

OXIDANE

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Oxidane
by Nicole Matos

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1.1

You entered in a conic section.
One elbow, the tip, pinched between two steering fingers and a thumb.
Not a breech birth, not exactly, like all those other
famous champions
Caesar and Macbeth and David Copperfield.
Born by the foot, born with a caul.
You were born at obtuse angles
drawn through the scarred plane of that homeroom doorway
everted, splayed, almost a Conscientious Objector.
It was easy to imagine the dogs upon you
your outsteps gently bumping
the earth as the secret police dragged you in.
She touched you so barely probably
that woman
because you were so dirty. But that isn't what we saw.
What we saw. So hard to say.
But first the elbow
steering in, catching us, catching up.

Pencil frozen halfway to mouth
thirty workbooks rustling
she twisted the knob of your elbow
unfurled you in that awkward threshold space
and left, without even a gesture to an empty seat.
There never was an empty seat.
Hector and that big kid
the one we called Gilgamesh
were squeezed in at the radiator
and we laid our work on windowsills, crusting the room's edges
when it wasn't too hot or too cold.
I was the one to make room, to claim you.
I wheeled and wheeled my hand.
Everyone watched. No hatred.
There was no way to tell you there was nothing to fear, just the loose
momentary engrossment of something new.
You were white, or mostly white.
Your hair was long, plain, it split
in locks in the front, but the back seemed
some sort of fuzzed semi-solid.
Pointillist, your dirt, the dandruff that sifted, the freckles.

1.3

Everything in that classroom happened in pantomime.
Nothing would be questioned
as long as there was quiet, solemn and total
and some denomination of worksheets at the end of our mutual time.
I stood up, backed up some steps, and made the grandest motion I
could.
My seat, take it, pointing, pointing.
You reacted at last, you had no choice.
You walked your steps and sat down.
And startled by my own magnificence, I looked around and
not seeing a solution
sat down at your feet on the floor, crosslegged, too.
They laughed at me when I did it
only a little, a quick raining patter
and only at me, my love, not ever at you.

So you entered, elbow-first, like a lever
a unit of possible labor
an inclination
between Tacey and me.
“You shouldn’t have done that,” she said to me, sotto voce
while your elbow, naked, speckled, beautiful
waited ahead, still alone at lunch, for a ticket to trade for a tray.
“We might have had a chance,” she said
and in her tone was genuine regret.
No further action: Tacey said we should Observe.
It was her Method:
using all five senses to take you in.
If we were going to take you in. The fateful question.
Seeing was easy. We could see you
—that has already been established—
but it took Tacey to notice your farsightedness:
“See the way she’s pop-eyed? Her eyes are exaggerated.
Most glasses make eyes look smaller.”
But why then were your glasses so cloudy, the lenses almost lemonade?
Small scuffs over and over?
Scrubbing them against concrete?
Scraping over sand?
I cleaned my own glasses in compulsive solidarity
huffing and rubbing, until Tacey made me stop.

1.5

Tasting you was, of course, the hardest.
You refused
with surprise more than suspicion, itself an empirical result
the gift of a cigarette, when we cornered you in the courtyard.
I had hoped to share in your saliva
to see if it would match the sour
that Tacey reported on your breath.
In the end, I tasted your hair. It wasn't too hard
to sit behind you in some interminable class,
to lift a tendril, the very end.
From the neck down your hair was, in fact, in strands, teeming and
separate;
it was only the section against your scalp matted like a melted toupee.
You had no feeling there at the ends, like normal hair, when I touched it
to my tongue.
It tasted of dish soap.
And to this day, when I do the dishes, before I rinse, I lift a glass, a
bowl,
a saucer to my lips, and I drink you back in.

“I think she is a feral child.” This was the end result of our investigations.

No shame in that. Some people get made on purpose
their parents taking temperatures and tests
all in the service of getting them here
while the rest of us are born without a meaningful sequence.

Throw-away people.

The units that made us just bobbling around, shimmering in and out of focus.

Driving a car, eating corn on the cob.

Crying for unknown reasons late at night.

Smelling like successively different colognes.

Patting, once in a while, surprisingly, our arms.

We followed you home, just to be sure nobody had made you, nobody important.

To be sure you were available to be made by us.