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BENIGN FASCICULATIONS*

One day, unprovoked,
a small snake ripples
in my thigh, unbidden as a tic
around the eye. Something
broken to congeal the honey
in my flesh,
a beehive gone awry.

Under a harsh light, you
report the nexus spread
like a brush-fire's nascent flame
to calves and head.

A syncopated wave
of muscular babble
unrecruited by anything
I've done or said, and then
I tell you I'm dead;
a droplet poised
at the end of life's spout.

Just a few months
'till my spinal cord rots,
breath is snuffed, and crawlers
pick my femurs clean.

At night I shout,
pursued by visions
of catacombs, of men I've tended,
slowly wasted to the bone,
wide-eyed as inmates
from the camps,
begging God to take them home.

What injustice
this chooses me,
must be what Lou Gehrig thought
and I think now
in my psychotic bloom.

You, merciful queen
hold my head in the unraveling
of this delicate thread;
my tears repentant
for the births and sunsets not seen,
arrivals and migrations,
aspirations left unsaid.

Benign Fasciculations and other poems

I fall asleep on a spread of nails,
pierced
by every tip-toe beneath my skin.

Until salvation comes
from a colleague's keen mind
and calm hand. Who declares
this invasion, benign.

HOLY THE HAND

wrought in bird-bone digits,
perched on lunate pedestal,
sheathed in the rosy glow
of cuticles and skin.

Each finger tethered by tendon
can curl to beckon,
go straight to castigate.
Tight as mortise and tenon,
a benediction
of rack and pinioned knuckles,
exquisite pinch of pulp,
square taste of fist. Holy the fingers

splayed in flow and form,
the Pieta's palms upturned
to pray, and manifold
in all the ways of caress,
punch and slap. Nuanced
on piano keys, with the thrill
of an armadillo's snout,
some clenched, others outstretched
as Michaelangelo's. Holy the hand

in profligate freedoms,
dextrous bequest
of our mathematician.
Like a macaw's beak, tenacious
as its claws, mercurial as mimosa.
Prehensile in grasp,
the messenger of intention,
and when sight fails, the eyes
of Braille.

Death plays
the strings that put
all hands to rest,
a requiem
for the heron's folded wings.

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THE BODY ELECTRIC

Come then to me,
bent on crutch or cane,
to this table, where
I shall gaze with the ophthalmoscope,
through the black hole in your eye,
you, who are numb, weak or blind
with a short circuit in mind.

I shall peer
through the looking-glass lens
at arteries that gather
into sight's river; the world you see.

Let me bounce the Queen Square hammer
on your elbows and knees,
the hitching posts of your muscles
that shrivel in the clutch of disease.

The dynamometer will measure grip
when stroke inflicts Samson's legacy,

and the needle-toothed wheel
run like a weasel across your skin,
will unleash subtle sparks of pain.
The 512 decibel fork
vibrates up bones to say
when a body's lost symmetry.

At the end, it's all the same
for carpenter or physicist,
unstrung fingers of the cellist.
For a fee, I will measure your broken home,
the breadth of your garden's shadow,
sorrow in amps and ohms,
before I send you away
with barely a glimmer of hope.

Hold me harmless, please,
for I'm only the surveyor
of your topography.

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