

Erin J. Mullikin

iii. How to Remember a Birthday Party

This is the cake of it now, tiny dove,
so that when we think

here in this place,
this is what we've come to:

you cough in my ear,
tell me something

about the way the icing falls,
drips onto the plate,

& how much it reminds you
of the way your grandfather

fell from the bed.
How the curtains shivered

just barely,
so that his thin hair

was seahorse silver
in the waving.

A little patch of green
rug then & there,

a old arm stretched across,
but here tonight,

a beckoning of tiny candles,
small moving shadows,

an equation of memories,
a summation of what happens.

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Now I've blown out the fire,
walked through a wall,

heard the bells
before they ever began to ring,

heard our hair growing, a freezing.
Every keening chime

sounding out your story,
your voice saying to me:

*Can't stop what's coming,
can't stop what is on its way.*

iii. How to Remember What You've Read

The sound of books opening
will fawn in the night,

will land pages,
feathers in our hands.

We may have hands.
We hold our mothers

from far away.
There are two sides

to every paper animal
among the spooling

shadow farm.
We may have a song

that rises up from
the dirt of scales,

the tiny octaves,
a dialogue of volumes

& splinters.
Here, a bleeding.

Here, a pool where we swim,
our terming

a guidebook for those
who have heard the wake,

a mourn or a splash,
a sigh or a cough.

vii. How to Remember an Apex

The wasp brood
frightened us, didn't it?

We ran into the dark clouds,
searching for the solar

arc of Hercules's spine.
The stars

separated us:
You: a curtain of black water,

swimming away.
Me: an awful knowing.

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If there are birds around us now,
let us meet with palms as bright as design.

The deer will bring the bellows
& the goats will raise a chorus

to horns & grass.
We will like it here

among the refrain of air
as the cloudiness of doves

forms black diamonds
in millpond water.

We can float on the surface
of orchid smoke,

our coats ballooning

to the sound of colts

learning to walk
across the ice working

over the pear trees
near the barn.