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Nola Woodland
The Silent Father

I've never seen a sky like this,
like God is trying to speak or
reach down to us, begging touch
after too long without, like
God is trying to recite a poem but
the words keep getting stuck
on car antennae, wrapped in
telephone wires, impaled on branches
of sleepwalking trees.

Tonight God is letting himself be
vulnerable. Listen around the words
that he says. Tonight you will
discover your own inconsequence.

You will be humble.

Bless what streams down
through the boughs, the shadows' hows.
Albic dawn thaws the riot that waits
the grateful humanimal child of Heaven,
finally acceded innocence, in a rare moment
when the Father spoke to you undressed.
Later, when his affection is again
an aberration, will he hold that display
against you?

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Good Dog (for Zuko)

The little dog barks,
there is not a thing passing
in this world that does not
interest him. How I envy
that instinctive passion.
How I wish I could chase
a ball all day and be happy.
If only what I chased were simple
as a tennis ball. This poem
might come more easy.

I suppose we have our things
in common: though I keep mine
inward, we both growl. We share
a suspicious attitude to strangers,
a desire to be held, a few white hairs.
We are both food motivated.
And, like he, I spend much time
just moving from room to room
redundantly, seeking out distraction;
seeking food or reward.

Unlike he,
I never turn my belly over to anyone.

Still, part of me would like someone
to come along, ruffle my ears
and tell me, Good Dog

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then
take off my leash
and harness and set me loose
saying, 'you're free!'
and know that they really meant it.

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What Body

"Is Beauty an affliction — then?" -- Emily Dickinson

Why must the heart break at the beauty that feeds it?

I contort my body to accommodate bodies that, after a long spell of knowing, abruptly become anonymous. I give my celibate mind over to the questionable dominion of undeveloped man-boys whose favorite paintings are bowls of fruit, piles of dead objects-- Still lives if there ever were.

I give myself over mouthing the mantras I've made countless times before: to not give of myself utterly; to not give of myself overly.

How to give and not give all?

So long had the world tasted colorless,
like blood and metal, so long had I sighed upward
in despair of the perfection and immensity--in love
with love, and hungry for it, I was ripe to invite madness.

There were soundtracks that accompanied my steps in June,
a violent explosion after what had seemed an endless winter;
and too quickly I, too entirely responding, blew the buds
in their first blossoms. It was fallow soil as any, I bore this,
my last revolution, the last time I chanced myself
on love, and was proven, in the same way as ever, a fool.

There are times I want to ask the world; want to plead
with the world: love me. Oh, just love me. Purely, and basically.
Not unreasonably, but with poetry, and with conviction hale enough
to see a season through both the bloom and its fade.

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In the end, after all, what lover could make you feel less alone,
under such a measureless, under such a starving sky?

What fire could warm so depthless a space?

What body would mean the permanent difference?

What body would ever be the ultimate body?