

The  
Latitude  
of a  
Mercy

*poems*

Stefan Lovasik

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# Primal

we are prey  
to our oblivion

you or me  
in a blast of white

phosphorous & orange  
orchids & birds

fall as fire washes  
the green & we see

skin burn to grimace  
stretch across black

teeth & know flame  
will always sing

your fear & mine  
vein the leaves

the grass as i press  
my hand to the ground

to know your pulse  
your moves the way

an animal can sense  
rain this fullness

of nowhere pure  
moment in pure now

absence & presence  
as i cut & pull

feel your life  
cover me

from howl to cry

## The Last Mission

year of the rat  
month of ears and skulls  
twenty-four days short  
and in a crawl to save  
what is left of me  
to kill whatever fills my scope  
whatever enters this green  
field of death that has torn us open  
our screams a chorus of long vowels  
that fall in the tall grass

i think i hear you call my name  
i think of your last kiss  
your warm breath  
but i know this is where misery  
gave birth to something worse  
i want a blessing  
to be given over to whatever god

i don't remember the blast of light  
but i'm sure you were there  
your kiss hard  
your breath that covers me

## Self-Portrait at 23 after ECT

The ash of Lang Vei  
On the tip of yr tongue,  
The red of Hwy. 9 flows  
Where shadows nail  
Gallows of jungle as the Fates  
Rustle a noose.  
You expected the voodoo  
To work, the ethereal Queen  
To make memory sleep,  
But the dark King pulls the pistol  
In the dark corners of the green  
War you carry, and only gods  
Don't remember:  
The shaman's blessing didn't take,  
Lovely fucking amnesia—  
Wait for the *words*,  
That other vision of another  
World you saw.

# The Foundry, 1960

*for Bruce Weigl,*

*in memory of Albert Weigl 1923–2018*

*& Lawrence Lovasik 1920–1995*

We run through slag and ash,  
play soldier, good at dying,  
then walk in the stiff green water  
near funnels of smoke where whistles  
ring for home, and another stack of tens and quarters.  
We watch the burial of fish and almost see  
the virus in the river that bent our friend's legs  
as barges crush toward the foundry  
where our fathers were burning;  
thought of how it would be to stand  
with them in the heat, their skin  
probably crackling in the silver suits;  
wondered how it would be to walk  
by the odd green water, to laugh  
our way to the bar and feel good  
about the extra sawbuck we had  
to throw back a couple of shots and beers;  
buy the biggest turkey for Thanksgiving—  
and we still wonder what it would be like  
to have that life they showed us.  
Even through the furious, green war  
they stood with us in the heat  
as they do now in cold wind,  
to bend down and kiss us,  
to let us know how to live.

# The Latitude of a Mercy

*for my wife*

For that time lived among strange flowers,  
Baptized in red, warm water  
Where no god would go,  
Paid witness too soon,  
I thought in grids and lines—  
The coordinates of survival,  
But saw in fractured light spirits gathered  
At points in the radiant green  
That spoke to me,  
Who held me  
To the latitude of a mercy,  
A way to get home  
To that summer when we kissed hard  
Listening to Etta James and Marvin Gaye,  
Bells and whistles from the Allegheny  
Telling me there could be other nights  
Time would draw out forever;  
Not this life dropped and broken,  
Beyond hope and those nights,  
But a walk with those spirits  
To now—along one, impossible line