

EVANGEL

Claudia Keelan

The god at the edge of things

Sidelined, helpless but for the words

You whisper – Were you whispering
Or is that a butterfly dying?

It is something dying,
Every second of every day,
While you whisper god's words
Into a monarch's wing.

I saw a picture of a hummingbird
With my name and address
Stamped across it.

It's Monday or Tuesday and machine noise.
Without my wish, without
Any action or announcement of desire,
My name and address phased out the wild.

Coyotes eat kittens
And purring grow large,
Howling at the door.
Partisan, starving, once removed cousins
Can't blow the house down.

I am all feeling and poor evidence,
Neither Job nor Lot's wife.

Now I spend the day arguing
With John the Baptist's Head.

Lopsided on the platter
He mouths scripture grimly.

Q. What happened to the boy
Who watched the girl dance?

A. He lost his head.

The coyotes kill another cat
And the night boys race
Their cars into the dawn,
The police a swarm of locusts
Following who fail their need.

“I didn’t know it would be like this
When it came to be like this”
John whispers, butterflies
Replacing his ears.
Much dancing.
Where’d she go
That pillar of salt?

[I WISH I UNDERSTOOD]

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I wish I understood human life
As well as I know the flowers,
Indian paintbrush sowed
Three years ago in the Mojave,
And the one red bloom
That burst whole into the summer
Briefly before the stalk
Shed into fuzz, it's seed
Multiplying itself outward
Into four living plants
Broadcast from the death fuzz.

To know the purpose of the finite life
Not as easy to suss as the flowers . . .
Our souls become invisible
When the body leaves it behind,
Not like flowers, not like debt,
In the stark boundaries of what is owed.

Nor evident in our protest,
Which agrees for the time
Of the march to inhabit
The boulevards of multiple cities,
Where a million or more
Separate bodies carrying signs
And conflicting loyalties
Evolve for the time of the broadcast
Into a we as they
Approach the capitol.

In protest, we know briefly
Why we're here.

The march ends.
I return, you return
Alone, home.

It will take hours, sometimes days,
Or one whole life
To recall the endless limits
Of our daring and innocent
Desire to be one together.

Though we are not together now,
Unless we become machines,
Sounding a warning
In the beeping back up whistle
Which signals war on earth,
On our desert because we don't
Recognize our lives in Her,
Razed all day into a margin.

We dig holes and pour cement.
And as if dropped from the sky,
Identical boxes, shoulder to shoulder,
We become destroyer.

TO A FLAMBOYA TREE IN CUBA

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Messiaen's birds singing
Inside a flute

Frail flowers, blooms smaller
Every year

Little Buddha
Hollyhock

Patterns of human relations
And wanting to look away

Thou pressed in, pressed vertically
And side to side
Abstraction of youth
Shoving Your seat empty

Life, the genre, clutching
A subway pole