

# 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.