

In the Absent Everyday

—
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A matter not of order

ONE

You eat with your right hand.
Prop the broom away
from your body. Strike.
A roof of wool, a bed of skin.
A follicle for food. A hand of error
and infliction is given to all.
The left hand heeds
prayer beads. The left hand
signals retreat.
What is your good name?
Where are you from?

City of tin

Politeness prohibits saying what I really think.
Viaduct: a code for a feeling. Like mauve
over the street of tarmac, a grave summer day
offering painted toe nails and a leg longer by perspiration.
Or gannets in sight. That women are said to speak so much
of feelings, as though to clarify would mean the end.
It never is. Clarification I mean. To indicate trust
I tell you the fish is who I look at most these days.
For love, for love. Endings happen. Words I use
because I like who I become. Give me nothing. Tiny,
tiny pebbles used as prop. Tilted and tinted glass.
City of my desire has lines rigged at the waist.
One minute of sleep at a desk might bring
it all down. Words you find under my nail.
(S)wallow. Some night owl effusion.

On 21st street

He waits by the window to witness
a disaster. Counts time by the glitter
of a ring, broken glass or hair. The street
emerges—cleaner, glamorous—a rhythm of images
in metallic revolutions. The street, a bridegroom
pinning weight on one single woman thinking alas,
thinking escape. The center of a journey,
a bouleversement when all he wants to do
is sit all day and deliquesce, drop by drop.
He wonders at the octopus who can get
her own drink; at the monkey who entertains
the crowd; the boy or girl called Teddi who
reads backwards from a moving car.
Just for a moment he wants to be a hog
or hot air balloon, deft and droll. He stretches
palms out, traces the lines with a pen. Writes into.

Autonomy of the mind

In my family, decisions are made by the lama
who dreams into fate. The gardener who is rotten
why is not as lucrative as the gardener whose garden
grows tomatoes. After all, we're living through
a conjecture. Wiser to say sorry within the alternatives
of a moment and read the display of toes as assent.
Men are men because we know. The men in my family
hope to return to a country they left in their youth.
They say home and point away from the cement rooms
they have built. At home they say the grass was tall,
the milk was sweet. At home, there was no need for sugar.

The youngest in the family died during the year of his
obstacle. A pilgrimage to four holy sites and seven offerings to
lamas proved otiose but Doma, the family dog, survived a fall
from a steeple. Once a year, the girls on our street worship
their brothers with offerings of flowers and vermilion
powder, remembering that brothers will one day take wives.
We wish to know the ordeals of all beings we pray for.
Amphibians. Crocodiles. What of oranges hanging like bats,
their discomfort in being ripe? What perpendicular roots
we've formed, in this, our neighbour's motherland. The
departed will return but that is not necessarily good.
To be born a human is a commendable feat, the elders say,
marking our foreheads with black soot to keep evil eyes away.