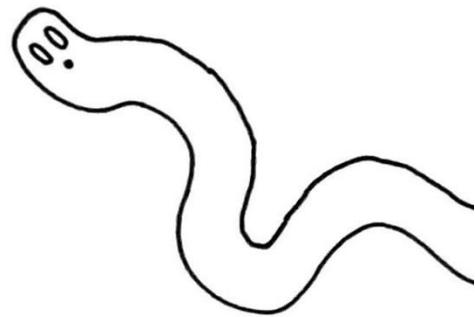
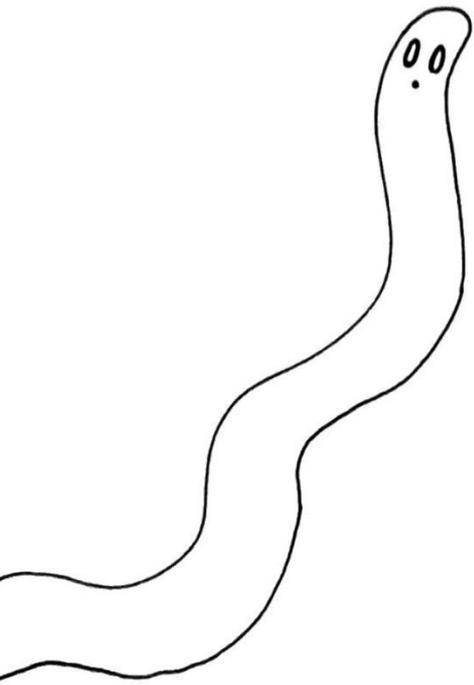


small significant things

poems by Josh Rubino



gloomer

sky gravid with tomorrow's
casual ice-age, cold sigh lit
of a thousand tiny moons

no moonlight reaches through
the toned-gray page, below which
I scribble my infinities in mist
that makes trees haunted and river
black as America's coal heart,
where doom infects beauty quick
as a sub-zero freeze

moonwind

on nights when the cold
moonwind is afoot
I am reminded
everything is motion
& I miss the noise
that insects make
into silence.

on moonwind nights
I know I cannot separate
the cicadas & mosquitos
from the company of
beloveds at dusk.

those worlds I call
bugs are the winged
promise of joy
under the fallow
orb of winter
that has now
become my teary
longing for the renewed
brotherhood between
myself & the thrum
of time's cyclical love,
always blowing me back
to the *ungraspable* –
even when, with tiny
unbearable wounds,
I destroy it
& myself
in the process.

moonwind, no more.
tonight I sing for the insects.

brutalism

daddy long leg
carcass on the gear-
teeth steps but this
building is riot-proof
& I am sucked into the
janitor's vacuum. if I
had eight arms like
you, I would take this
rejection of beauty
apart, piecemeal, a
scavenger's harvest
that could raise you
from that dead stoop.
you chose peace, we
cried poison & made
something smooth &
square & devoid of
windows so no one
witnessed your death
so silent it was a vigil.
no windows into your
world so we ended it.
oh, if I had eight arms-
- but no. it is solid
concrete. so tonight I
will bare my feet &
vigil the town ants-
eye & if I am stepped
on we'll know what
god is & if not I'll sing
what's left of you on
that step, or some
sod's shoe, & the
words like sandpaper
will make me an
architect.

remains

i.

glowing cloud on the burnt prairie
eyes for bones on ash-black ground
we walk like giants in a river

we find a skull
 I wish I could give my pen

moon is camera shy
we say forest with heavy legs
femur poking from your breast pocket

frogs are going somewhere important
shoeless little legs
 how silent they could die

trees getting blacker
sky opening its fragrance
scent of turn back

scent of our skeletons
some kid finding us among frogs and birdsong years from now
 nothing but coonskin cap and tattered khakis in November heat
bring your pen

back among stalks
we are zooarcheologists
you let the moon alight to every white whispering death
 there amid the buds
 amid the possibility of youth
you fill your pockets with haunt
I feel the gravity of remains turn sky lavender
I watch the day die into another

ii.

all my memories of you are full skyed
we played with skeletons we did not understand
in front of your mother's hand-held
your backyard a Hollywood of sunflowers

we had our tiny metal picks and the rockiest park in town
thought we might one day find a mosasaur
some relic of the sea that made us
that years from then would become the prairie

I watch you now, sticking dead things in your pocket
dragging around all your past becomings
a stuttering reel made diaphanous by moonlight

I might say you were always trying to reveal the marrow of the world
you might say you were just trying to get through the day

earthborn and winded

I know you can capture what time really is
on the prairie, you show me what I really am,
a collection of possibilities:

the dead boy who stayed in the forest too long
the one who saw the sky bleeding the day's wound
the ape who unknowingly stole frog-life from charmed rocks
the one who scooped a spider from her porcelain prison
the man who worried when you became thief for a day
the one who sees you are free

free as those who recognize they may never be
free as the floating gossamer of kids behind a camera
free as the bones we tossed to the veiled moon

in celebration of the rigid things we sometimes leave behind

why the long face?

– after “Sawdust & Diamonds”

I asked
and you told me how
the angels used to speak to you
in the ether of childhood but
 you did not call them doves

You spoke of the way all the stuff
of you seemed to fall out of place
 a feeling you recognized as
 someone’s death flitting
 your ribcage

Would I were a surgeon to your grief
Here is the first incision – no
time is delicate and
I
don’t know what to say
I
offer my body

 a shawl
 for the silent dust storm
 we’ve just released

In one of those granules is what
 I hope
 was the love
 that made you--
 all I can offer
 in the end

I saw the stone of this
pulling the skin down your face
and I willed you to seek me
 as my little feet once sought
 the warmth behind my mother’s
 knees on a night when the ghosts
 spoke louder
 than usual

There will always be
another city swallowed
by the sea

and if I cannot hold
you there
I will let all those wispy
things that animate the world
pass through me and I
will know the brevity
was not always lightness
but always touched
by the banished
angels of youth
who nonetheless
followed us pigeoned
into the densest waters
of the earth
where we learned that only
with such elongation
could we stand
and kiss the soil
simultaneously

epicedium for the squirrel

Forgive me for calling you cautious,
looking into those glossy marbles, dark
as new moon, that must have severely
reflected my heaving winter body
running along the trail we humans
use to huff & puff a few years back
onto our lives. My immense disappointment
when of course you – that bushy grey
marvel – scurried away in a flourish
of agility that made me seriously despise
the meat clinging to my bones made stale
by a life spent mostly in chairs. If you
would but think of me as a tree,
dear squirrel, though I know it is
I who must think of you as a
world all your own.

Forgive me, for I did not understand
when my father ran you over
in his little red Toyota, driving
from California to Kansas. We
pulled over on some stolen highway
that has become a desert in my mind
& Dad cried while I stayed
in the backseat and looked out
at the yucca. If a day comes when
I might give you, dear squirrel,
a sliver of my reality; if our neurons
might be compatible for a moment;
if we might speak, in our way, know
that there are nights where I wheeze
back through the thickness of the years
to that highway & the red car
& the red carcass & I get out of
the backseat, knees aching from
the journey, & I mourn
with my father, there in the
middle of the country that
coined the word *roadkill*.

pulse

Lightning wires the sky anxious for thunder,
though often it does not come. I feel myself

chafing in the charged humidity, chasing quickly
quickly with the ointment but the rash fades

before I can treat it. Rain passes through me, fills
me like a spring-fed pond, tireless in my bubbling

struggle against the scum of the surface. Tomorrow,
I will wake not joyful, not morose, but fluid,

indifferent, splitting into droplets all the day so
that pieces of me fill the buckets and little cracks

in the windowsill where I am drunk by lizards
and small significant things. I cannot say

whether I am content, only full of questions that
feel as worthwhile as asking birds to sing

during a thunderstorm. The house shakes, cracks
a thousand lightnings. I try to be awed but can only

be still as some great bass drum engulfs
my heart from above.

manifesto

Tomorrow, I declare
I will be born a poet

I will not make something
of the way the snow melts
into the ground, but know
the process poetic in itself

I will tease the invisible
strings of camaraderie with
the spider & the squirrel
poets, the mushroom poets,
the bird bards, the lichen
lovers, the many rooted
romantics of the grove,
exhaling their symbiosis

I will smile *hello* to
the Amazon delivery poet,
who will blast hard rock
into the neighborhood
as joy slicing the daily
exploitation, joy
which the poet knows
should be the baseline
of existence, not that
which must constantly
combat blue-lit hands
gesticulating survival

I will hear stories

I will feel the tiny
buttermakers churn
their mysterious vat
beneath my ribs
at the sound of a poet
telling another poet
her back pain went

away with her anxiety –
so beautiful I want to cry

I will cry often,
for the poet is one
who seems always to
be spilling at the eyes
with libations

I will find myself mostly
out of doors, wondering
about doors, wandering
halls, building windows
that vanish as curiously
as they appear

I will finally see things
as motions, everything
quivering with the chance
to be, for just as the tree
grows to grow, the poet
says *tomorrow* to make
infinity of the finite,
nothing to lose but
inhibition and the respect
of those who dare stand
in the way of the everywhere
ordinary beauty, bold as
birdsong and laughter

the chase

huddled on the stone of the morning,
mint-lipped in sweatshirts,
I willed you to squeeze my hand
& you did

we watched the squirrels garland
the trees—a chase I'd like to think
was love: love of eating & being
eaten & spreading life through
all the forests in between

look! you pointed to a pair
of cardinals floating among
the tributaries of bark—red
like your nose & my heart
in my throat

there, as we shivered of small,
delightful things, I thought of
how all those love songs got it
wrong & I was glad the world
did not stop for us

ode to the microbes of me

I suppose I should start
by saying I am sorry.

Sorry for the
massacre
I unleash
on some of you
when I use
anti-bacterial soap.

Though, there is
the possibility
that some of you
are responsible
for that. What
I mean is
some of you,

excitable, making
love to yourselves
like oil in water,

might be writing
this poem.

Some colony
or another, feeding
on the pasta
I made —

I mean *you made*
— for dinner,
might've done
some abracadabra
to the wizening
thing upstairs,
might've slimed
over the keys
some joyful rag

that echoed
the avenues
of my brain
and made me
reach,

possessed,

for my pen.
To write this!
a celebration of you,
 those billions
 of infinitesimal
 spirits
that let me taste
hand-crafted things
and feel the damp
 leaves of honeysuckle
 brush against my bare
 morning skin.

towards an ecology of my bedroom

The white tower fan by the door, all shuddering plastic,
is no longer a blower of air but my very sleep itself.
And there are the books that aren't really books
but thin membranes, behind which the world dawns
on my eyes. They sit in minute decay,
waiting for the gimcrack shelf to fall out – and yes,
it is unclear whether I am referring to the shelf
in my room or the shelf in my mind. Last week,
the spider, on whose sight my flesh
flocked
towards the ceiling,
is now probably living,
in quiet fear of my fear, behind the cardboard cutout
of Brad Pitt on my wall, tacked there in snakeskin
shoes as a reminder that maybe I am not such a
serious person after all. And so, Brad – shelter
of spiders, made from pulp from a tree who maybe
once sheltered many spiders – becomes now a death
omen for the gnats that are also the pothos' cries
of drowning. Everything here waits for kerosene
or dozer or perhaps just to be packed up and forgotten,
left to the little gods who take all in their time.
Time – there's a funny word,
all condensed as it is in this room, emanating
ceaselessly many wavelengths. Take this Strokes
record, for instance, pouring out my windowed youth,
but also, 2001 and the tragedy of the towers and even
all the years past and present in which a mysterious
black disc holds the keys to my awkward rigid body
among its tiny electric mountains. This body
that sits on the floor wanting so badly to dance
something frilled and red-dressed
across the page,
something as sure of itself as the
peperomia tendrilling her gentle stem
towards my pillow – the pillow streaked geometric
with whatever arrangement
the sun and the window have made that day, so that I am
pretty sure the disheveled-looking plant is reaching

whisper

I am learning, theoretically, how to be in the world,

to not let the ruptures whisper
financial

insecurity
whisper

the way mom & dad did in their bedroom
while the tattered blankets beckoned on the couch
whisper

competition
whisper

like the steam escaping the potatoes boiling over
or dad's ears when the next cheap car broke down
whisper

like sitting alone for too long.

I am learning to whisper tender
whisper

Gaia
whisper

god, may I learn to love the mosquito
whisper

like the eyes of the barn owl in my mind
whisper

I am learning how to be in the world.

So, come now, great grizzly, katydids of the prairie,
ant on my ankle, aphid of my eye, apple sapling
leaning like a bow in the wind, o wind, the most
renowned whisperer of all —

come now, with all your theories, for I am just
beginning to learn mine.

I have had a tete-a-tete with what we created,
what kept dad up at night & made the floorboards
splinter our feet,
what gloams across my screen each day, banshees
of the things I have been whispered –
fear

& fear, I now know, is worse than death,
for I am useless in fear but
I am learning,
earthworm,
my utility
in death.

Now, tell me, prairie grass & your buffalo,
what can I be in life,
in this whisper among the decibels of time.

Notes

1. "why the long face?" refers to a line in Joanna Newsom's song "Sawdust & Diamonds," from her 2006 album *Ys* put out by Drag City Records.
2. Cover illustration by me.