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Poetry Chapbook: *Red Light Laughter*

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POETRY BY MARCUS LLOYD RUMMELL

RED LIGHT LAUGHTER

Poetry by Marcus Lloyd Rummell

for my Family, all of them,
& especially Maynard

“I am nobody; I have nothing to do with explosions.”

—*Sylvia Plath, “Tulips”*

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And finally, thank you to Beth Ann Fennelly, whose world somehow brushed up against my own, and for a short time showed me I owned some music.

INVOCATION:

how to conjure

that mumbled holiness

III.

I'm

a young man.

royal muse!
wait
no longer.

i,

The alchemist,
purge the impure from
blood;

revive sick flesh
through blood.

IV.

the sun pours down
daylight.

come
lunging through the air;
beat
and bump against

the bars,

the basements.

all at once bells break loose
to heaven,
like home. no one left.

the end.

—And i, ears with drums,
parade in soul,
weep, and read
t his black flag.

LA DAME DU TEMPS JADIS

where is the caress that used to simmer
between you & i our spring lips pursed
each for the warmth of the other?

before

the rainbow had been crushed
into a sky of winter slate you offered a flower's bud
pink & purple-tipped.

you'd rest it

gently on my navel's cusp lighter
than all the clouds that i could point
out with dumb & pallid hands.

if only a single finger would grow

red with loud heat linger & arouse
itself to the ruddy clamor of the world.

to touch

& be touched not by a three-months' snow
but folds upon folds of delicate feathers velvet
like the monarch's wing wild
as its way among the milkweed.

with unconscious sleep-heavy hands i stand
before the field of hacked & whitened stems.
the wind-ravaged flowers left unblossomed
palpitate against a fallow ground.

i see half a petal twitching
under the stony sky.

i take it up

& grind its true grit between my teeth.

FOR MAYNARD, MY DOG

the moonlight was a pandemonium
of crackling twigs twigs in face in hair in eyes
they scraped the skin but healed it too in hair
they gave me antlers eyes a path of powder
enclosed above by hanging branch the moon

& i am ten again coyote barks
in curtained night the dog gets up but slow
he drinks what's in the water dish & dreams
of rivers bounding deer for quiet ease
& windless is it now the blackened sky

THE FALL

in the dusky sun i heard light laughter
it was you & your now obscured light laughter

we weren't meant to meet we did
on a bench beneath a robin's brief red light laughter

can a "can i sit here" come to anything after all
i ask you fallen leaflover should we dread light laughter

& the autumn after will we fall like the leaves that always lie best
these questions we wondered without quivered light laughter

was i a circle traced haphazard
was marcus i just slurred light laughter

WITHIN THE UNKEMPT KUDZU
BY A GARDEN FULL OF WATER

the strawberry you've plucked bounces upon my tongue.
in liquid sugar-like death (& i drunk & still drinking),
the berry explodes. i am nobody,
loosed by its flood of dizzy wine.

in liquid, like sugar, i'm drunk. & still drinking
the berry, supple, & quivering calm
is loosed by its flood of dizzy wine.
i am a pine cone leaning toward the liquor

of the berry supple & quivering calm.
the berry explodes & i am nobody.
i am a pine cone, leaning forward to lick her,
the strawberry. you, plucked, bounce upon my tongue,

within the unkempt kudzu by a garden full of water.

SUMMER

I.

My clock
& i
 exchange
breath for
breath. In,
out. Tick,
tock.

 If not
for some
distant
midnight
footsteps,
we would

 produce

monotonous sound.

 We have become the single chrysalis
while caterpillars wet dream into golden blankets.

II.

In the beginning of spring,
it rained every day,

& the moon—

the moon that reflected white sun
off bumblebee, lily,
lily lit upon &
lily alighting,
ponds of electric pollen

—would split like liquid birth.

III.

I can hear the hands of my bronzed clock
beginning to shake & shudder

as they click to realize what is now faceless—
to what is vibrating instead

to the night's watery golden soles,
which skip only to the waxing tide.

WHISKEY

Some impossible bell hollow constant

peals violently as the censer's smoky clefs
twine / remind
the bleeding cough

what does not change. Is

a church bell on the hill howling
bottomless fire in the Shepherd's tone

noting this dead ember
becoming as gray as the weightless morning?

What does not change is

the sudden bell quaking &
forever clamorous
tumultuous

that comes to mute some faint crackling flame.

What does not change, is.

THE HORSE RACE

I.

in the dusk, at the finish line.

in place is the pale palomino horse.

in place the horse is running.

in place the pale palomino horse is running &

the horse that is running is a pale palomino.

the horse shrieks

in ragged gasps as its dusty hoof
carves into its own eye socket. bone
grinds bone. blood streams muddy
over a grey-yellow coat.

a mutilated cadence, returning, to begin

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ELEGY FOR MAYNARD, MY DOG

you're running running
through woods becoming whiter
whiter with ringing

*The gentlest thing in the world
overcomes the hardest thing in the world.*

you're drinking water
from streams cooler than tin bowls
cardinals rest here

*That which has no substance
enters where there is no space.*

spring air pets you lulls
you into dream the winds are
all playful whistles

This shows the value of non-action.

soft as feathers your
wrinkled face as your white paws
fall & lift lighter

*Teaching without words,
performing without actions:*

when the black crow caws
i hear the kitchen tiles they
click under your claws

that is the Master's way.

LOAFER'S HAIKU

snowflake drifts to nose	simultaneous
with nose drifting to snow	crystals like water balloons pop
a hooded child sits	the summer storm pours

FOR TERRENCE

caterpillar, i raise the conch to your ear
& send you sailing on a brass, beached leaflet.
as you glide by gnarled oak,

their grandmother fingers stretch towards touch.
with the cadence of trees, the leaflet sparks
igniting in song & fluid word.

you explode into orange, match-tipped wings,
unhinging in the daytime sun.

NOW I AM SURE

that my mother is the red-winged blackbird
stitching her nest from dried summer grass

lashed to cattails. she darts across the salty marsh,
birthing color with each beat of tender blood-wing,

the ruffled shudder of her small, yellow stripe.
she calls to me, her egg cradled

& rocking against two others, all speckled with brown.
loosened by my moving, a grassy leaf

alights, hardly audible, on the muddy field below;
a rivulet's trickle carries the leaf away.

today i will be born, bloody, but singing still.

NATURE POEM

i sit on the curb, too close
to a friend whose eyes drip liquid wax
that leave me scarred, unable to know her.
it is only then that i see it:
half the worm writhing,
the other half

limp & lifeless.

the miniature pink body
is smashed into the pavement, the crushed
ends are wet, purple, & blue.
my friend's eyes dry, becoming candles—
she & i are not such complicated things.

PORTRAIT

My mother is sick. She has pneumonia.
She coughs & I hear her lungs tear & flood,

the crackle of mucus, waves. My brother,
who is nineteen, isn't here. His room,

empty, looms like a shadow. My other
brother, ten, isn't ill, but pretends.

He gets me a Hot Pocket; my mother,
a bagel with orange cheese. Tonight

he'll wedge fingers down his throat for two hours
until the Pop Tart he's eaten

for dinner returns as yellow vomit.
When his stomach is empty

he'll throw up green phlegm & finally
blood. He just wants us to care, like he does.

I want to crawl inside the mouth of the microwave.

—

I find my father, asleep on the couch. His black Jack Daniels
t-shirt is bunched above his belly,
patched from his recent herniorrhaphy. The bandage is specked
with dried, orange blood.

He's woken by my wandering into his house. Bleary-eyed, he
throws off his blanket & begins
the story behind his "procedure": how the whole thing took
only two hours; how the doctors

had to peel back the skin of his swollen belly button; how they
had to pack all his guts back in,
insert a mesh metal plate, & sew him back up. When he finishes,
he drives up the road

to his girlfriend's house. Before he leaves he tells me how she
needs help, she's spackling a wall.

I steal two of his oxycodone, swallow them, & begin to think of
how to pack

everything I own into a pickup truck, which I don't yet have the
money to buy.

I shouldn't have taken those painkillers. I should have sold them
to friends & kept the cash, taken whatever I could get.

I want to be washed in beer & flammable liquids.

—

Now I'm alone in my dorm room, big enough for a bed, myself,
& little else. The walls need paint, a new color; they are like the
last walls

someone in a pale, paisley gown would see. They are a sickly,
lifeless mint, yet somehow soothing. Scotch-taped

to one wall is the drawing, made a year ago by my four-year-
old cousin.

My skin has been colored orange. Each stroke of marker

looks like a bloody scratch, while my hair is ten dead &
fallen leaves.

My head is an uneven circle; my nose a bullet hole.

She has drawn my left eye larger than the right, & my thin,
crooked lips
are pursed. The pupils of each eye are little more than
orange dots.

My pupils could be miniature portraits, myself in my own eyes.
I look like the sun, forever staring at what must die.

—

I should have painted my own portrait, silky like the sheen of
a panther
bathed in plum light – purple like the pit, bubbling within
the peach.

ONE OR TWO QUESTIONS

to V.P.P.

what's Ezra Pound's worst advice

if there were a sleepy fire
in yr living stanza

read seeds not twigs

would you snuff it out entirely
or let its rhyme go free

or make it new?

ARS POETICA ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

*[Pome sits center stage appearing “incomplete.”
His robes slowly flower budding orange from his nipples.*

*Enter the Future a pink soap bubble floating listless
& aloft the vaulted ceiling.]*

POME [*eyes closed*]:

The audience is no longer
Concerned with what will happen.

*[The Past a black diamond is rolled across the stage.
stopped near the edge of the bubbles’s shadow*

*The ringing of soft bells can be heard
A bamboo flute five finger-holed falls into Pome’s lap.]*

POME [*eyes still closed*]:

The audience is no longer
Concerned with what has happened.

*[Behind Pome curtain by orange curtain
begins to pull away revealing the Present*

*presenting itself as the smallest gift
tucked between a soapy globe & a mountain.]*

POME [*beholding only empty seats before him discovers the flute*]:

The cricket clicks its
Seven sycamore-like notes.
Violet starlings perch.

Seven wonder-filled seconds?
Seven wonder-filled seconds.

O

pillar, i raise
& send you on:
glide by!

i etch to touch
the cadence of trees, the

ode to chipped wing
time.

NOTES

- 2 S EE (CHAR [CHAR HOW]): Charles Baudelaire. *Les Fleurs Du Mal*. “Spleen (I–IV).” Trans. Richard Howard. This poem is an erasure poem, in the style of Ronald Johnson’s 1977 “Radi Os,” itself an erasure of John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*.
- 7 AFTER THE KEY TURNS, AFTER THE DOOR GROANS: John Keats. “The Eve of St. Agnes.”
- 8 LA DAME DU TEMPS JADIS: François Villon. “Ballade des Dames du Temps Jadis.”
- 15 WHISKEY: See also Shepard’s Tone.
- 18 ELEGY FOR MAYNARD, MY DOG: Lao-tzu. *Tao Te Ching*, “43.” Trans. Stephen Mitchell.
- 27 ONE OR TWO QUESTIONS: *The Iowa Review*. “W. S. Merwin on Ezra Pound.” Ed. Ed Folsom. Vol. 15, No. 2 (Spring–Summer, 1985).



MARCUS LLOYD RUMMELL

(right, pictured with Nathaniel Greene Cyrus)

Sprang from the fertile earth of Hamden.
He was banished to the barren lands of Naugatuck,
For his repeated acts of silver-bestial delinquency

& then some shit about wandering the Earth.
He is 21 years old.

—*Conor Coleman*

April 2010.

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