

# nocturnal temple

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## IMAGINE YOUR MOTHER READING ALL THE WORDS YOU HAVE EVER WRITTEN

literate or illiterate, weaver of dresses or boots.  
eyes, smell, skin. your words in her knapsack, even  
though she breathes next to you. your failure to  
imagine, indecipherable. hunger vacant with fog-  
horns, a missing protein, thread.

when i can no longer listen to her words, i pluck out  
the vowel sounds and pin them to the clothesline  
outside my window, watch their heart beats wick-  
edly.

## A SEA ENTOMBED INSIDE HER

or a seat at the thrift store, the most darling stool.  
i am thirsty and missing my sea-level. day off, lungs  
parched. continue dreaming up a soup in zazen,  
getting something delicate right. a dress made of  
fall wind, skippy. the buildings uninhabited here  
feature many beds dressed in clean sheets. white  
duvet and dust, still squinting suns embedded inside  
suns.

## A TASTE IS A PROMISE (BEATE)

cook barley for breakfast, sweetened with cinnamon and cloves. put a sweet potato in the oven for julia, which she is taking to a workshop. small daisies poking out of the gutters. slow walking meditation outside. everything is exposed here: strange abdominal pain, respite, clay feet.

## THE SILENCE WAS LIFTED FOR AN HOUR, IN THE SPIRIT OF CONVIVIALITY

the story now inside you even though you were not there, stain of its warmth. return to something primordial. the ikebana arrangement is moved from one room to another. open with a scene of recovery. naked women climb in sleeping bags to infect another woman, suffering from hypothermia, with immediate heat. find the broken limbs. this story is conveyed to you more than once.

I WANT TO CONTEST WHEN ANYONE  
SAYS LANGUAGE IS POISONOUS. EVEN  
IN THE SEAMS OF SMALL TALK, WATCH  
HER FINGERS WEAVE SOMETHING ELSE

halfway through each meditation period something like a bell and a whisper, "posture." adjust the pain pressing into my kidneys. shards of a dream: i am at a monastery near a littered beach with several arab women, who take up entire couches to themselves, drink sugary mint tea while smoking cigarettes. eyes marked with black liner, the air thick with laughter. we go to the beach to lift dirty foam cups from the sand. red scarves tight around the neck, whipped from the wind. no one speaks during the day.

## A DOCTOR OF HEMATOLOGY APPEARS

i dip 400 strawberries in chocolate while talking to a seattle woman, who fills me with images of ferries. when striking the meditation board, feet scuttle past, hills rotate hues. some cup their ears. what is shrill: a startle and a call out of deep fatigue. a box of apples spilled around john's feet. we were fasting that day and dropping things. a woman in the temple bathroom suffers from a nose bleed, you feel the blood rushing in your throat.

## FROM MY WINDOW I WATCH HER WASH HER DELICATE BLOUSES

to illustrate the gentle care she received, she recalled an incident in which a woman visited her hospital port late at night, and with a flashlight, drew blood while she was asleep.

## THE NIGHTS ARE MINE

stirrings about  
long-winded  
sail or flight-  
bird  
dialogue  
lashing, fire  
absent from  
light-headed limbs  
buddha belly

# DO NOT HINDER THAT WHICH HEARS IT

(BEATE)

the makeshift han at the refuge is less echoey but  
more raw

she motioned for me to turn and face the wall

she is accompanied by her dog, who comes and goes  
but then trails her feet

she was given "the coldest spot in the room"

she moved the pink water bottle to the side to make  
room for her friend

we revived leafy greens in a tub of water

she asked us to come closer so we could hear her  
better

## THERE IS A SATELLITE PHONE, BUT "IT MIGHT BE A PROP"

the problem here with taking walks is a lack of orientation, "even for a swiss-mountain girl"

the daikon was sprinkled with salt to give it a slightly pickled taste

she sweeps rows of red lentils to the side of the tray as she eyes them for tiny rocks

in the distance she walks to her campsite

she puts on and removes her sandals, leaving the clasps intact

## SIMPLY HOBBLE ALONG IN YOUR OWN SENSATION

j's hot-wet-noon sweat – hers? when the lights dim  
a swollen affection (for whom

attempt to mark the imprints you've spread across  
the floor. kneel down. small blue bruises, shadow of  
almond-shaped eye, a pukey smell.

she dances by herself now, reveling in the textures  
of wood and foot, privately, spinning until dizzy,  
laughing quietly, about to be sick.

## OUR PHONE CALL KEPT DROPPING SO WE CALL EACH OTHER BACK TO MEND THE ABRUPT ENDINGS

i notice his sweater draped on the line outside, one grey weathered sleeve puffs with the breeze. jisen explains, "you don't bow before the officiant, stay on her wings and then appear to appear at the same time." isabelle relays the travails of her imaginary children, a schoolhouse full of them. one goes into the mountains at night, worrying her.

## THE KIND OF BOY WHO FILLED A MUG WITH "PLEASE DRINK THIS"

i abandoned the broom and moved on to the next thing. at a zen center, objects are like your children. sometimes you cup their faces, other times you flatten their limbs. what kind of mother would i make? so bursting of love and thoroughly distracted at once, the neighbors would always be returning the children i left out in the rain.

# SHE WAS ALWAYS GETTING SOMETHING STUCK IN HER EYE

outside/inside  
crumbs/dust  
buddha/leap year birthday  
two cards/one says "cheer up"  
window/only a  
"repeat"/clothing

## WHILE IN REMODELING

scratches on floor                      cushions lifted to attic  
    re(arrange)  
    threads on top visible to allow imperfections  
burn thumb at altar while lighting a candle  
    service versus no service  
shoes line up thunderstorms  
we sit alphabetically silent  
the mosquitoes don't move

## “DO NOT SQUANDER YOUR LIFE”

- LEG:            asleep  
                  the nerve!  
                  (nail polish is hurriedly removed)
- TREMOR:       burning eyes  
                  oh, my juniper  
                  sit on a chair  
                  the quality of your bow reflects the
- BELL:           nearly passed out today  
                  (too much salt? too much sauna?)  
                  approach your cushion  
                  wait, turn clockwise, bow
- WATER:         the orchids, lifted and doused  
                  small vessel, an offering, emptied at  
                  night welling up (some childhood

thing) in the high desert, brief showers  
the right amount of solution to dip a  
mop into figments and future inks

**BOW:**

at present, heartfelt  
at present, robotic  
a pause before rising (violins)  
permission  
gratitude (what simmers inside a  
drum) palms toward

**CLACKERS:**

(the sky falls, stubs toe) (no evening sit)  
(study hall)

## THE TEMPLE IS QUIET AT NIGHT

the zafus gently lift off the zabutons, shake loose  
the tremors and traumas, compulsive thoughts.  
the tatami mats heave strange sighs. love, hate,  
sadness, restlessness, anger. outside my window,  
a canopy that protects a table and chairs is half-  
collapsed. dream of an unnamed city saturated in  
amber light, on all fours on a newly finished floor,  
searching for the old wounds. where to place used  
match sticks. during the guided meditation, people  
meet their deaths on the floor.

## DOES ANYONE WANT TO DEMONSTRATE?

i never wanted to break dance before i got here but now i want to. there is a lot of sitting and bowing but what about sprinting. my head is filled with hip hop songs. tidbit: break it down. when the dishwasher becomes muddied with food bits, i take the basin outside and offer the water to a tree.

## SMALL BANDS OF LIGHT CIRCLE HER FEET

in chasing the temple, what am i after. a vast mark on canvas, a sky untainted by plot. each day the floor is washed with vinegar and water, mopped in long smooth strokes. this is your assignment: trust. don't blacken all activities. caress each event, like the butoh dancer follows the white balloon, as if this is all there is: a circle infected by helium shaping a stage. witness her pauses: terror, disappointment, glee. she stops to saturate a corner. we quickly wipe the footprints infused with sweat, before the procession begins.

## IN THE DARK, IT'S EASIER TO KNOW

friday night blackout. find candles for the guests,  
thumb the insides, many gutted out. dimmed  
voices, a new meeting of the foot. when she arrived  
to the dormitory she decided to shower in the dark,  
letting a flashlight dangle from the shower caddy.

## IN THE MIDDLE OF THE TALK, THE TEMPLE DOOR BLEW OPEN AGAIN

while everyone is away, jean and i divide the campus to split the watering. i bury a hose inside shakti's garden under the towering sunflowers, which doesn't reach the secret parts, where bean and squash plants poke out. what else? joey the rabbit eats parsley and one papaya tablet daily. brief but potent rain during zazen. all this doesn't touch on anything.

## THE TEMPLE REINVENTS VIGOROUSLY

the priests have shaved their heads again. there are hidden garments inside their black robes, a bowing cloth that is precisely unfolded at morning service. not waiting, an unveiling. we shift the cushions to meet the needs of those arriving. the substitute altar introduces a new spaciousness. when the green tara thanka is unveiled, the women in the temple begin weeping. her gestures point as if marking in air a course or convergence that appears then vanishes. at night i dream of small vials containing essences of plants saturated by the sun. insides, figments of something else.

"I DON'T MEAN THIS AS A JOKE. YOU CAN HAVE A TURNAROUND AS SOON AS YOU WALK OUT OF HERE AND BE COMPLETELY BLISSED OUT"

be a bigger backbone. something is wrong but i don't know what. the morning while i slept in, sensing thick menstrual blood, roshi took everyone through a meditation toward their last breath. my father adjusts his intestines in the evenings, makes markings. no word from him since 2000. a friend says, write a letter. i say, i want to show him my mosquito bites.

PLACE A KOAN INSIDE YOU AS IF YOU  
WERE PREGNANT WITH IT

during a daylong sit, i did not move for two hours.  
upon rising, felt the chants clasp me to no place to  
hide or you have nothing to capture  
offer your head  
jump from

## THERE ARE WOMEN SINGING IN THE TEMPLE

the dance inside the dance a woman weaves silk  
what stays: unravel the long string of beads from  
the ankle, eyeballs shifting up and down a story  
could not have absorbed the brilliant whirling except  
from afar, the sound dimmed white, the zikr leaving  
the shore mayumi takes roshi's foot in her hand  
costumes and props fall away in a corner, don't feel  
so heavy inside. the rains come

## YOU ARE TOO FAR TO HEAR THE MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT

"adjust your posture upon sitting, then leave yourself profoundly alone." i held the manjushri statue still while the table was being moved. a box of chocolates is passed around the room during the recital. the teachers are away this weekend. at the restaurant, rose adjusts her palms in front of her navel, explains that it is only in the last week that she understood how the mudra worked. like this. index fingers meeting inside, thumbs which light up each other, but do not smother.

## NOCTURNAL TEMPLE

in the flaps  
door blushed open  
why does one awaken all others  
she says, "i'm losing all reference points"  
a fugue or a fragment  
what do i leave out  
news from foreign corridors  
during the zikr no native speakers  
just syllables flattened  
lost my constitution at each threshold  
brink of clear-eyed nothing to utter  
a flat sheet whipped in thunder  
    O Enchantress  
how to locate words before words  
blank yellow eyes faced me in the line-up  
long tapered fingers took down one bloodied  
clothespin after another, blew away genetics  
crumpled my sculptures of bird-wire  
redirected me to the sky

with wooden sticks we were seated for hours  
from pointing so long outstretched  
arms numbed into wonder  
upstairs a wasteland of birds  
precise patterns land  
in rome there were various kinds of prophets  
the frame keeps abandoning

