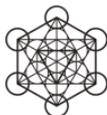


WE ARE ALL JUST ANIMALS & PLANTS

ALEX MANLEY



Metatron
Montreal

Contents

Habitat	1
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I: Animals

Mars & The Black Hole	5
Naming Rights	7
Bird Brain	9
Camera	11
All I Want	13
Butterfly Knife	18
The Natural Sciences	20

II: Assorted Paraphernalia

Prometheus II	25
Black Squirrel	27
Bad Reputation	29
Winter Solstice	31
Scotch Bonnet	33

III: Plants

Bonnie & Clyde Nite	37
Strange Powers	39
Pamela Isley	41
Belabor	43
The Lip Of	44
Garden Variety	53
The Left-Hand Path	55

Noahitic	57
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Habitat

I'm atom.
Up and sprouting.

Coming, seeing, divvying heights.
A foetus in the gauze of antique pages.

Calligraphy pens split open in the middle
like Darwin's finches, Linnaean

nomenclature's sheen. Time-lapse clips
of flowering cacti drip from the canopy.

Catch from the caruncula my crocodile
tears. Mark the cells on the door frame.

Punnett's squares wrinkle in the heat, wither.
Burst. I'm Mendel. I'm phenotypes. Study

my modifications. Farm me. Till
me. Monetize my instinct. Cash my crop.

Watch me dance, like a bee. Watch
the patterns. Do the math. All the
fundamental things comply. You've got to
know that you're bringing out
all the viral in me. Life's pandemic
contagion. A fauve machine.

I'm licking my chops, mechanically
animal. I'm hatching claws. Nature,
red of tooth and syringes. I'm sprouting
leaves, vines, tendrils
of smoke, forest fires. I'm ash.
I'm dust. I'm sprouting.

A

I: ANIMALS

Mars & The Black Hole

i

When we wake up, it's already one
and the light sits there in your room like a shy friend,

unobtrusive, too polite to rouse us from our sleeping in.
The walls are deer skull, bone-white and I am naked.

ii

When you leave to get us breakfast in bed, I check the internet
on my phone. We eat last night's remaining bagels

with cream cheese and feed each other pieces of mango
the way you feed me poems from your pink Neruda chapbook,

first in Spanish, then in English,
fingers to lips, wet and sticky.

iii

When we fuck, we borrow your roommate's last condom,
and when we shower we wash each other, each a child by turn.

iv

When we step out, you take me ten minutes out of the way
to show me a quiet spot you like, a little bridge,

a piece of road over lines and lines of train tracks.

It's endearing in its unimpressiveness, that you would

care to share something so small with me.

The train tracks stretch out before us, below us, for us,

distance beckoning. I've kissed girls on bridges before,
but never when it was this cold out.

Naming Rights

There are names for trees, actually—
black ash, pin cherry, slippery elm.

The trick is not to know them
when you're walking through the forest.

There are names for all sorts of things,
So why shouldn't there be names for

the gradient before the camera focuses,
the way it's always pink or grey;

for all the futures we invent, which will
one day be pasts that never happened;

for the conversations I imagine we will have
the next time we meet, the way you take stage direction;

for the pictures you show everyone, that make me ache
like a hungry little turtle whose jaws are always snapping.

Why shouldn't there be a name for the kiss I give you
when I catch myself trying to pretend I've fallen in love—

the way you say you have on your secret blog—
like black ash, pin cherry, slippery elm?