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Liminal

My eyes press against the bus window.
My fingers caress scenery. I daydream,
and scheme to keep the close,
roadside drum of fence posts
from passing faster
than gray, hazy trees
dragging and droning in distant fields.

Meadows spread toward the blurred horizon.
I remember that word she used,
and how I mused at the meaning she provided.
"Tell me again,"
I amiably demand of my random seat companion.

"Liminality", she liltily replies.
"Removing your mask
during the act of renewal,
when you'll freely cast away
your past skin and rules,
and wait for them to be replaced
by an awakening and a newly born face."

A threshold.
The boundary between
the known and the unknown.
The steps of a long-distance bus leading to *a new life*.

I trudge forward.

Bus steps.
A squat, clumsy,
black crescendo brink,
unassuming but surprisingly
sonorous when you stop, listen, and
allow it to sing its rhythmic striding cadence
with verses of creative exodus and revived reemergence.

I listen,
clench closed my eyes,
stop, and remain.
I'm carried forward, weightless, beyond the brink.
My feet touch new terrain.

I glance around, turn to wave goodbye to her
as the bus revives, rolls forward, revs.

But there is only blinding window glare,
and a fleeting trace of her darkened, faceless form.

Satori

In the fall of 1962
I sang
in a western Kansas field,
threw my boots high in the air,
and danced
through black-eyed susans
and dried lilacs
dotted white by premature snow.

I jumped, landed on my back,
stared at the sky,
made it me,
got mesmerized.

Soon I saw the kind of sight
that old farmers on the evening news
describe as "The damnedest thing I ever saw"
while raising their pitchfork or rake
a few inches in the air
to indicate a relationship
between what they saw
and the sky.

These days passenger trains are gone
and bears hibernate all year in a global village,

but my boots are still falling.

Breathing Indigo and White

(A notional ekphrastic poem based on the art of Mark Rothko)

Indented white rhythms of rectangles and squares,
overlapping overinglapp overlappoveringlappoverlapping,
rise from a cloudy vertical surface.
They drag across at eye level,
long thin alabaster strums
accompanied by random drums of staccato chroma.

Below, a deep indigo swath,
innumerable subtle shifts of blue,
swipes from left to right,
each of its four sides
soft, imprecise, blurred, gentle lines
forming a misty, breathing rectangle.

Towering above
hovers a square of airy white,
paired in width with the indigo
but stretching far upward.
Tiny refrains of warm white
speckle through the cool flurry of clouds.
Corners blurry, rounded, soulful.

A thin beaming streak
of lemon yellow
severs
the indigo from the cumulus box above.

A square of deep-red rust brown
lives in the cloud's lower left,
diminutive, but dark and daring against the white,
nosing its way
into the indigo's upper corner,
tasting its blue melody,
but staying, for now, in the calm chorus of cool clouds.

Slender bending bands of orange, turquoise and red
ground the boundaries of indigo and white,
colored sounds intermingling
and singing in linear harmonious hues.

Tiny textural taps
scattered by these three streaking colors
percuss the fields of indigo and white,

gusts so faint they acquaint just those
who make close approach,
who see beyond the blue and cumulus,
those who are thrust in by the curious
hum of peaceful, focused breathing.

Painted and repainted for ages,
this singing but overlooked alley wall
endures and thrives upon
chipping, fading, blending of its colored coats.
Overlapping brushstrokes reference
the changing preferences of colored decades.
Impasto histories of posters
paint dismissively covers,
the initials of time-torn ancient lovers
who endure only in texture and plaster,
stray hairs from worn brushes,
a sand blaster,
a vandal's knife,
words carved rough and terse,
a drunken truck driver geared in reverse.

A wall brought to life by years
of accidental and incidental endowments.

It breathes deeper than a Rothko painting,
and exhales with the stillness of the present moment.

Camera

(A notional ekphrastic poem based on the photographs of painter Ellsworth Kelly)

During the latter days
of that long trip
the camera ceased to be
an intermediary lens
that simply sensed and seized
any view it pleased.

Gradually it grew into
an organizing tool
 choosing and composing,
 tidying and trimming,

dividing, defining, refining
shapes and fields,
forms and lines,
patterns and planes,
whether
rough, refined,
fractal, frumpy,
thick, thin,
round, rectangular,
rhomboid, rhombus,
receding, reaching,
choice, chance.

The camera now devises visual dances,
designs that dwell in graceful domains
found in the four sides of the frame.

Rhythmic arrangements
residing in the frame's simple squareness,
growing wild,
sometimes sublime,
defying distance by grasping
the universe beyond the peripheries
of flat surfaces,
Offering images of travelless travels
extending
beyond paper corners and gallery walls,
unravelling
from margins and right angles,
untangling
from the dictates and demands
of left and right.

The beauty of shapes.

They first define,
and then unwind.

Chainsaw Woodcarving

And this particular sculpture
challenges viewers
to wrap themselves

in the warm glow of growth rings
spiraling within their own imagined tree,
to curl into a specific moment in time--

--perhaps that moment
when a pliable sapling
formed and froze
into a thickened stubborn trunk.

The steel maw of chainsaw,
a rhythmic thrust and wobble
nipping rather than gnawing.
Knowing precisely
where to incise,
metal eager teeth
biting and subtracting
their way into new perspectives.

It's time to rethink.
To relearn,
revisit,
redraw,
reveal.

Chips and dust must fly
to find a sapling.

Dénouement

He found his love in Arabia,
a poor Nepali engineer,
his soulmate,
whom he was forbidden to marry.
He returned home,
swearing to never again travel.
These days he sits until late,
composing bulky symphonies
that rise
with him at mid-day.

The Devil is God
when he refuses to compromise.
The price of preservation
is a plummet
down steps

hewn of metamorphic stone.

She told the landlord
she found dead baby mice in the kitchen,
rigid pink thumbs
curiously grouped
in the center
of the red oxide floor.
The landlord replied,
"I wonder what killed
the mice."

Daydreams are myths
starring heroes who run
in perpetual wheels.
Lullabies carve wounds
where the years
will eventually enter.

A dog's nose reported
to its listless owner:
"This world holds more wonders
than the universe has stars."
And with that call at its tip,
the nose pointed
a direct path
toward the outdoors,
and the inert pile of fur
yielded to calls
of breeze and aroma.

Jesus was a carpenter.
He built the hidden bridge
beneath the surface of the water.
And wanderers journey forward
on trails engineered
for statues that stand as mile markers.

They sat around the table
laughing, talking of names
for animal groups.
A *troop* of monkeys,
a *murder* of crows,
a *chattering* of chickens.
She remained quiet
and thought to herself,
"For the monsters

who visit during nights
I suggest an *emptiness*."

Tolling is for yesterday,
equally for tomorrow,
but never for the now.
Clock dials are round
to allow no ledges for ladders
leading to new ground.

Silence and stillness
formed a golden glow
for me that afternoon,
a welcome respite
from piecing together
fragments of wrinkled,
torn decades
in attempts,
no longer playful,
at finding meaning.

God is the Devil
when he refuses to compromise.
The price of preservation
is a plummet
down steps
hewn of metamorphic stone.