

REFUGIUM

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Refugium

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REFUGIUM: An area in which a population of organisms can survive through a period of unfavorable conditions.

ROOM

I've heard third-hand each stanza is a room.
In June, yard too means room. In June, yard
means the room where I cure my innards,
where I stew them in liquor. The crevasse

over the stream where the snow melts first
is a room and so is each tulip.
The nurse log becoming the forest floor
is a room with the promise of future rooms.

In bed with another, my hand seeks the knob
to the next room. The landlord claims
the tattered couch makes the porch a messy room
and so has to go. All the fires constellated

on the beach are rooms walled by people
who watch a core enflamed.
For a second I thought my car a room,
but these automobiles arcing the bridge

do not make a poem—only traffic.
Asthma is an owl in the room of my lungs.
A tenderloin sliced yea thick is a room
with walls of burnt skin.

Each song is a room I leave blushing
when my singing's done. All these rooms.
All the clouds drifting through their open doors.
No wonder I am always outside.

MUTUAL ONTOLOGY

The tiger must be exactly here.
The deer can be anywhere else.

MUTUAL LOITERING

In the sun I spy
an abandoned shuttlecock,

and in the shade,
a dewy web.

MUTUAL CLOUDS

The drowned girl's eye.
The gleaming train's roof
bisecting the plain.

MUTUAL MASTERPIECE

Michaelangelo sculpted, he said,
by taking away
what the rock asked him
to take away.

So we leave our snowman
for the sun to hew.

MUTUAL TOUCH

The warmth of the bee
at the nut of the swarm.
The soft collisions
in a cloud of gnats.

MUTUAL SOURCE

Flowers with red petals.
Flowers with their roots in blood.

MUTUAL RETURN

I forgot to say goodbye.
I stood by my car in the street.
I looked at my watch in the clouds.

Inside, you slept
with the patience of a dreamer
who knows she will wake.

MUTUAL EGO

On the wire a bunting,
its red chest puffed.
In the text I note,
“Emphasis mine.”

MUTUAL TRIANGLE

I arrive at the traffic circle. A truck brakes,
I wave. On my right a woman waits
at the corner with her dog. The next block:
a traffic circle. A truck brakes, I wave.
On my right a woman waits on the corner
with her dog. Above: trees, a preponderance
of orange, the sky flashing aluminum.

MUTUAL NIGHTMARE

Where are the children?

The sailors bought the children.

MUTUAL WAGE

The woman with the Man
Ray tattoo reclines
like a graph of monthly earnings.

In the gallery, a man thinks,
“I could have done that.”
But didn’t.

MUTUAL HANGOVER

The scoreboard hangs zeros
like the climax of an aria.
My team swings the bat
like they’re playing underwater.

MUTUAL ADVERTISEMENT

The bus stops. King Felix hurls
a fastball directly at my forehead.
My face, pale reflector,
throws back the sun.

MUTUAL SCOPE

When I learn the universe is very big
I feel big myself
for having learned this.
Later, when I understand,
I feel tiny.

MUTUAL FISH

The way we're deboned
by a comfy sofa.

MUTUAL COSMOLOGY

Far things twinkle
or are very hard to see,
so we stare for a long time.

Far things don't twinkle.
We blink.

THE WATCHTOWER

Heaven is a large and interesting place.
-Agent Cooper, *Twin Peaks*

Chimneys salute my departure with smoke.
The car engines too
and the breath of my friends who wave

in the street. The earth opens its vents,
blazing sores like the Kazakh pit
an akim aches to fill.

The flood finds every corner
of every filing cabinet, finds the crook
of each staple in all documents,

finds the space beneath the seawall and soon
the space where the seawall was.
Satellites plummet like enflamed hibachis.

Ponds double and triple, indistinct
from horizon, quiet, reflecting
our monuments. Above, stars disperse

and veil the sky, a jellyfish velum.
I check for signs
in the sink of an abandoned home.

Nothing prepared me
for the spray of moths
that fluttered from the faucet head.

I take my hoofing-it bone
and hitch it to my mind bone.
Claiming I am wild

means I have nothing left
to escape from.
I mistook myself

for someone smart enough
to avoid the crush at the stadium gate.
But that's where I see

my own half-ghost slip
to the floor and vanish in a tangle.
Then I realize how far

I stand from my shadow.
My own brother too
was a stranger at birth.

The new small towns
are just like the old small towns,
waiting for the boom

though there's never a boom,
bartenders dusting the stools,
the same bottle corked for years.

A papier maché bison looms
by the fireplace. A barber
blesses my dome with impossible

symmetry. I'm not sure
if I shouldn't lift weights
because it doesn't matter,

or should because I'm never sore.
Like someone swinging
a dull scythe, I shave

with cold water. At the bar, I read
the paper in that Minoan script
no one ever figured out.

When a sign promises elk,
there's the herd by the stream.
The moose cow so divined
cuds a spot safe from the road.
The railroad crossing never blinks.
At the deli, my number's up.

No waiting,
yet all the time in the world.

At home, I dig out a box
of broken china. See, I remind myself,
what your hurry brought.
I toss the shards in my yard
where a pigeon flight pecks.
I wake to a pretty decent mosaic.

My heart breaks
to see us come together
in pretense, so human.

In life
this thrilled me most of all:
skirting task for story,
listening in my white robe,
in my eye-patch,
in whatever guise
it took to leave the house,

learning a lesson
about something ancient
like a tortoise
or a fear.

No sign of our twins.
No chance of farm accidents
or highways glinting
through marsh willows.
No sunsets with ambulance arcs.

No former planets.
No ice moons or clenched fists
or skulls full of cement.
Just the snowberry's skin
collecting all color.

No animal noise.
No kneeling barns.
No spindly legs of cell phone towers.
No boot prints in the salt marsh.
No ponds in the prints.
No furrows in the field.
No limned edge.
No edge period.

The zoo's still open to the hail-dodging chimps
beneath their burlap sacks,
to the kids folding maps into tricorne hats.
I spur the ham of the nearest hog. It's my right

once I stuff some coins in its slot. No reins,
I am bucked back and skyward.
At last I can see the earth's jaunty tilt.
I can see the professions creeping

onto friends' faces. Luckily, someone
glued all this moss to the bark,
so I know what's south-facing,
so with a high point and star
I can find any direction.

On the crowded train,
rather than falling,
I touch lightly the backs
of passengers or steady myself
briefly by their shoulders.
There is none of the violence
of an overripe blackberry

fallen to the sidewalk.
There is no science to be read
in the charred home,
no motive in its black licks
or beautiful swoops of flame.
Feral dogs roam the fallout
and descend to subway stations.

We who had once walked
so many miles to be alone
were not surprised this place
was ruled by abnegation.
There were the chuckling creatures
on the rooftop we always heard
but never saw.

I scrub our map of its rivers
and ink them on my forearms.
Soon I take them for granted.

I bend the rules
I'm not sure are rules.
I get by on nerve,

which is where
we started anyway,
with a knot of molecules

that grew two feet,
that ate the brain
of the first marmot it stoned,

that loved the rivers
then forgot the rivers,
that stared down the mastodon

at the mouth of the cave
asking only for help. The blueprint?
A helix, two strands

twined without touching.
On the dry creek's bridge,
a man pushes a cartful of cans.

No eye contact, I give him
a bill someone's scrawled:
"Not My God."

In the sand beneath us,
two fish mime slow, caliginous arcs,
fat balloons in the reflection of the sky.

I wish again for my life,
where mist spilled from the freezer
and frost formed on the glass.

Where I went on galumphing,
squishing bugs, scaring birds. A heron flexed
its flight muscles at the sight of me.

Come November, smart friends
booked it for Baja, enlisted
in alcohol as a second language.

Now I sigh to the deepest parts
of the ocean, which must be tired
of holding up the other parts.

My shadow is just another
thing indebted to earth.
I understand the rippling energy

at the edge of the universe,
because I've seen what happens
at the lakeshore. Once again

I step into the fumes
of the city like a tentative deer
at dusk in the statuary.

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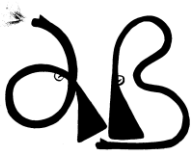
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The “chuckling creatures” are borrowed from Emily Dickinson’s poem, “An awful tempest mashed the air...”

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BIO

Originally from a small town in coastal Maine, Bill moved to Seattle after receiving degrees in creative writing from UNC-Wilmington and Dartmouth College. He currently teaches writing at Edmonds Community College, Richard Hugo House, and 826 Seattle.



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