pot, some pots with pinches of salt, some pots with fistfuls of pepper. Our bell tolls for liberty and her cracked crown, her cracked torch of red kerosene. We, as species, other to other, planetary kindling, one spark away from ash, our malled nation, our nuclear self, selves in the moment, particular and special, ordinary

and obsolete. The demise of expedient empires won't spare our ecology an epitaph, the eradication of the pristine for the temporary solution. Our nation, our fleeting nation, making the world safe for freedom safe from irony.

When I pray, as now I pray, I pray to self, the self before birth and the self after death, if selves they be, if selves there are, omnipresence without omnipotence; I pray for the ignorance of unlimited gall. If I can't feel shame, grant me a tour of destruction so I can resist and refuse my place, my public denial. Our world is a kaleidoscope of collaborative joy and rage, the tumbled shards of human color come loose, cathedral glass and storefront aplomb, the tremendous crash of commercial sanctity, the dawn's witnessing of other in self, the reflexive repose; I pray for binary failure and the restoration of the chisel. I pray for forgiveness and the apparatus to forgive, the fidelity of a canine heart. I pray for universal health unto death, the grand scheme of things, the emptying of hospitals toward restorative flame, the oxygen of collective mercy. Death spreads itself across our memory as the promise at birth, the culmination of effort, the end of desire, the violent release. We hold the secrets to creative imagination, the awesome heft of care, and I pray for the exposure to passion, passion that raises the roof as a rush of wind; we await the lift of passion as a groom to consummation, the primal

awareness of difference, lust from burst will, we are the engine even as we are the train's speed. Parables are dubious, prophecy is rigged, heritage is advocate, the arrested heart is call, forgetfulness is fold.

Hearts break down to water and longing. Mind breaks down to water and longing. We long for clearer waters and the ridding of our thirsts. Supreme love, that greatest love of all, outflows eros and fraternos and philos and agape; it is the love of everything as it is, and it constantly adjusts to the is. The universe, and everything in it, perfect as it always was, as it is, as it ever will be, even in its imperfections—I pray for this universe, for all universes, for my allotted measure of understanding, for the magnificence of chosen innocence.

B E N E D I C T I O N

Then, to the yester next and the morrow gone, my hands in sorrow bound, the sorrow of the ever will, the feint, the faint, the merciful sleep and the more merced waking, I lift mine eyes to the brighter crest, the rising wind of mind, its lift toward haven bound, the binding grist and devotion milled, the torch, the view, the child's gasp, the crimp, the catch, the clean remove, I've done what duty was visible to me, what was there to standard, and I've knelt away from what wasn't mine, what won't be mine to hold, and now we think to stride toward reverie, we begin to lace our boots, this revelry of motion, perceived or perceived around, it doesn't matter now, not to matter, not to motion, not to the witnessing of the motion nor the mobility of the perception, I ask for guidance of the lesser chest, the greater chest is down for the night, this will be the day we've bargained for and counted on and feared, the fear that forged the spines of those we've come to join in wonder, in squint, in poise, in crouch, in spark, in rustle and flicker and burst, in battle gear that has gone to page, from veins upon the anvils drenched, the coffee cooled to blood, the teeth of doubt to anthills hauled, our sisters of a struggle washed away beyond the sounds of trains, the flood toward daily pound and vision blur, we believe in something now,

that something of the canceled hurt, the counseled balm, the common and the charmed, the bitter kite and its slackening string can't harm our gravity hearts, our blown wills, our second steps.

Then, I must swallow, I can't spit, the saliva burns. I pray for hounds to bay us out and for hope to bed us down under the sudden comfort of the relinquishment of scope. I pray for mercy under justice smoothed and the energy to leave. Neither the wind's rising nor its dying away will tell us who we are. Neither the wind's rising nor its dying away can tell us who we are.

Now that I am back to work, back in the land of nod and gristle, nestle and nettle and auspice, let me bend toward the will of the heat from the stoves, the stove in my kitchen, the stove in my bed, the furnace in my chest where burn a legion of misconceptions into coals of retroactive graces, with shelf lives beyond the deaths of me, the deaths of you, the deaths of what we herald, to crusade is to deny the past into which our nation hurtles, into which our imaginations are shoved, a tug of war across the pit of self, the pit of selves, the nation of self where living keeps on happening.

Across the trespass of my soul, if soul is mine to speak of, let there be a dandelion blown by Laura who outlives me, by Reeve who will out action me, his Revere to my Ramick, his r

upon my R, his will upon my was, across the trespass of his soul, if soul is his to speak of, souls in time and space and dimension, and out of them as well, across the trespasses of our souls, above our nation of jest who has just got to be kidding, she isn't kidding, and above our globe of thirst, I must swallow, I can't spit, the saliva burns.

Father of mine, dead and now alive, dead to me and for the life of me, a sweet wind blown through the lesser chest, now a gust of history, of possibility, you tell me to teach, you implore, you insist, the hills bow toward your gaze, you watched the bombs wobble down toward Dresden and you tried to make them beans, to conjure up a billion stalks to feed forgiveness out of infancy, and now you rest upon my parlor shelf beyond the deaths of me. Father and son and who knows who beyond the depths of me.

Away from the sea and into the city and out of the city and into the desert and out of the desert and into the city and out of the city and into the desert and out of the desert toward the sea. This, the cat's cradle of my destiny, from string I've saved from birth, raveled from the garments of those I've loved, tiny fluffs at a time. I can't teach until I'm taught. I won't reach until I'm taut; the sounds of language, like the sounds of trains, like the forgiveness of trees, like the deaths of me, this latent love for father found upon my parlor shelf.

Out of the light and into the light, the lesser chest, the greater chest, the dippers of our hearts, zenith into sea, I capitulate, I calibrate, I skip, I crumple, I flail, I will drown myself in outer tides with the fidelity I've saved, and this, lest you grimace, is a good thing, if good things are mine to speak of, and good things are mine to speak of.

I've heard the new organ music, which I know to be the old organ music, and I've seen the congregation stand; then, I imagine myself an elderly man, hands folded in his lap, having spoken of all he could speak of, having written all he could write, the telling done, the thinking he'd thought all sent to wind, the apparatus worn, like soles of boots, without relief, beyond ability to adhere, and this man of slump and drag and hoist, his love for his wife still growing, his love for his life at last grown, will gasp for air and withdraw, will nod to air and be gone. I've failed and I'm ascending into unknowing while I play in the piles of my shedding, alive and alive, all things possible.

Tim Ramick