

BIRD YEARS

dicko king

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To Treva, my first reader.

“Library Lion” has appeared in *Cactus Heart*; “The Virgin Mary & Mathew Brady” in *Prime Number*.

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for Mary Alice 1916 - 2015

Red Joshua

This is the painting into which you will not go wistfully
but nervously, squinting into its harsh red
an eye out
for shards and snake
and worked obsidian.

These are thousand year
root systems fucking with your head.
This is the water without the wet.

This is the sea, its fish running
like roadrunners.

Listen up . . .

Lizards come to die

in this here picture.

mouth

Rapid Eye Movement

I don't know what they are . . .

but they are not them—the dreams

I flew in.

First Communion

This is the tongue I was given.
Its black root, its ink-like eye
blinded with a wafer of bread.

For all the mouths—listen:

When a mouth opens,

it opens in prayer.

Bump-out

*. . . his is small muddy blood
we won't let yet,*

the gods say, as nurse cuts
the lie between Mum and me.

My Nile runs while I run
the odds:

this just a bump-out
in the universe,

and it being true—my father speaking Gaelic the once

or am I hearing a memory of his . . .

Kindergarten

High black doors sing
mournfully,
sweep

into the new light
mother swears

is safe.

These doors moan I weep

as she leaves the little me.

And when they line us up like pins
to try the butter churn,

it begins—abandonment,

anxiety.

Gifting

When Sisters of Halifax
broke on the body of a boy
a book's spine—

a boy broke
and didn't mend.

A scar's no end
to a wound.

A Father Sat on an Egg (anomaly)

You will never hear this from your father, but

*your father tried hatching your egg,
setting over you day after day,
boggy testicles blanketing
your soft shell,*

*only the rasp
of his shoeless feet
shifting in the nest
to break the long vigil's
quiet.*

*All this in hopes of a child
in place of a loss*

*which I believe he believed he'd suffered
in either commerce or connectedness*

*or some such silly thing as that which still
has him bewildered at his commitment*

*hovering as he was over a strange
-ling's egg hoping*

this would read

like a father to you.

Mouth

We are wary—listening to Tom,
our weary brother, the reliquary

—a last son of his own childless sept.

When his soul is done

it will be as if
our old house is torn down.

It leaves me cold to take
his memories for my own.

Listen to his lungs—

the rasp of his slow words
stiff as a meat saw

working the lean hindquarter
of our childhood.

He makes the pieces
of our myth discomfoting

—says one thing while I believe another
as he speaks of our distressed life

and of our father, the gandy dancer,
who track-walked beneath Boston,

is seen later in cardrooms and joints,
later in AA,

redeemed too late for us
who say he loved his wife.

And as if doing the work of the archeologist
on a last late night of excavation,

he makes a deep wound deeper while the wives sleep
—digs at our new, our long dead, looks for the lie

of the sun at the head or the feet
for good life, bad life.

And as regards our lives, says
it is the Nile is the River of Life

—and our blood a river so like the Nile
to him, the moment's Egyptologist,

that it is more than metaphor

—and the sifting of the myth for
what's to be found

in what's forgotten
is what we'll do

as we consider
the missing and the gone.

The ancestors whispering

*. . . it is not time who
is devourer of all things*

*—it is the mouth
of our memory*

lost, and gorging . . .

Wunderkind

Wives sleep, forgotten.

We, sons of Mary, sit, wait
for her locked-down memory to speak

little boy speak—that we might know
who little boys are made of.

Our father, the reformed
night crawler, sleeps nearby,

is dementing nicely, slow
as old ice—

is done being missed,
is home for good.

Mum, the story straightener, won't bring out
her fair recollections against our own,

and we, not hearing the break in her spirit
mending unevenly,

will get no revelations out of this reunion.

We, who live beneath the bridge
of this matrimony, isolated

from tooth, from tit,

do not see their vows renew.

We, who grew rangey and distant,

do not speak tonight

—are mute.

