



ANTON FROST

The Small Book of Rewards

i. *Tall Flowers*

'Throw your shadow,' they sign.
'The clouds are coming

to throw theirs.'
Acorns are shaken off the trees,

the city fills with weddings.

Like a pain inside the mouth,
bells clamor across the river.

There are tall, orange flowers in the park
that are psychic.

It's the way they tremble,
the way they touch your shins with the small green leaves

of their stems
while looking the other way.

I walk past thinking
petrichor

instead of *the smell of rain*.

The orange flowers shake their heads
but say nothing.

I pause awkwardly to smell one,
then pull my camera covertly to my chest

and snap a photo.

Later I will see
I missed the flowers,

cut the heads off their stems.
I will shake my head.

The movement will summon the smell
of the orange flowers--

'Death,' it will telepathize,
'is only when everything really is

behind you.'

ii. *The Small Book of Rewards*

The sizes of the planets
hang off the vine.

It takes courage
to walk in this kind of universe.

The nearness of a deer
plucks at my sleeve,

makes me jump.
My heart looks up at me askance.

I was opening and closing my hand
gently over a single grape

but I crushed it.

'I cannot give her my heart,'
the pulp says in its delirium.

Breezes touch my hair gently,

as if working a combination lock.

Distant hills promise
some vague, keen thing.

I try slurping the crushed grape
off my palm.

To be something
light

issues from

is not
everything,

it seems.

iii. *Outer Space*

The hemispheres stir their waters,
the neurons flash in neon letters.

One afternoon the voice of the Lord jumps across a narrow stream,
loses a sandal,

curses.

In a dream, I watch as my instincts lead me to the distant edges of fields--
part of me longs to be fanned

by the branches overhead, to pretend
the movements of their shadows over me

rewind the murmur of zeroes
that have replaced the faces of good people.

It is dream-magic where the earth is day-lit,
but the sky is black and starry.

Years ago in the planetarium, on a strange whim,
my friends and I sat in a row and held each other's hands

while the stars and planets
washed over us in the dark.

I have always squirmed at the way my pulse throbs
in my fingertips when I touch them together,

but I seemed immune
for that,

with their hands.

Someone else's scripture

.

The books of the earth:

New, Quarter, Harvest.
Half, Full, Crescent.

.

“Spill your oils,”
the water says
to the moon.

.

How does the myth go,
who was the hero

that threw the word for

life

into the dark center of the lake?
What has life been

since?

.

“Can anybody stay longer?”
the stars beg.

.

The cello eases its pheromones
over the smell of your lips.

I say, “You are my favorite countryside.
The color of your hair drifts through the trees.”

You smile with the scent of warm dirt
on your breath.

.

I grasp doorknobs
as if I were underwater,

I turn pages

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as if there were blood between my fingers.

The lamplight sunsets halfway across the open book,
my palms muffle the title.

My heartbeat evens to a horizon.
My hair dozes gently.

.

The hour will unpurse in the spaces between action
and vanishing point.

The hour will flash between
the horse's legs.

The hour will grieve behind a sheet of rain.
The hour will thunder with the downswing of comets.

The hour will vanish into someone
else's scripture.

.

The result waits.

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A pang of absence when looking at her body.
A heat coming off the long grass after dusk.

By looking out over the water,
by entering cities on foot,

I have learned how to beckon
rather than beg.

.

at rest

i.

beneath the pines, sticks get arranged.
they lie there honestly.

ii.

he wakes with his face in her hair.
the smell that's half-morning, half-riverbank.

iii.

the water nearby snakes away.
falling berries send ripples out.

*some things equal each other
out*

he thinks

as the name of the nearest city shrinks down
to glances of light on her fingernails.

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iv.

soft ground and time.

v.

air flowers into cool and warm colors,
sand pools around the dune grass.

vi.

the way light has of failing
the hills and cities,

the water
and his body--

half-erased,
burrs, non-moons.

vii.

beneath the pines he arranges himself alongside her.

he pretends to sleep.

he sleeps.

sunrises

the road lies there
like a rock
grasping a straight line
as if about to put on pants

blistering
with longing
dizzy with evaporated water
and distance

the road lies there
like lightning the sun has tamed

sunlight
snapping its fingers
or whistling
the road playing dead
shaking
rolling over hills
obeying

*

birds with binoculars around their necks

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that cover their bright red and yellow breasts
lonely birds
manning the branches
watching

for sunrise
like a rare animal
or an enemy
moving in the trees

a flash
a silence with it

*

so many leaves. the dark is ending.
i don't know,
how does anything last
this longing?

i shake my head and blink
as if soap has just been rinsed
from my face.

*

the road just lies there.
the sun isn't even facing this way.

so many leaves.
it's like someone whispering to you.

it's like a drop of water fattening
on a roof-edge--
that soothed feeling that lowers itself
along the back of your head
when someone whispers to you.

*

the birds are singing,
looking into their binos,
the sun is rising.

roughly translated,
they're saying

so many leaves.

or maybe it's

so much leaves.

you never can tell
with them

though it sounds nice
either way

with the sun coming up.