

**Jeremy Pataky, Poetry**

**“Meanwhile,” “Metabolize,” “Conservation of Energy,” “Homestead,”  
“Packing,” “Unland,” “Backcountry,” “Beach Stone Sun,” “We Swallow  
Apple Seeds and Wait for Signs of Growth,” and “Osmosis”**

*MEANWHILE*

Nature evolves into conscious metaphor –  
Think omen: sign: uncanny crow call  
outside the tent the second you awake,  
ground print relieved into your back.

Phosphorescence time lapses the stars,  
gills suture in the neck of a human fetus,  
thumb bones gesture inside the darkness of whale flukes.

Maps are painted in the caves of geese skulls.  
An afternoon’s clouds mimic  
the undersides of jellyfish. Castaways  
dwell in every living being – worm, whale,  
bacterium, beetle, man.

Coagulation is blood  
becoming sap.

Within houses piled on hollow foundations  
lives transform into themselves. Outside, moss  
and lichen begin the long process of reclamation,  
aided by rain and sunlight. Hours silt the pores of our skin.

We stay busy becoming fruit, wine, vegetable, dirt,  
symbol. Our ears are small beaches lapped by waves.  
The backs of our eyelids absorb the stories  
that let us believe our worlds.

*METABOLIZE*

We dwell in the lonesome  
loam of the world's past lives,  
layered and layering.

Leaf-fall unbecomes among grass  
and flowers, uneaten  
salmonberry and yellowing swordfern.

We are soil nudged  
sideways by a probing  
taproot, our fists clutching  
minerals and skin,  
wing bits and teeth.

When our lost and unnoticed  
fragments metabolize  
into the bloodstream  
that soaks us, our cell  
water will quicken  
like new birds  
discovering flight.

Oceans inhale and exhale  
around islands and the hulls of boats  
while we cut back our cuticles  
and haul trash to the road.

Above us, birds know daylight is tidal.  
Down here we pace this way  
and that through all phases of the moon,  
scribbling plans on calendars,  
showering daily,  
eyeing our watches.

*Conservation of Energy*

Just when the serpent dreams molt.  
The holes become worms of rain.  
The plains hide vestigial seaweeds.  
No one notices Venus.

Just when the shudderwinds jangle.  
The water subtracts its bones.  
The islands divide into packs.  
No one is put to blame.

Just when the map outpaces.  
The interstates underline themselves.  
The cities are run-on sentences.  
No one remembers silence.

Just when the semi-colon pupates.  
The air imagines a body.  
The beach refuses to be loyal.  
No one expects it to choose.

Just when the clock quits.  
The midges continue to jerk.  
The runway practices geometry.  
No one acknowledges the wisdom of crows.

*HOMESTEAD*

We built a cabin in the outback of the mind,  
split birch and aspen, saved rain,  
burned oil lamps and decorated with the mossy  
bones of old dreams. We expected no visitors,  
though we found wolf and muskrat tracks by the river.

Out here we write nothing into the pages ahead.  
It is enough to leave them to their thoughts,  
their bed sheet cleanliness. The words  
we have for each other are recovered from the past,  
unearthed like the relics of an old mine.

There is grit in my mouth, still,  
salt from you or the water,  
a film of sun in my eyes  
which regard our histories,  
held together with an old rope.

The words we have for each other  
are not the written kind,  
are not the spoken kind.  
Just stones arranged on a beach,  
offered to the waves that claim them.

*PACKING*

Hours this far north  
are sediment layered  
into days that will be useable  
later, when we flux south  
toward threadbare skies  
and tides that don't strand boats, salmon,  
whole trees.

Each breath here is caloric and we pack  
them on like muscle and secrete them  
as sweat, as hair, as a quiet we learn  
from snow and long winter darkneses, a quiet  
which conveys more than any sheaf  
of sentences, a quiet  
that will temper  
the days into one  
long day.

Like snow crushed under its own weight,  
tensed into glacial ice that mills  
mountains into graphite-colored flour,  
our time here will absorb nearly all colors.

Our memories from some future vantage  
will be blue-tinged, will be laced  
with silty rivulets and veined with subsurface  
tunnels, arteries of liquid ice. We will be the frayed  
end of seasons bleeding into networks  
of streams that run off all the way  
to the ocean

where silt mingles with salt,  
blue alchemizes to aquamarine  
and tourmaline, a long walk stills  
to slumberous ebb and flow, a wet  
breath.

*UNLAND*

We leave the unland zone of tides –  
interlace highlit by green algae muck, moist  
lickprint of ocean –  
and align ourselves with the black line horizon,  
bow quivering like a compass needle.

We bring our own overlap,  
firm as land,  
onto this fluid plain unruled  
by geology, but not geometry:  
waves advance in lines  
like text down a blue page.

Each wave is a tide zone of wind  
and ocean. Peaks and troughs  
mimic the heave  
between sky and water,  
where the hull bucks left and right, down and up,  
kicking and giving. We heel then level,  
waves spume over the bow,  
black mast points like a finger  
toward the rushing clouds.

These bodies go loose  
to the give-in that lets in sea.  
Tides rise inside,  
blood ebbs to skin, lips,  
fingertips. Faces coat to brine-rind,  
planet instinct coded in salt.

Later, legs will hallucinate  
ocean swells like eyelid-insides  
remembering a straight stare of sun.  
We'll mix a sea water ash tincture,  
drink a draught to shove place and moments  
under skin. Pull sentences out of straits  
where words and winds crash  
above shoals and seaweed, barnacled rocks  
and waterclocks gone dry.

*BACKCOUNTRY*

Small lives of the tundra  
left gnaw marks behind,  
year-old petroglyphs scribed in the bone  
of an old moose antler  
shed in this nameless valley  
where a silt-laden stream  
mumbles its way toward a river.

Do the teeth marks or the empty  
channels cut downstream describe  
a more whole desire? The hunger  
for calcium and the discarded, perennial  
idea of bone  
each answer the question  
burbled by the river.

Erosion, here, is the mining of fossilized  
answers from a cut bank.

Like a spring-fledged  
ptarmigan holding still on a rocky  
slope, almost invisible  
against the lichen  
and snow-dappled scree,  
our tent squats where we left  
it down the valley.

Hundreds of miles west, the first road threads  
through some Siberian moment.  
Just ahead, the berry-filled  
scat of a brown bear dries on the yellow caribou lichen.

*BEACH STONE SUN*

Wet stones reflect  
sun until waves snuff  
them like clouds overtaking the moon,  
an upgush of ocean hefts the orbéd skies  
out of rest, drops them on the inhale  
in *chock-clack* glissandos  
of pebble mutter.

Grumble before the tide-frothed sea foam,  
anemone, driftwood and tumbled shell,  
the long tubes of bull kelp,  
bulbs the size of a fist,  
hard knuckles and cuticles  
pummeled down smooth, orbicular.

The sun goes and the stones  
dim back to stones,  
the cobbled beach smoothes  
into silhouette under squadrons  
of stars that suicide into their reflections.

Wield yourself like a salt water  
blood magnet. Tempt  
waves sewing themselves  
to dark sky along a horizon seam –  
wash the stars from your skin.

Silt settles in the cavity where the purple  
muscle of your heart glugs and glugs.

Your body builds itself around that seed  
again and again. Calcium packs  
around a grain in an oyster's wet dark.

*We Swallow Apple Seeds and Wait for Signs of Growth*

Because the porch is slathered by weather.

Because our water rusts.

Because we wile whole days listlessly.

Because we're fork-tongued and feather-voiced  
two shades shy of one good reason.

Because because suffices.

Because we camouflage words  
with brick-room echoes.

Because we learned photosynthesis by mimicry.

Because weather weathers the porch-wood.

Because of lost to-do lists.

Because belief is comfort  
and waiting is religion.

*OSMOSIS*

Mud-slog all day through chill understory,  
soak sun shafting through the canopy.  
Lung-sponge the wet air.

Dank lichen haunts minutes unround as rain.  
Leaf undersides gaze at underbrush skies.  
Ferns sink roots in loam memory.

Slog through mud all day under overstory,  
let lungs and feet reconcile their duties.  
Walk the tightrope trail through the forest  
and stare hard at what you don't touch:

A cobweb set to net the sun.  
Moss undoing a fallen spruce.  
Marmalade-shaded witch's butter hard on a stump.

Green ferns emerge from memory folds,  
repetition of footsteps morphs the brain to moss.  
Synapses throb like frog croak  
or the *glip glup* drip of cave water.  
Thoughts creep through moist tissue.  
A newborn slug sleeps inside an old bone.