

Stuttering Towards Joy

I.

How to freeze each inevitable stutter of love—Let us
commend encaustic for protecting the fragility of paper—
Meditation, if conducted deeply, must harvest pain—

Radioactive yellows and reds make plastic flowers
inappropriate for marking grief. But how else to see
them by roadsides when traffic passes swiftly? To see

the thing as the thing itself: look through a window to
see only glass—An orphan's rant for attachment speaks
to desire for desire's own sake; not knowing what one

wants does not obviate the *wanting*—There was a page
that was a glass pane etched with words; paper is too
soft a field for your hand leaving my waist—The poem

where protest becomes matter-of-fact—When the distance
between page and a reader's eyes becomes as intimate
as commingling breaths—Lazy poem where suffering

becomes rationale for salvation—Laying my brow against
the wet walls of a beer bottle—O poem whose first word
is "however." O poem whose last word is "consequently."

O poems that begin with the least lyrical words to raise the
threshold for defining "treasure"—When I happily bled
tears: *O sweetness of damp cheeks*—When poems set

you ablaze until you look at the world with glowing alien
eyes: lidless to see better, gold irises to erase the sun's
glare, and unblinking—

II.

Those prayers bringing forth

stigmata in areas of my body usually hidden from a public
's gaze—O poem whose words entrance by galloping across
the page until you feel the wind against your face and

suddenly you are composing the opera that will be entitled
“Homophon!” Those poetry readings where I ripped pages
from my books. Sometimes I autographed them; sometimes

I crumpled them into balls I'd toss towards the audience as
if they were money or my underwear—To insert a typo
at the last minute of proofing manuscripts: a space for read

-ers to inhabit in the tradition of indigenous weavers creating
imperfections as doorways for spirits to enter—So much
depends on a punctuation mark—How rarely an author

-ial blink exaggerates or diminishes the punctuation mark—
Complexity defined as the evolution of : to :: —so few persist
to explore :: : Lucidity does not guarantee freshness

in language—How to depict without the negative grid—Certain
poems writ casually to be minor poems but failing to be minor—
The advantage of an ignored chandelier—A poem made power

-ful by a poet who allowed darkness its time, then archived
the experience (that placed snow on her hair) as *Blessing*—
My country of hammocks and waling-waling orchids whose

perfumes obviate the world's magnificent indifference—First
lines swiftly yanking you into the poems' mapless depths—
Chilled monks illuminating manuscripts with silver and gold

and rarely seeing finished results : : We cannot know if they
felt compensated from anticipating a new generation
will sacrifice to continue their works. O fingers insufficiently

warmed by skinned mittens. O eyes abused by feeble lamps.
O stone walls that defined the limits of experience as if words
always fulfill what are expected of them—

III.

How reading the

phrase, “the scent of your nervous desire,” makes your nose
twitch—How stellar line-breaks transform a reading into
a rhythm so deeply felt even bones rock and roll! How critique

alone is as meager a fuel for poetry as it is for romance—Your
haste in tearing off jeweled combs—How love clouds as much
as it clarifies vision—Revelations delivered so keenly they

become razors against veins—When we agreed to live in
Technicolor—That hush sudden *and physical*—When “he found
himself” exemplified a marvelous line-break by continuing on

to the next line's word, "adrift"—O strand of hair hearkening
a welt—When double slashes—" / /"—evoked troubled girls
cutting themselves, paradoxically to *feel*—A poem whose light

flickers, *fragile* but one senses its dependability for never dying
into dark—The present is thin, and the past thick... Judicious
insertions of the word "you" to alchemize the reader into

the author! A wind chime dancing with, not against, wind:
a wind chime delighting with its hobo tune—The grit of jazz as
a scaffold—The paradox of garnets: stones for jewelry but ever

evoking blood, jewels transcending décor—O dictator who
became my father—No one else can be the sentry watching
over your life; only you can judge when you have absconded

from your inherent possibilities—O willing fall to move on knees
towards an altar hidden by rows of fat white candles with flames
scented by the blood of fallen priests, virgins, poets, crones,

sons, daughters, bastards, politicians, rebels, mothers... O
relentlessness of a gaze atop a sweat-soddened shirt, broken
knees, and trembling fingers—A poem written because

its author, "at the end of life, must stagger back towards love"—

IV.

How reader-response becomes enjoyable precisely because
what's read does not make sense—*O membrane of your lips*—

The psychic toll of managing self-deprecating sages—That shallow poem like “food wine” for over-relying on social context to overcome its flaws—Recall the poem whose nudity is radical

for addressing money instead of flesh—The timidity of your sixth toe—O radiance of darkness—“Guantanamo” might rear its bloodied head in a poem but Guantamano is not just a word—

Referencing “Guam” when they write a discourse on what’s *passed over*—O medicinal nature of tango—O logic of fragments—I forgot my poetry is going to change the world.

I forgot my words are healing. I forgot my words are apples infused with cheerful cinnamon. I forgot my words are holy. I forgot my words will lift you—all of you!—towards *Joy*.

Revelations From the Stone Mirror

I.

The interior, from the beginning, was stone—Stone
the compromise defines absence of void—When a stone
hand cracks, its pieces will not be caught—A roof tile flew

and slate sliced my cheek: blood on fingers after brushing
glimmer of bone—How effectively pain obviates
abstractions—Yes *crackle of light, dream of icicles* and

the unpredictability of angles cut by any creature chased
for its nutritious heart—O maddened sunlight into which
hostages emptied fears while erupting from a robbed bank—

That *thing* unidentifiable, but evoking pink pearls luminescent
within a gutted goat's entrails—We swelled underground
with rain as certain elements erased their absence:

whisper
Song
stairway

Aftermath a stone watching itself like a poem in a forest
covered fretfully by ancient moss, its only legacy to be
a stone toe with orange paint long faded (though it lingers

in someone's memory)—Someone shrouded herself
in white linen: a poem invisible but stubbornly transparent
until flesh became stone—A moving prop of clouds fails

to soften the edges of dark architecture—Paint transforms
canvas to skin; when the paint can is empty, then will innocence
reveal itself—

II.

We agreed to toss away the blindfold to empower

our ears beyond mere holes for burning stones tossed our way
by a cruel race—Or stones tossed our way by a venal
dictatorship—Or stones tossed our way by a passive

bureaucrat wielding power over the education of the child
we will never experience—Or stones tossed our way by obscene
combinations of trust fund babies and hedge fund billionaires—

Or stones tossed our way by the demands of poverty: how
poverty paradoxically narrows the impoverished focus into
the small, then petty, then brutish—Yes absence of green

as my bandaged wing swung to break stalactites—A mirror
-ed face only partially owns its reflection—Flying fish are
always wide-eyed always breathless always look unbelieving—

Yes long-haired women exist, but outside the frame as
has been reality for centuries—Yes ziggurat tattooed on
an inner thigh, an area where inscription must have surfaced

with anguish, then desperation, then a hymn long-forgotten
as I'd forgotten how to attend anyone's church—A body
drowns in light as a hand writes—Eyes leak flames—

III.

“Matte vs. Glass”—Chill of kissing the wrong man: *O lifetime of pearls!*—How a reflection manifests loneliness or holiness but never both at the same time—The wave: its singularity

easily fractured by sunlight’s blades—When stars become asterisks to matters best left in the dark (I forgot the tirelessness of shame)—The mental is a muscle—The forgotten bagpipe

morphs into a discarded lung atop the asphalt of your aborted road—Once, I was woken by a whisper to see a red chair tipped on its side on a white shag carpet: when they finally found you,

it was the heart of winter and the only witnesses were stripped trees bent by old winds, their muteness ancient and forever—*Hiraeth* defined as rain of black crows plummeting from the bullets

of hidden hunters with soft hands—Constellations don’t sing, don’t cooperate, are forever on a pedestal—The stairway descends into concrete to muffle but still sing our song—Once, I danced—

en compas!—into a story I thought belonged to me. I became a character in it, giving its narrative all the years demanded from my life. But the story began long before I entered it. I forgot

I was only dancing flamenco—

Mental snapshot of three coyotes goldened by sunlight
as they peed upon the buttercups—Wrestling a long poem until
all thorns have been gathered into cupped palms for birthing

psalms (O smile at a stranger's blood mixed with rose petals
for generous perfume)—Turquoise on the Kachina doll hanging
on your wall, color of sunlit ocean embracing Greece while you

explored Mexico: I remember Philip Lamantia—Puzzle of
agriculture: Philip Lamantia entering the blue frame of glass
bordering the blue wooden door into *Maykadeh* where we met

for “they do wonders with tongue.” Sprezzatura woke my veins—
How, sweetly, you offered eggplant, its skin made palatable
through much prior bruising: I remember you, Philip Lamantia—

II.

I forgot my birth language Ilokano: *maysa, dua, tallo, uppat,*
lima, innem, pito, walo, siam, sangapulo... Allow diamonds
to fray—Maturity defined as recognizing the second-greatest

loss is disillusion—Look at the decaying world through slitted
eyes—When the hunched sommelier corrected, “You mean
‘saddle leather,’” I learned one can forget what one never knew—

Define the figure eight as an hourglass frittering time away—
Icarus actually lived and the sky went livid—Red pistils rising
from waxy white petals always look profane and magnificent

-ly divine—Blades tangoed on my palms to carve life-lines—
Wings curled beneath black leather—A “someday” as
elusive as a cab at 4 a.m., and the musky scent of fortitude—

O crushing tune that worked Baudelaire to the bone—Waiting
by grimy hotel glass, peeking through hair, fingering lace
sleeves, envying the lobby’s silk flowers for their inability to feel—

White birch flashing through forest greenery evoked your eyes—
Duende that overcomes without satiating the *longing* for more—
Derrida hunched as I was over an antique desk scribbling past

egregious back pain, “There is speech. / There is phenomena.”
—Athena also rises from the gape of wounds—

III.

Charisma defined

as a wall at dusk with shelves of books whose spines stared
at you as a neighbor’s saxophone elongated a note from low to
high to low—Your finger tracing the cheek I offered as proxy—

How the ellipsis hides, elides, gives up ... Forgotten orphan, skinny
as he offered his toys: twigs, cracked stone, two matchboxes
cradling spiders, earthworm in tin can—Pounding through fields

of tall grass to release the beauty of white butterflies rising in a panic—
Abu Ghraib—Tondo, a shanty town created by a massive garbage
dump called “Smokey Mountain”—Mountains losing trees for books

about mountains losing trees—Kali warriors memorizing *halad*
to quicken the surfacing of deadly positions during hours of battle—
A yellowed photograph slipping from brittle pages—Milk leaking

from the corner of the sleeping child's mouth—Believing the world was overpopulated by mothers who would always welcome back prodigal sons and daughters with warm rice and cool slices of

pineapple—Sarong undoing itself to the trill of birdsong—Sarong's fall bringing down the eagle with curious eyes—Sarong caressed breasts and thighs before it was borne away by a river's current—

Sarong fell and a river blushed—*Ikaw, aking pag-ibig, ay naruon...*
"You, my Love, were there..."

IV.

O stone garden in Kyoto where the 15th stone is invisible from all angles—That the sun practices justice by

privileging vines which work harder on steep terrain amid gravel than on level land fertile with natural nutrients and easily accessed by water—Kathmandu where I recognized you in me and I in you

upon turning a street corner onto a plaza where every inch was topped by mud pots, their inky glazes like benefactions from goats peering through second- and third-story windows—Coltrane in Napa

Valley, his "Pursuance" the rhythm of your heartbeat against my roaming palm, and the sound of grapevines growing—A flock of starlings shattering the sky's clean plate like grains of black pepper—

A calf affixed to an iron rotisserie: the animal cooked slowly for hours. and hours until its meat was a page-turn away from falling from the bone—A valley witnessing my return to you with a primitive ardor

shared by hunting hawks, crack of cartilage audible as they
obviated distance, as they swooped, wings flared as if posing
for Rembrandt—O those paintings that evoke what lives outside

the frame, like a woman who so loved a man she ate his testicles
between quaffs of sweet Jerez, chewing and chewing meat before
swallowing—

V.

A tremor ripples a vein in anticipation of a possibility.

Another possibility: a tremor ripples a vein in anticipation—We
never knew the opposite of *Easy Beauty*—Darkness was the key
not the lock—A wooden door in Ulan Ude, cracked in places

a wash of faded blue paint tattooed by pale green diamonds
evoking island in the Sulu Sea, an emerald floating on lapis lazuli
staining, too, the sky—A night train lumbering across Siberia in

whose hold Ivan, a Russian geologist, apologized for his poor
English by reciting Pushkin in his native tongue. Ezra Pound was
correct: inarticulate sounds transport as music—A room where

the only sign of contentment was a gown framed on one wall
its dance present but not visible—Ignoring Paris waiting on
the other side of a shuttered window—Passion always exacts

a price, and Love is always eager to pay—A beach where
sand constantly shifted its hollows—The debris from attempting to
unify “the convex with the concave”—Writing a poem, then turning

it physical (I forgot its opposite is equally arduous...and lyrical)—
A girl singing as if Heaven was mere breath away—A girl singing
to repel a black bear—A girl singing along with Dave Brubeck

after he regaled with a tale: he turned to music only after studying
how to heal cattle as a vet. I forgot Dave Brubeck on the piano,
Randy Jones on drums, Jack Six on string bass, Bobby Militello on

sax—all conspiring for “The Time of Our Madness”—

VI.

A girl singing
to mountains in Nepal quivering like 500-pound Sumo wrestlers—
A girl singing to *la luna naranja*—A girl singing as she spun a globe,

its whirl evoking the guarantee of returns with all departures—A girl
singing *I will become Babaylan!* with notes only virgin boys can
muster, only dogs can hear—A girl singing to unfurl wings that have

never betrayed her—A girl singing as she smooched the sun... A girl
singing forth her benedictions: May you never grow intimate with cold
ashes and burlap. May you never feel tar and black feathers. May

you know what I saw through *flames*... A girl singing in Porto Vecchio:
lobster at noon, a tiny tortoise tip-toeing across the bedspread, a bus
endearingly halted by determined partridges marching across the road

as Simone De Beauvoir and Nelson Algren watched—Heaven could
be ... a breath away—I am trying to remember how a girl clung to
herself, how she persevered to remain in constant song—

The Secret Life of Magenta

I.

The world is never unclad—White velvet ribbon
stripped from a negligee becomes a bookmarker—
So many secrets masked by lace—Tears not

diluting the martial energy of a gaze—Mercury
become lifestyle—Oh unknown source of a lover's
pause—Freeze the spiral that is memory's perspective—

An open door through which, faintly, *Bach* ... Murmurs
melting with marrow into soup—The revolt of the minor
key—Pepper a poor metaphor for truffles—Exodus led

by beards—Deathbeds where eyes take on an ascetic's
gleam of ecstasy—*Forgo wings*—White prows slicing
oceans—The pulse pulsing among persimmons—

Suspension defined as a persimmon—The seduction of
wet cobblestones—Paradox the scent of a lunatic
negative—The god aspiring to decay—Aspiring to

geometry—Map viz a rough skin—The glue of "if" —
Weeping over the language not yet lost by toddlers—
The resonance of bone—Blue becoming golden

in a Cimabue—Waiting out the ash in one's mouth
until morning dawns—Paintings completed by the shadows
of viewers—The ember of amber—Respond to mystery

II.

with a kiss—That pleasurable tension of avidity—
Slowing down in a room intimate with piano lessons—
Dwarves playing violins, velvet scarves at their feet—

The anguished redhead during Verdi—That dangerous
happiness only rain can elicit—Skin extended by
voluminous ballgown—Ignoring bells—Names of children

not born, like *Alexander*—Scavenged pearls—A whip's
pathos—Sausage fat sizzling with the passion of cultists—
Irrelevant bonhomie—Diluted molasses—The stillness

of a barn as moss peeks through wood slats—Over a hill,
a waiting choir—Apples rotting on a lawn—Compassion
defined as resuscitating *Salieri*—Softening through sleep—

Ice relaxing its contours into liquid gold—A typo lurking
in 645-1133—Sunray searing a stallion—Car fender
tattooing a 100-degree summer day against my skin—

Deceit defined as conclusions—Intimacy measured by
a glistening patch of flesh—Money as metaphor—
The pathos of the word "ethos"—Reading lips through

a mirror—Seams caused by bindings—The paleness of
paste—When the stutter steadies itself—Blindly foraging

III.

for eggs—The blinding whiteness of a thick porcelain mug

sunning itself on your windowsill—Capturing light through algebra—Capturing you, *Lover*, through algebra—Dust losing its passivity—Fringes colonizing—Snow tucked

amid cotton nightgowns—Dream defined as a face, name-less but in a bookstore—Twin and twining knotholes—Wave of grasshoppers blocking the view of a headless

Buddha—Peace defined as unblinking, unmoving heifers—Meager defined as pity—The lurking joker card—Desperation defined as rouged nipples—O delicate scrim

of fine wrinkles—Omission as confession—Moonlight reveals itself as broken—The noiseless convulsion—The deception of diamonds—Audacity defined as cruelty—Always on the other

side of street corners: caravans of sad hags—Nostalgia defined as ivory—Sea vomiting gold coins despite flirtatious glints—When butter melts, something is nullified—Even false witches

salsa—The chef who scoffed at insurance—Stitching together a map from the remnants of fur-covered boots—Dungeons wasting marble—Regret defined as a Kingdom with unknown

borders—Forgiveness defined as a brass coin—The awkward blanket of trust—The alley without flavor—Does magenta really exist in Geneva ... ?