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Of Taffeta and Soil

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FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

OF TAFFETA AND SOIL

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

in

CREATIVE WRITING

by

Marina Pruna

2013

To: Dean Kenneth G. Furton
College of Arts and Sciences

This thesis, written by Marina Pruna, and entitled Of Taffeta And Soil, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgment.

We have read this thesis and recommend that it be approved.

Denise Duhamel

James Sutton

Campbell McGrath, Major Professor

Date of Defense: February 26, 2013

The thesis of Marina Pruna is approved.

Dean Kenneth G. Furton
College of Arts and Sciences

Dean Lakshmi N. Reddi
University Graduate School

Florida International University, 2013

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DEDICATION

In memory of my grandparents, Isabel and Nestor Moré, for Chopin, Madryn, and all else
in between. Thank you.

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS
OF TAFFETA AND SOIL

by

Marina Pruna

Florida International University, 2013

Miami, Florida

Professor Campbell McGrath, Major Professor

OF TAFFETA AND SOIL is a collection of poetry unified through images of Argentinean and Floridian soil, flora, and fauna, and by themes of geographic and emotional dislocation, memory, and the quest for home. These images are brought forth in lyrical poems that question the growth and settling of a romantic partnership, domestic turmoil and resolution, and the constant tension between self and community. Mostly written in free verse, the collection also utilizes forms such as prose poem, haiku, and sonnet, for more formal unity. Section one chronicles and explores a romantic relationship through attraction, passion, disappointment, and self-awareness. Section two is a long poem that centers on the speaker's continuous struggle to come to terms with her present adult life while still remembering and idealizing a homeland. Finally, the collection ends with two sections that work toward self-acceptance, forgiveness, and evolution via community, family, travel and nature.

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I.

SELF-DOUBT

A cradle in the back of my mind
sways for you, uneven thought.

It lingers between high expectation
and elegy,

and often, it doesn't move at all.
Sometimes, in the morning,

when light is still asleep
and summer winds softly snore,

the cradle seems to glow
as if a newborn lay in it.

I muffle my steps
and shush the mockingbirds.

But when the day advances
into shadeless revelation,

there hangs only a crown

of twigs,

until the blue jays descend,

signaling with their shadow song.

THE IMAGINED LIFE

Everything, but the brick-colored couch,
which was purchased because it fit
the corner like a tailored wedding dress,

copper studded fists,
arms in rigid right angles
and wooden pegs like anchors--

everything else was gathered,
borrowed and pinched,
picked for the temporary morrow,

to be dispensed with
clean and fast,
like untying a bow.

MOON

Where will you end up?

Will I be any better then?

Will my body crater like yours
in the way of every ennobling blow?

Pitiful saucer, only good
as a slice, otherwise

dented, discolored, a black
and white image, short of sepia.

The man with the infinite coat
playing kidnapper: a blaze to your head

while we're blue and spinning,
endless in worry, a world in despair.

My mind has become my own satellite,
thought after thought suspended in orbit,

never arriving, never leaving.

A traveler of my own tarred evening.

THIN AIR

Instead,
words are snagged
in the net of air between us.

Your solution is simple:
you draw at my wrists
and take me in, fold by fold,
first my words and tongue,
then the air inside,
where I keep
my familiar monologue,
the sketch of my face,
the intimation of a pulse.

I want to be collapsed:
a slight crease in your pocket.

Instead,
I have been here before,
in this place where every thought
is aborted before it escapes, every quarrel

is a garment I cannot wear, every piece of me,
an unwrapped present in a corner.

From my floating body I detach
meaning, unhooking a line
and not staying to watch what happens next.

SLANTED ROOF

It is your line.

Personal and simple:

I love you.

Slippers folded

before bed. Sandy hills

continue to roll.

CRUSH

I prefer you in pieces
countable, sequential, separable.
Dangling finger pointing pointlessly.
A foot askew, severed from nerves.

I tolerate you in the grey zone
borderless, undefinable.
An unhittable target like a song
at the tip of my tongue.

I keep you volcano ash wafting upward,
soft rumble of insides choking
off a belch of fire blood,
a checked mountain of sparkle.

This is what I want:
a black hat, no rabbit,
seven bouncing mouths of laughter,
sans sound,
a pink parasol stabbed into the dormant beach,
missing cloth.

Because whole I lay
raw, charred, suffocated
underneath the marmalade disc
that is you, sucking calmly
at the sugary citrus,
clocking the little death.

THE MOTH

A shame you can't see my wings
origami creased beneath blades,
tempered in sleep and nerve.

I moved along the floor once,
a better substitute--.

Now, a hot white halo,
my only pull to death.
Dusty with travel and this momentary stop,

I see past speckles of pollen
into the flower of things.

I am flexible and flickable, buoyant,
pulpable. These are my only truths.
And the golden rail down my back

like a wick of fire.
I know when to take flight,

when to unfurl into wind,
crackling only in traces.
I've been taught patience.

Echoes of history
in my segments.

When I lift toward the balloons of trees,
I am the painter's stroke,
the high note of light.

PICTURE WINDOW

You and I are not thinking
about the willow tree,
particular in its rustle this fall.

We've squandered color,
lodged ourselves
black and white in argument.

I hold your words like hot wax,
slick ovals at first,
then sticky with burn.

You cool and harden,
smaller in resignation.
Our raked sympathy: a dry pile

in a corner. Missing our window,
a slant of sun dissolves
itself upon the rooftop

of our evening. Outside,
the canopies blacken to slumber
as I draw the curtain.

GETAWAY

And so we escape
the flat heat of our home
land into the dirt of mountains
where sliding can happen.
The grit of our discontent loses
its footing, tumbles
down into the body's
valley. We lean back and forget
where we come from,
traveling this ascent
like ravens on an updraft of winter,
black cracks in frost. We carry
the soil tucked in
the crescents of our nails,
buried in the corners of
our eyes, nestled in the feathery
skin that beats into the air.

WHEN YOU LEAVE

“While avalanches are sudden, the warning signs are almost always numerous before they let loose. Yet in 90% of avalanche incidents, the snow slides are triggered by the victim. . . ” – National Geographic

In bass tones, the announcement
booms like a yodel snuffed.
The rumble travels down
the spine unaware of its tomorrow,

and I sleep in socks
to the orange fire's
tempo. At the foot
of the bed, we've tucked
every night's remarks.

At dawn, rescue dogs
snuffle wildly along
sloping crests and troughs
of hardened snow.

They expect the sun
will pivot onto the trails,
just as they knew the mountain

would drop its white scarf
down the dirty steps.

FALLING

The house on the mountain

The house on the mountain burns

On the mountain burns the sky

The mountain burns the sky tonight

Burns, the sky tonight, like a wall in hell

The sky tonight, like a wall in hell, falls under

Like a wall in hell, fall, fall under and lose

Fall, fall under and lose favor, fervor and light

Lose favor, fervor and light, lose everything

Lose everything except the house

The house on the mountain

The house on the mountain burns

COCOON

Up ahead, I see a goddess of balance,
a cocoon of a woman, amber, hot,
limbs like wind chimes breaking morning,
unmasking the performance.

She carries with her a story
of silt and salt in dusty ridges.

I begin to think of rain. Darts
lancing the cocoon, pounding
the hissing fire. Each rod airless.

Yet I long for her
or is it the cocoon?--
that can be pierced, drained,
dried up and kicked about
like a coconut. Still capable,
in its fuzzy skull of sleep, to angle
toward the gumbo limbos,
and dream of life past the windy shore.

II.

PENINSULA VALDES

I. *The Cartographer*

The drive is dry and yellow across this land of the familiarly foreign.

I am home, dear Argentum.

grains of sand whip into the wind like a yellow taffeta handkerchief

I draw the peninsula, like a shoe, slipping
out into the cobalt Atlantic waters.

There is a darkness that anchors Valdés,

meters of hot earth that travel true north to sprout cacti and yellow wild flowers.

Worn and comfortable, this boot is a stationed beat into the Patagón wind.

To get at it, I must press the shapes into place, erase, press, erase:
tomorrow's palimpsest of memory in curved and broken grooves.

II. *Historia*

She was tiny, my grandmother, teacher at the baby grand.

Scales at the piano after *mate*, C Major first, then minor.

Crossing with the thumb to keep continuity in the silence between notes.

She pulled apart her fingers to show me—

my reach farther than hers, clumsy.

No Rachmaninoff, Chopin, Grieg, or Alfonsina.

I will get back to her.

He was of the people who called the whales *cachalotes*.

He was of the sheep farm and October shearing.

He was of Gastre.

He was of the harmonica and fireside lamb.

He was of medicine of women, of children.

He was of Puccini and Verdi.

He is of hillside soil and stone.

III. *Punta Pardelas*

It is my first memory. Cold salty water, floating a little. Ahead, an eye like a globe, like a beach ball, inky in depth and unmoving.

The whale is a mass of grey leather larger than any blanket, bigger than the water I am in,
more expansive than my mind at that time or any other.

You and I understand each other.

You are an eye.

I am an I.

Your songs are the underwater chords of a violin, undulating for so many...

Mine are like hiccups.

We watch each other. I am three. You are not.

Yet, you and I understand each other.

IV. *The Wind*

At dinner, I think of ways to return. I stare into albums of tawny days while my fish gets
cold.

You call out in your windy Antarctic voice like fingers reaching across the table.

Do you remember the evening scent of brine from my shore?

You can never come back – no one really ever does.

And just like that, your gales of laughter grow and wane until the room in my mind bares itself. Barren and prickled, now a newer desert. Every day. The photos don't seem to help except to show where I fail.

V. *The Viedma*

When the Welsh colonized parts of Chubut in the late 19th Century, they brought with them tea and a cream tart that is now found only in a few bakeries in Gaimán, Trelew and Puerto Madryn. They were bards, men with strings that tied them back to their own peninsula in the Irish Sea. Of their strings, they made stories, wove them into baskets filled with wild fox and lavender. Cynan Jones, Gwilim Lewis, Morris AP Hughes, Evan Thomas, Richard Bryn Williams, pseudo-men of flesh and flakes, able to linger in the gusts. Abundant, of grit, many, they pressed themselves into chronicles, now books on my shelf.

VI. *Playa Paraná*

The black pebbles of Paraná
take in the small heat of winter's

midday. They sit huddled together
like grandmothers at church

or town's people in mourning.

(Such quiet, except for kelp gulls.)

I suspect they fear the bareness
of that longing that comes with time.

Or they understand that the passing
of each season will grind them further,

make of them smooth litters,
eyeless children that drown

in the shore breaks of the gulf.

They may bear witness

to my visit by the sound of my voice
until I no longer recall words.

And then who will sing them
to the grainy silence? Who

will sing for me when I can't
bear the hungry beaks that scoop

from the whales' backs
the bounty of my nostalgia?

VII. *Caleta Valdés*

It is still Monday, the drive, interminable, as I near the neck between the San José and the Nuevo. If it weren't for the skinny Isthmus of Ameghino, these two gulfs would be one. The peninsula, an island.

O distance, distance, distance, distance, distance, distance.

The dust from the road billows behind, erasing our proof. Some seeps through the edges of the window panes and settles on the cracked seat. I draw circles into it with my finger, then my hand, then my forearm. I play the right hand of the C minor scale, with each tap, a tiny cloud opens.

VIII. *Punta Norte*

Succumbing to slumber, heads tilt
until the bodies stitch themselves
to the bumps and rises of the road.

grains of sand whip into the wind like yellow taffeta

Why the long wind if not
to call us home? Its pitch travels
in and out while the cold limbs of morning
hang in the bluing sky. *taffeta*

This is a map, the hard definable:
pins in the mind, not the memory-making
but the *is* that surrounds me.
Why must I constantly untether?

IX. *Punta Gales*

She wrote her last lines when she dived off the cliff. Into the velvet waters, Alfonsina sang herself to sleep. She buried her voice in the mossy entrails of the tide. Harmonies

would return through westward currents to the shores of Punta Gales where my grandfather waited for low tide and the air holes of sea snail life.

I walk this black beach grown solid as a tanker's back,
noticing shoe prints instead of air holes.

Abuelo, what would you say to this traffic?

His thick glasses and gaucho beret pointed down, scanning the potted ground. Three grandkids followed, digging little index fingers into selected homes like raids, scooping out a snail at a time. As the sun disappeared, so did the hunters, back into the old Chevy and over the mesa.

To pickle the sea snails in vinegar and garlic, my grandmother had to work her fingers into hooks, unlatching the stiff caramel operculum, soft steam rising and filling her curled hair. The grandkids looped in and out of the swinging door as she pulled out coil after twisted limp coil.

Strong as taffeta, those fine fingers,
grandmother's aged tools, our opiates.

X. *Doradillo*

Overwhelming day—
this, the stillness before
the wind uncaps
my golden coat of armor.

Can you accept the shoreline's
victory? Its pivot to the sun
like a cormorant vaulting.
Behind the distance,

along the brilliant break,
the singular play
of a shiny cetacean calf—
O, to begin, to begin again.

XI. *Puerto Pirámides*

Patchwork hides was women's work. To dye each huanaco square, dry then sew into wearable blankets. In a circle, shielding the fire from the cutting wind, the women hummed while beating down the textured animal skin. Outside the circle, the men were

strong. They were Tehuelches. For thousands of years, they read Patagonia: the pink skies that forecast wind, shore life for winter, mountains for summer, and the grit of smashed bone to strengthen the children, make them grow tall.

Elal, son of Kóoch, who created the water, wind, sun and sand, be our hero again,
the Tehuelche chant.

Tell your father to place us back into his mouth,
to take back his breath, the one that brought us the sound of hoofs,
to take back his tears, the ones that made rivers of stone and blood,
to sit in his loneliness a little while longer while we find sleep again.

Disuse makes of the tongue a dusty fossil, an interment.

The last three dig at the hard packed soil until they feel the outline of language –
their backs remember the way down, but they've been left alone too long.
Empty, they sit at the edge.

They mumble, rock forward and back until sunset
and a wild dream make dirt of them too.

XII. *My Madryn*

The front porch, a small white wall
where I sit to watch couples walk after dinner.

Chopin's *Revolutionary* builds
behind me a white thunder storm.

With each crescendo, the white bricks
of memory remake the splendid house,

the neighborhood's music box.

A living room window opens,

and grandmother's *Fantasy Impromptu*
marries the velveteen nocturne of a whale.

I'm in the car again.

The white noise of dirt-

road-travel takes down
each wall, brick at a time.

The peninsula promises birth
and evolution, its history

beneath layers of white clay
and salt. It does not offer

a road back. Only a road
toward, toward, toward—

it erases itself behind us,
invisible fingers wiping away

our prints, leaving us
unmoored.

Blown taffeta
yellowed to white by wind.

XIII. The Island of Birds

We live here,
we remind the low tide. When you rise,

we give thanks.

We ward this tombolo with songs
that decant us into evening. We keep
our own shores, hold conference with the moon,

detail the canopied landscape with our children
in no hurry.

We are Magellanic, Southern, Neotropic, Oystered, Kelp.

You are welcome, if only to view us as we spring into air.

If only to note that we gather in us the duty to leave
and the patience to return.

In this daily design, we exact nothing
but the stretch of our wings and the gulf's wind
to carry us home.

III.

STILLS

The half-constructed bridge

intentions

(or) echoes lapping back in different voices

*

The draw bridge

the design

of forgiveness

*

The collapsed bridge

swallowing

the fine-tuned cry

*

The suspended bridge

a bony wind

at the back of the neck

*

The paved bridge

heaviness

felt by no one but the bridge

*

The toll bridge

held in buckets

for the dry season

*

The abandoned bridge

sweeping the front porch

fallen into daylong nap

*

The old bridge

no charge to ride that highway

immense sun in afternoon sky is still just sun

*

The swaying bridge

lullaby at the rocking chair

I've forgotten your name

SEASONS IN FLORIDA, HAIKU

The oak tree
grows tired;
leaves shuffle down the road.

Tomatoes like bells—
do pluck one, neighbor, before
you're called to dinner.

Close to sun setting,
flight of blue and gold macaws
tempering our sky.

Leaning,
a rake on the trellis:
where will I rest tomorrow?

TWO ORCHIDS

1

Fence, lattice, rusty hooks, bones of oak,
assured of morning, noon, night,
and all tidal changes or almanac deliveries,
drawn out by fire, after rain, in spite of fire,
arching to meet, to unfold a gloved white hand.

2

Lancing to perfection, it
is a swimmer diving through air,
projecting the rounded chest
of quivering purple until
it collapses into suspension,
a statue of itself.

MORNING FAIR

High above I-95,
the red-shouldered hawk scans
for rats trekking along cement gutters
once warm and woody rivulets
of Florida Pine.

Soon, she knifes down & through
the conveyor belt of human cargo.

I'm on the freeway, dragging
through traffic with sudden stops,
listening to *Morning Edition* and slipping
into a news coma for twenty miles to work.

It's sunny out, but we can't tell.
We're shielded by the to-do list,
which screams like bad wallpaper.

But sometimes, it's Saturday morning.
I put the kettle on and pick
a cup, a teaspoon, instant coffee, and sugar.
In a row I set down each item, an assembly line
of breakfast. The toaster is pulled from the shelf

and above my sink, the garden answers my yawn
through the window in round dew & stiff petals.
It's early enough that the loudest part
of the house is the harmonics of the boiling pot.

And absolutely nothing happens,
but the balmy liquid down my throat
and the cat's curled meow.

THE RACE

Asking a question just lands me more responsibility, so I sit on my hands, the metal of the chair warming against my knuckles, and I listen while holding my breath and sucking in my cheeks between amalgam molars and tongue, and I focus, pick a spot on my boss' forehead, either along the dried up rivulet that's formed between her eyebrows or the wispy hairline that's buried beneath the helmet bangs, and I think about her \$1200-a-month BMW lease payment, or that last-minute-only-first-class-left ticket to the London meeting that happens every year at the same time, or the particular fondness for 32-lb stock paper for high resolution forecast charts that don't survive the day, or our glass cubicles with hourly competition of halogen and sun while the a/c steadies at 63 for the wearability of a Magaschoni cashmere wrap, and I allow my mind to approach the stable doors, hoofs scraping dirt like heating metal, steam piping out the long snout, and I see the sun in the distance like a gold medal, so when the whinny rises pitched and red, I can do nothing but unhook the wooden gate and let the pounding peel away, leave behind the dirty ground of questions: how can I - how fast can I - please you?

STAMPEDE

The pivot chair I sit in
can't spin me fast enough
to blur out your disappointment.

How can you just sit there, you say.

So I kick the balls of my feet down hard
and I swirl fast enough to see you
before we shared house keys and worries
about our parents' futures,

when standing near you
set off a team of colts,
like the shotgun at a starting line
before the runners stampede,

not stopping because they can't stop,
because they've been training so long
that their bodies just know this is right,
that there is no finish line

like the lines that their bodies make
against the morning air.

One by one, they spill outward
and separate.

FRIDAY NIGHT BATH

I fancy a man like Aristotle,
one lost in elegant thought like Plato
was, then tuck away the foam bath, bottle
of Pinot Noir, peppery potato
chips, and follow him deep into his tomb
of dark wonder where the queries happen.
He guides me ably into his world's womb,
cautions me of slick ground, then holds his lens
to my spotting eye, classy tool of chrome
and polished glass, to temper the seething
earnestness of my life. There is no dome
private enough to muffle our breathing.
Oh, I heartily thank the divine scheme:
my Friday night bath of water and dreams.

TIERRA FERTIL

para Isabel Allende

Dentro de mí, una paz. Dentro,
una tormenta como una manta,
como un cielo abarcando tierra.

Ahí llega la lluvia.
Que fresca el agua
de imaginación, pasado, y cuento.

Que poca lucha cuando
las horas pasan verdes.

FERTILE LAND

for Isabel Allende

Within, peace. Within,
a storm like a blanket,
like a sky embracing land.

Here comes the rain.
How fresh the water
of imagination, past, story.

How small the struggle
when the passing of hours is green.

IN AN INSTANT

after Henri Cartier-Bresson's photograph: India. 1950. Tamil Nadu. Madura

In an instant, the scorched eye
is the stillness of no future.

The shutter threads the picture
into another tapestry of work.

The mind feeds a ripe plum to the paper lips
and binds the hot air of the afternoon

to his chest.

When the eye returns to us in sleep,

it does so directly, so central
among the shadow outlines of leaf.

The bars of rib and vein
dwell in the sunlight of design.

ACENTO

I imagine you, syllable gavel,
as from the time of castles
and bloody bulls.

General Acento crossing the ocean,
heralding uniform cries of pitch and cadence,
creating at once an army of foot soldiers
and a history.

Today you might be
on a train in a rainy city,
the whole world fast, in color.
You are one-legged
and seated in a dirty corner.

The rest of us only remember
to forget to look around,
to notice anything but our stresses,
even when the man in the corner
could use a hand
regaining his footing in this world.

BOWING OUT

Alfonsina Storni (1892-1938)

Metaphors that transformed
the soul into a bowl of collapsed petals and moss into blooming moons
quit ringing their concentric meanings.

We were slipped a note
with your new address: a glass house in the velvet surf,
on an avenue of keening currents.

On the deadened shores,
we stood as piles of grooved stone and rusted sand, with your message,
a handkerchief in flames.

IV.

PALERMO SOHO

Old Palermo, city haze, cigarette soot,
a shady tango secret, gone.
True cobblestone faked slick, snaking
bistro clutters and lemony gymboree,
distended boot & bag boutiques, hammering
gorilla glass on leather on stilettos at brunch.

It tears at me, scent of October
during spring dawn, bread loaf heat
rising and sneaking past newspaper
stands – *La Nación* – his beret
grey, clipping a bus coin to his ear,
as he shouts new day's news

at grandmother, boy to hip, hip
to basket, popping open, spilling
mate, yerba, dulce de leche,
rounding the corner to the neighbor's.
Crescent moon of evening, not yet
escaping rooftops or balcony sides,

dinner Malbec and soda siphon,
penciled items on the market list

of mother, waving hair, and hand
to block's butcher, belly of a man,
grass streaks left behind on starchy apron,
traces of sunny cow bleached quiet.

Attempting symphony in scope and stroke,
mi Buenos Aires querido,
today's morning chaos
slips into the air, hot and billowing.

VALEDICTION: BUENOS AIRES

Let me tell you about the way the park
commands silence tonight.

The crunch of leaves and click of pavement
have stayed away. I keep no company.

But there's that thing you do
that I bring with me everywhere,
chills that live on the fringes
of my mind as a ruffle on a skirt.

I call it surrender—twirling
in it, feeling its energy
tear away in circles, that thing
that binds me together in a centrifuge.

So I give you this evening,
lay our marrow on this bed
of brown oak leaves, which rustle
as I compose my goodbye.

PARANA NIGHT

Braced before the stripping wind of the Antarctic, Night sits quiet and unassuming in the kind of shy and withdrawn way only Night would understand, or maybe a nun. She waits, shouldering that impossible moon and the salty child it brings with it. The ocean has slumbered for hours, coming to rest over and over on the black beach of Parana'. There is no point in asking where anyone is, she thinks. Without a voice, she only has the screaming lights that shoot across her back sometimes and the expectation of morning, that painful white clock. She'd like to dissolve without torment. If anyone does come, let it be the fisherman. She imagines how he runs his hands into the waking water and up his forearms, smoothing the hairs, before looking down the line of shore and pushing off. She knows that as soon as he sets his boat to the horizon's flaming line, she'll come undone again.

ODE: PATAGONIAN MOTHER

I won't write you a song, mama,
because your mind has heard tales
told by the whales to the wind.

And I won't knit you a coat, since
Antarctic gales and father's furrowed trails
have folded your skin into pearl.

And why still a landscape
when your incandescent heart can stir
color into our tundra sadness?

A SAD STORY IN HAIKU

Across the wet grass,
the concreteness
of a park bench.

The oaks at dawn
mourn moonlight,
leaves swoon.

A single man
walks a single path
to his single thought.

Afternoon robin
circles the tired oaks.
The ground grows quiet.

A reddened sky falls,
closes the park's green landscape –
cold truth is a gun.

THE LIFE OF ANTS

April, and letters for the page seem like ants that scatter when I put pen to paper. I see them crawl off the sides, onto the desk's edge, and then over. Where do they go? There are so many of them, and they are fast, so awake, so determined. I try, but my mind can't seem to bend around corners.

The crab house is on a bluff overlooking Half Moon Bay. The wind, cold and stiff, yet somehow friendly as an old cat. I sit outside, tie my hands to the menu as if I am mooring myself to a pier. To quiet my mind, I remind myself that it is early, that there is no reason to swallow hot chowder in huge gulps, that custard pie can be enjoyed despite a little sand in my shoes. Below the water's deep voice, the clock freewheels like frenetic ants at my ankles.

I stand at the lip of a grave. A holy man speaks, weaving the occasion into an acceptable basket. His words are dead ants. My thoughts are the chilled skin on my neck, my trembling stomach, the shallowness of my hands and feet. Under the angling pines, beneath the pale keening and remote daylight sun, I too am bound to this galactic matter.

DEVOLUTION

I've been down this road.

My back, a railroad of matter:

chiseled, fissured, nailed, fused.

Worn ties of my skid row.

If only to unlatch myself

from these iron sheets, kick away

the uneven foundation, steal

into the slick tunnels of the new.

WIFE

Like a black flower

the bruising invisible

Powdered corolla

muted still

Yet there must be wailing

sustaining the starched crisp courtesy

Perhaps the sun hissing

rays to staccato departure

GRANDPA'S DRIVING LESSON

When we arrived atop the last paved hill in Madryn
and you nodded me forward, all I saw were waves
of golden sand, all I felt were waves of golden sand.

The many geographies up ahead after
that first slide: Punta Tombo, Gales,
El Indio, Paraná, Pardelas, Ninfas.

Only in that time of endless dunes and silver gulf,
of salty Antarctic breeze, would I be ten
and behind the wheel of your beat-up Chevy pick-up.

To cross into that terrain of shifting earth, that immaculacy,
like riding a Southern Right whale into glassy new water.
All I wanted was one last look at your face,

at the jutting jaw, stubbled grey and set, and the doubled-up
glasses - dark shades over thick bifocals. But I knew better:
Eyes on the road, nena, always, not just when driving.

ELEGY

cloud-petaled night sky above

orange moon on edge of sea plane

felt collar turned up against the southern wind

road folds left away

statue of the indian farthest marker

signals the end

of town above or below the arched bow

strains left away

I say I love you every day

words lashed to sides of caves and cliffs

arrow down through mirrored surfaces

left left away

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