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from metamorphoses

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from metamorphoses

"In nova fert animus mutatas dicere formas / corpora." Ovid

i

The transformation of the hours into chocolate morsels, the migration of birds,
The absence of the smell of paint, the chalkboard scratch of misplaced hilarity,
Speak, who, where, as if, a painting: two painters who are tired of paint,
Their noses turned to turpentine, their eyebrows to congealed brushes
Like the sudden move to Spring in the Deep South, or dandelions, or dark
Colors which reveal the light of the moon's magnanimous milking
Of the stars. O whose and his and hers,
My eyes are magnetized in every direction; or in my beginning is my
Middle, as if roses chewed cud, as if I were who I am who knowing must
Be and is and shall in being discontinued; for this is the like of the hour,
Whose time becomes rocks, trees, discontent schoolboys; whose ticks
Become lazy summers and humid late autumns; whose tocks
Are and become the Velcro of my soul's longing.

ii

With the advent of sliced bread there came rats; not rats like in *The Plague*,
But those that pop out of walls and stare at you rather than eat your baby.
And in this assertion one finds that death is easier to bear, that in the blank
Stares of mourning, there are still sharp minor chords, still nocturnes
Which mothers play in their heads when they feel the fangs of the wind.
But do the unheard songs of birds sing, deep and low, high upon the north,
Where words become icicles; and does music persist in the musical
Notes of two blades of St. Augustine; the confessions of plants, irrelevant
As a dead idol, blare tidings of nothingness to a world whose only delight is
Self—where is thy victory, where is thy sting, o auto, o counterfeited
Something. I am not water. These words are not *ex nihilo*, nor these thoughts
Prime; the world has enough thirty-sevens. The audience, the audience,
You are my joyful pen, my bloodied eyes, my fractured solitude.

iii

A young boy, not unlike what I imagine Ibsen to have looked like
 At age nine, suddenly becomes a giraffe, towering over his own
 House, his own kitchen, his father's desk, the neighborhood yard.
 His movement is fickle, like an accordion. He first tastes his own
 Trees, then those of the Lindholms, but finds nothing so pleasing
 As the idea of the sky, its blueness increasing without bound,
 Its lack of children and pomegranates, its subtle wit.
 So he makes the sound that giraffes do when they say goodbye,
 Then jumps, clear into the gulf between earth and never
 And perhaps what we like to call the moon, to land on the shores
 Of his own planet, where he can be le petit prince, but where
 Giraffish is the langue of choice; and sometimes, but only sometimes,
 Because of his reticence, he remembers his home, his family,
 His little bedside table with the convenient piggy bank and
 Photo of the beach. Yet he thinks he is happy, and
 We know that he is, for his neck is strong, and the leaves
 Abundant, and it's a free galaxy.

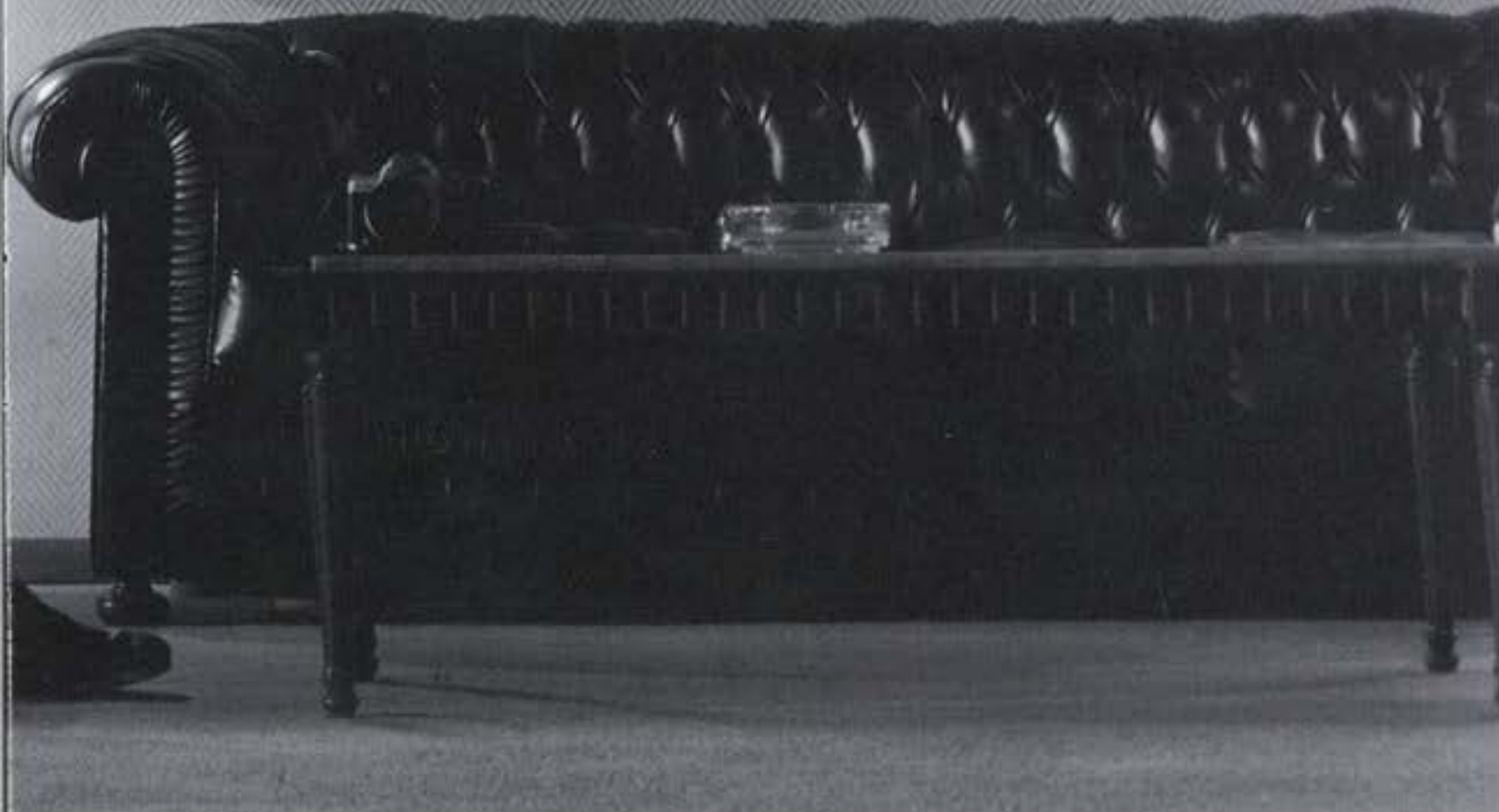
iv

If pain is anything, and it usually is not—except
 For snow, sometimes when one's face is frozen
 And one contemplates lost loves—it is not
 The opposite of a grapefruit, whose juices, splattered,
 Fail to choose any surface upon which to rest,
 But fly, free and finally feeling the air whose particles
 They have shunned; nor is it the thing itself,
 Yet it becomes, over time, the way I feel when I look
 At a certain shade of carpet, whose hue reminds me
 Only of her cruelties, or that certain touch
 Which only suggests the absence of metaphors
 For my relationship with the jobs I have not had,
 The money I have not made, the fame I have not
 Gotten. Where is my heart, or my motives, or their
 Million muttering minutiae, or the inability to speak
 Certain phrases which twist or sound inebriated:
 Judicial system; this passeth forth; but also the lisp
 Of loneliness—its pale self-denial, its reliance
 On the universality and untemporality of minutes.
 I am a villanelle. But I do not rhyme, merely repeat.
 Repeat, repeat.

Janet, without thinking at all, last Thursday
Turned into a rhapsody of flavorful appreciation,
And then a cookie: large, static, several hours old but still fresh.
Her eyes seemed to remain in two large chocolate chips,
But these were the first that the insects attacked.
Her guts, it seemed, had all become a gift from Ghirardelli,
As her boyfriend soon discovered, digging, with her girlfriends,
Into her former side. It served her, they thought,
Right that such would happen: her life, up to this point,
Had been utterly cookie-less; she had always refused to eat them,
And now, to demonstrate her newfound open-mindedness
Which stretched to all things theoretical and digestible,
She attempted the legendary dessert, only to find herself remarkably
Round, soft, edible. She was gone before sunset; washed down
By milk and the stars.



In the beginning, God was creating the heavens and the earth.
Nobody was moving; that is, there wasn't anybody;
Then suddenly there was. Or perhaps not suddenly;
I don't know. But being is always sudden when you wake up.
And so the cosmos woke up—or came out
Of the nonexistent womb with its eyes still closed.
Light was an anomaly when there was so much
Nothingness; it was amusing itself, being the only anything
Anywhere near, when God started organizing.
In the end things were a great deal better than good,
But we know that the Creator must be a classicist
Because he uses litotes. Besides that, prelapsaria
Wasn't exactly a Golden Age because everything
Was made out of wood. Fie on Eve for not thinking
Of aluminum. But they got along quite well.
The birds were humming, the willows sighing,
The not-yet-born children laughing.



In this story a tree turns into I.
 The tree was a live oak, standing gravely
 In Biloxi, and before I knew it, those grand
 Branches had curled into hands and fingers,
 Its knots into a nose and eyes. It was definitely
 Myself. Yet there I was, looking at myself,
 Not willing to say "Hello" just yet.
 So instead I said "Hello" and I didn't answer.
 Then I said, "Isn't this bizarre," and I agreed.
 We decided that the tree mustn't have ever been.
 But then we disagreed: "There's a big hole there,"
 I said, pointing to the ground. I wasn't so sure.
 So finally I suggested that we part, I going home,
 I going to Singapore or somewhere.
 "I'm confused," I said. "As am I," said I.
 Finally the British navy rolled up on the sand
 And told me to wake up.

Early this morning the College of Cardinals knocked,
 Terribly softly, on Larry's dorm room door, to his
 Utmost surprise, pronouncing him the pontiff,
 The Holy Father; there was a loophole, they said,
 In church law, which did not require the pope
 To be anything in particular; he would, however,
 Have to move to the Vatican immediately, if
 He didn't mind. Nor did he, for in their eyes
 He saw that nothing was impossible, that pure
 Robes would solve all problems, and that Rome
 Was only a few short hours away.

Silent, like the figures atop St. Mark's in Venice, does the world
Go to its destruction. No harpers play, Orpheus having gone,
Ruined by the whole Hades incident. There might be a bitter,
Dissonant rendition of an Eastern liturgy, the basses and altos
Grating the nerves of the tenors, whose hearts remain in Las Vegas.
And when the world is transformed from its present beauty,
There will be nothing but itself, reworked in a million ways
Or one—like a pomegranate seed, or a tangled mesh of rubber bands.
It will find itself refreshed but unrenewed, for the rocks will still age,
The buildings collapse, the fires burn out, the fat ladies sing,
The little kids walk their poodles, the master of a large household
Use a stopwatch to get dressed. The only thing that has changed,
Besides everything and the mailman, is unchangeability, its persistent
Denial of dust, of wings—Icarus was resurrected yesterday
By a careless bard, only to fall again into the sea. Again
The plowman continued, the waves ignored, and Daedalus
Yet cried, "Icare, ubi es? qua te regione requiram?"
And to no avail, as always, as the worker bees die,
As the evening becomes the morning, becomes the noon,
Becomes the twilight and then the perpetual absence of words
To contain these nine hundred thousand faces.

by Sam Keyes