

By the Edge

Adrian Cole



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Stone Corpse Press

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are one with the River and Woods.

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Shells in the Sand (Self Portrait as an Oyster)

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Elegy 4



(Untitled) 9/15/20

I see you mocking me
the way I hold my head
tilted at the side
viewing the red in the Eye

But I prefer to sink

Diamond lover you are dense and clear
cracked carved with tools of your stronger selves
mined on slave labor bloodied view
call myself the shell may be biologically sound

Bone of Pearly iridescence I am
dead earthly snot
Plucked from the river swallowed used

My Grandfather remembers long summers wading through waters. When they were
plentiful, skillfully sliced oysters to gape, fashioning my Mother handfuls of misshapen
Jewels.

He was that river farmed dry
left to soak in the chemicals guttural moans as I
slip myself into your quarries
hunting for shellfish fossils
swallowing you to grit sucking on your carbon
the compression churns you my indigestion sand under the lung
salvation as I contort your body
Mouth to Mouth
Eye to Eye

I Bite My Lip As You Walk By

Forever in Mourning of This Time (12/3/23)

Tomorrow ice will break
cut cracked by weight of sunlight
they will fish out each
spiny fragment

weight of a foot on gas
birds flying into mirrored glass
how I collected a bouquet of their tiny claws
set it at your Mother's grave

must I gild your grief a river of my eyes
when so sick crying myself
diagrams of organisms
roadkill as billboards

leading to depths I beg Driven Away
a row of empty holes
a suitable grave
a foundation for a tree.

9/12/24

Yesterday I Noticed the Oak in Our Front Yard

the one my Grandmother planted herself as
only a stick and a few leaves has grown so much
it's top aligns with the ancient elm in the backyard

so many years it's grown without you
so many years we've grown between those trees
You died in a September like this one
when the oak was no taller than the roof of this squat house
how it's acorns have doubled in size
in a decade we may see the young wood stretch to kiss the tips of the old
how even then we estimated
not even 5 more years
before the elm would fall
just one big storm might
do it
and doesn't
today it survives it's leaves seem somehow greener against the grey bark

we always try and guess when the old will leave us with placid apprehension
while the young we marvel at how they grow catch up to us
sometimes fall sooner

living between these two trees
it's only right to see a good strong trunk shading the tombstones of a cemetery
it's been years years since we visited the graves
Your grave has no trees We cannot plant them o(de)wed to the military
plot
I hope sometimes when this year is ancient there will be a forest
the place Your body rests an elm thrives

It starts as a stick maybe with a few leaves and grows larger than this house.

All of the chances there are to remember final words become flooded with the precious small ones
we'll Never Say Again.

So Live !

you would not make a humble corpse
the bee who stung dragging half of her thorax back to her queen
asks if she did enough
you cannot return Graciously as you have lived halfway
things never said still lie with you whether you are still bone in earth or
particles flowing with water
that bird who dove in front of a pickup yest she dangles through the air to return
to preen her chicks
even at 90 years even after devastation climax and the fall
all the Beloveds and Grudges you gave and took
in the despair of being a monolith 9 billion monoliths
am I just the same
unable to let go without the clawing of padless paws desperate at the earth when the rabbits'
burrow caves in
your last breath will be ragged you will know there's more that must be done
more to do had you the body the bearings the strength
one more push to protect them all We ever ask is one more
more that I could say as we wa(o)nder
will it ever be enough is a fear set in enveloping hands
you cannot make a humble corpse
half alive We are still instinct
gripping sometimes for ideas We never allow before
or hope We pretend gone

Hunting

There is
so much noise sometimes, heart racing ready to fire it's hard to admit even that Yes,
yesterday I smiled it seems all the euphoria is split with devastation to the Edge
a joy itself feels like a trigger waiting to pierce flesh
a hand can only remove itself from that trigger breathe remember
my heart is that same kind of heart I almost shot the gun may be
over-fired, violence bores deep holes
in us all whether there was a tool
in hand or not, I remember all the deer
we shot not as meat or trophy rather
as a heart beat rhythmic Real
in love with the doe and grass
dew on an antler
seeing in its own vision the
Light of the sun we share

Why Flee or Freeze

on the side of the road laid the dead possum

just viscera and fur

why would they cross the road

they must go to another side

sometimes there is dead in the road

as if they just fell asleep

when your face is caved in and blistered

can We try to feel close to you

We are small beings

hit before We reach that other side

they might have seen you

when the light seemed brighter

on the other an older deader possum

this is not some punchline

that have no signs of impact

bleeding next to your small intestine

waiting for collision that never comes

or one of your own in spring

how startled and insignificant We felt
time mangles but We are not our bodies

you couldn't understand the apology We spoke

We had no way to bury all of you
so you cannot just be your body

or move you to a greener side

To all the beings, Dead by the edge of the road

if there's ever a heaven there's hope it's just for you.

In Lieu

I think sometime somewhere someone said
it's the ordeal of being known we must go through to be loved.

I like many have dreamed
memorizing another's handprint in an effort to keep it he(a)ld.

It's that anti-pressure
empty air I fear in my lonesome nature.

In a hundred letters maybe in a new alphabet
I can say in your hand

You hold mine.

There is nothing so intimate as a palm up, a prayer to something you can't put words into, a prayer
for that which was Never Felt.

Swim or Sink

We don't know which of us faded out first
the light of the stars always recycles itself at some point
every time it felt like the last time
We knew it would be another day
getting through another day
when feeling alive is in the margins

He was sitting on the inclined border of an over-dry corn field. The heat of the highway, and the breath of eighty mile an hour cars passing at his back. He had come out here to escape the violence in himself. The red urge to be something even after everything lost its meaning, even if just a stain on pavement. He took shaking breaths, the pressure never left his throat like a collar too tight, like there was a noose just under the skin. He held a wishful hand towards the fading sun, thinking soon it would be too cold to escape. The ice, a sheet wall over life itself, locking everything that can't leave its grasp and weight first.

He thought one horrid thing on repeat for the last 18 hours; *Why are the ones I love most able to wound deepest? How did I end up here so alone? The kinder world is one I cannot be part of.* These ruminations were tedious at best, thoughts that lingered on the edge long enough until there was an opening to break in. He knew one day there would be no escaping this. He remembered long drives through empty country roads, all the music, and talk, and silence that filled the distance. He remembered the first time he stared out from the highest point of the playground to the legion of corn and realized, I am playing near all the others but I am apart from them completely. He wondered if he ever knew what it was to be a child at all.

The heavy mallet of emotion kicked in, and he began walking but he didn't turn back home. Turning his back, he walked on until the sun receded into the million tiny pinpricks of stars, until the highway was a mear smudge of passing light. He walked along a familiar riverbank, but had never followed it this far. He walked until he couldn't see houses, or streetlights, or bear to trudge on any further. The calm swirl of the water hypnotizing, a wide eyed doe thought to stop her drinking then continued. He couldn't take another step and fell backwards, arms outstretched into a trust exercise with the river, now floating gentle as a living thing can. He looked up to the infinite of stars. Endless repeats of songs, tv, phone screen, media, another war distant, another war right next

door, memory flooded what was left of his exhausted mind, so many moments all colliding in on themselves to offer no comfort. He considered staying there, falling asleep in the cold waters. Eyes slowly shutting to the night above.

An overwhelming embrace, a figure in the moon assuring him something would be warm again, and then he became a catfish, or the catfish within his center broke through the egg like membrane of his skin and sauntered away into the night, taking him with it. The life cycle came first, to be part of this ecosystem, the need to eat and rest, to flee polluted waters, or return to spawning pools and feeding grounds. Everything emitted a comforting heat, the sun a diluted beam through the water's surface. Small fish floated along next to his bulk, he was a part of something so vast and so settled with age. Algae began to grow on the surface of his scales, it was another day after another day.

He remembered being sometime else, younger, piercing thick bodied worms to hooks. Setting their dying loose onto a line into still waters. A work-heavy hand on his shoulder, the first time he had cried for them. Everything had a heart right? Now worms tasted like light, swallowing anything that would be consumed he had grown old like this. The things thirty years can do to a body. He felt weightless, almost joyful.

To be a detritivore does not mean to eat everything below you, but simply to take what's left of life which will prolong your own. Catfish are one of the largest freshwater fish, and hunger grows in size exponentially. He heard it first, a shining jewel of a small fish, it glittered and waved unprotected in the deep. He didn't see the line or the sinker, the hook just drove in catching on the thin flesh of his lips. Twisting and pulling against it with no time for warning he was thrust from the deep to the shallows and then brought from home made waters to the processing line. There are no escapes for a fish of his size against the hunger of man.

He remembered a lonely evening in a dry canal. There were two of him, at least for a time there was a mirror in his soul to another boy's.

If I have to go back I think I'll die.

I won't let you go then.

Then the tide rose and they were no longer a mirror, and the heaviness drew in. There was just the memory of what used to be.

He was half gutted when he started to see color again. There were sparks for a moment, then a flood. He was in his body and above it. The world was so glorious, and then a hand would reach into the bisected wound of his body, fish out another stringy piece of viscera. The hand took a cold metal spoon and scooped a bundle of ripe eggs from where they had homed themselves. Until all of him was precious or discard, along with many others, a pile of bile and organs by the shore. He realized pain was not distinctly human but shared by everything. The processors seemed surprised by his desperate flopping long after the killing cut.

He receded from being, what was left of him taken from the fish and left in a pile of bone and purposeless organs. The skin and whiskers he had made home for so long now sloughed off and bones reknit. There was a terrible weight in what was becoming his chest. He emerged from the pile of discarded pieces and leftover carcasses caked in their blood. Forty years of life gone, walking out of the runoff, through sand and chipped glass, laid bare, he stared out from the riverbank. He felt as if he were a lost tourist, there were no bearings to get, a vague warm shape wrapped a blanket around him after hours of standing then faded. Watching the eb and flow of the tide there seemed less of him now, no home in the land or water. He crossed the dock and walked by the edge of the river until it became familiar again, until that memory returned.

Will you remember me?

Of course.

Will you stay?

Neither boy had an answer for the other, instead of continuing they held the other's hand like a lifeline. On the distant shore someone beckoned, arms reaching out, ready to hold him.

if each time was the last time
then it was all a wonderful goodbye
stars are categorized by their age not by their deaths
to be alive is to be something that can touch infinity
at our end we transform into broader material
if all the world was already written
there would be no miracle to this

A memorial of shells, a riverbed run dry, a last breath, a haunting of final words,
Never Remembered.

Where Roadkill Goes at Night

It was more than a thump as the deer crossed only to just swerve out of the way
even with headlights we are a rough blur against a cool dark backdrop.
Blended in to the shaded trees there was no time on our end to react
only a prayer for him and the relief of

knowing a near miss. Even as
the wild end knows us fragile claims bodies over broken bones.
How lucky to be bruised then.
The eye of the buck terrified brandishing it's long antlers
as it lopes off letting fear leak away with movement.

Sometimes I dream of that Doe's body
the way it seemed kinder to take out the knife
than to leave her in a slow painful bleed.
can this be called Mercy
part of her followed us home
he sat beside her in that dry grass for as long as she breathed
her pastel tongue soft as baby's skin caressing his hand.

Two deer meet in an entirely verdant wood
there is never an edge to the green.
There is never a near miss a passing roar.
There is a forest none can reach without impact.

Migration

Now is the time for
the Birds to flee
this place and fill the sky
multitudinous as stars
I see the avian pieces
left in the road or
fallen from trees
Birds that never were
I collect eggshells
feathers dry yolkless
How many more of you
have flown How many
times have you fled frigid
to be met with impact or
hope to return with a
warm nest on a distant
tree For all the feathers
on this altar there
are always more
in the veiled
Sky

Disembodymeant

to diss disassemble my body ment cement
what it Meant to my body
such a removed thing

the me assembled into bodily form, emboldened and engorged
body is meat discouraged REPEAT
held within you are a container REAPEAT
the outward oyster We are REPEAT

Soft Salty Disgusting
all our hardness hiding inside the hand pulls you from the
River pulls you from the container
a cloaca can't scream
ripped from the shell

Dismembered Misremembered Eaten Delicious REPEAT
floating bones along the river REAPEAT
Unburdened Untethered Enfranchised REPEAT

free fire which watches
you sleep the Ghost in your sheets REAPED THE
Liberated from the Body BEAT
still proving you're thinking Lucid Dream REPEAT

I wake and see the self I keep Disembodied right above by three feet
All it ever meant is

REAP THE BEAT
REPEAT
REAP EAT

Distance

After Genesis P-Orridge

When Summer comes I may consider. Beyond yearning. The touch I have abandoned in us. The trick of any predator is to keep moving. Run from that binary. Piecing apart. Keep moving. And never show your belly or become like your merciful prey.

They bomb those solid sure hearts. Doing that which pulls at the seams. The divide between prey and predator. A matter of hunger. I have learned to repeat bomb-fire lies. I never believed. Am I a better figure for not locking others behind their tomb? I can't say You. Always the lingering Them stuck in the throat. A catch. I dream of dead waking. Wavering.

There is a way of touch. When Summer comes. That has always been left to those solid hands and hearts. I ask one season. We put on our old mimic white dresses. Sit on the rocks like the kneeling we did outside those large arched doors. It is not a banishment this time. A prayer and to beg only have a variance in desperation.

We stand on the rocks and become fluid at the next wash of high tide. Walking into the water until the lily fabric stains the night. Our fluid bodies falling from the lace. Colliding force faced and faceted and never forced to touch. Or let go.

What does it mean to want your hand on my back? And promise I can feel it. When it's been five years since you've left touch. The predator's heart beats just as frantic failing. As the prey.

There will be a force under heavy blast which I cannot buckle under. But run toward. There is a hot day I can plunge into. Vibrant green waters no one with a human heart swims in. The blue purple bruises of shaking breaths I held in. A gasp of bubbles to the sky. Blue returns to blue. Green returns to green.

What does it mean to crave worlds that walked away from us? Their season of peace. Your time. Ended the day I was born. I will not own that bomb. I am no omen. A palm toward the sky. An eye. Searching.

Searching

The Clawing

I am ready for Good things
sit here waiting hand open for just one of those
Good things to land gave up bribing with seed

I used to grasp and climb and cling to things that didn't
belong to me
cause they were Good and might be mine one day if I
held them tightly or long enough

their bones crumble under pressure

I was told those Good things were gonna come to me
that I didn't deserve them I was told
a lot of things
while others tried to hold tight to their own
Good things

I am ready now
for even one Good thing I won't strangle
squander it this time
I know now how to hold it
gently like a fledgling bird

fallen to me

I wait palm open maybe in vain
there has to be at least one more for
all the drowning
now is not the time to fill with water asphyxiate

We all need to let go at some season
return to nest empty handed unadorned
it's only a Good thing when you can embrace it
it's only Good if it wasn't mine first floating
but was given
when it was your hand

there has to be one more
I won't beg
I can wait patient like at the bus stop
just one more Good thing
like your hand out
ready too

Outward Coming In

Timestamp: 4/14/25 5:07 pm

That is correct. The insurance company said that as of 3/19/25 there was a change in the law that allows employers to opt'd in or out of gender related surgeries as an exclusion in benefits. It appears that your insurance has opt'd out and it is not a covered service.

not covered

a plush blanket wrapped so tightly the air went humid wet tear steamed
turned burnt plastic on already sensitive skin hyper senses set to
spark incinerate

not a first exclusion in memory or want
this was not covered in the texts
but I read on raw and bleeding anyway
a doubt with no birds turned skyward

there was a raccoon dead in the road on my way to work
its small rough hands stretched reaching to the sky
as bodies in tons of luxury mined earth met metal and rubber
turned them viscera on street cleaned pavement

I am not the first to go out in the night and stretch my arms to the sky
only to feel what makes me (w)hole ripped from me
a rendering of March 19th and marches pained far reaching
too much to join my limping form

a ghost abandoned with so much will to change
it seems they have *opt'd* out of our care
gender the stain on the pavement they can never scrub out
my body will have that same broken bloodied scent as that skyward reaching raccoon

served in service disregarded pieces of life for sensibilities
idea empty safety of those deemed better off alive
I survived climbed from that hole primed for rotting
doubled my time only to find my self correct at first
reap and reach not covered

there is no kind opening of this body

there is no way to beg the pained parts away and not be left flattened on roads
that ate caravans walking ever westward in a circle
they call this bleeding manifest alone law

they call those who do not serve roadkill destiny like so many before us
in spite of profit or benefits they have *opt'd* out of a world
called worth it and I am on the pavement bleeding
small rough hands stretched outward rigor mortis

my clear eyes watching a sunrise that will not come for me
survived by the many bodies like mine so many they take
trucks and shovels and incinerate the exclusion zone our bodies
incinerate

that raccoon had kin and I dream like them
of shifting through the night without impact
of pressing my weathered fur to another's to dance
of kissing the scars we chose

and died for

Shells in the Sand (Self Portrait as an Oyster)

Crack Me Open Slurp Me Up

led first by my partic(le)ss names in the nameless parts
the walls between the tissues lodged
keep forgetting the lead in the water when the boil order fades
too pre-packed ripped out stuffed and studied sauteed refilled
We bathe with what we can come out honeyed and chase the bees
too scarce and scar(r)ed to sting A memory of clearer waters
it's easy to say every life is precious tougher to pick the plastics out

To Be an Oyster Is To Be Walled In

it is fair to say I do not how I look but to say I do not feel
like you know the feel of a tongue gliding against the hairs along your neck
before it ever happened the follicles knew the wet feeling
pushed the wrong way a shiver I am just the same

Crack It Open Slurp It Up

the pearls hurt each year grows another it's
wisdom toothy parasite rub and push against it against
better judgment even the plastics take hold in my softest parts
You need all the pearls force beads into membrane hope it comes out half as shiny
swallow more sand I taste like lead in the water the
oil slick tries to mimic my inner walls none of us will w(e)ar it
best I push against what aches me what pulls me in I
have no kin left you can take

Crack You Open Slurp You Up

is it a foot or a mouth pearl or a sore
never thought it would be so hard to catch filter
suck fuck same spot so long it turns to stone you can eat my tongue or is
it a foot in a mouth never mind the mussel
the nervous system you have ruled it this flesh feels no pain
after the fact we are recognized when your finished digesting admire my
walls make buttons of me call me pretty opalescence a value
the rivers were drained for

Crack Me Open Slurp You Up

I was always glowing inside filtering through the oil lead grit

when you called me a snotty rock when you carved my last sister the same
when you spat her out half chewed alive the river turned her too
gasoline slick sour on your tongue
or is it a foot or a heart anything else you want your teeth on

Crack You Open I Hope You Choke On Me

The Song That Stays

often thoughts circle back to the failing machines of our bodies
it's easy to count what we lose
it's easy to know the ache of limitation
once I could run for miles in the blue twilight
bruises and skinned knees our badges of honor

Once

we had the balance for it
now we fear what a fall can do
often I wonder had I never known my heart could fail
the things I'd do with it

if your knees could withstand the climb down the levee
the harsh summit back
would we still sing by the rocks like we used to
I know your hands are just as warm as then

I still go to that spot on the river
my favorite comfort is biking past it on the trail
sometimes at sunset a man will stand centered between the rocks playing violin
open air on soft strings carrying a melody through the distance I pass
I think of the way the ligaments in his hands must feel
tight in the chill or more at home by the waters edge

the way if I am careful I know
there will still be parts of this machine worth salvaging
things yet to learn we are capable of
too odd we used to sit there too at that same spot
we'd sing and pass smoke
how so often we'd dream of an end to this current

yet I cannot bear this river silent
or that we've had our last cigarette there
and so a stranger's music fills it
I am reminded I must find another way to sing

(Untitled) 9/15/20

Mirrors stare back at the River Rivers
stare and beg Why do you mock these Reflections
I would stare in the Mirror I wouldn't remember the shape
of my-self too much distinction between skin wall bone fabric
the smooth glass hardening me When

I stare into the River I wobble and drift softer the confident current
algae dyed these tissues fiber greened bent
towards the current glittered sun adorned minnow danced
These are memories of frequency small muddied glances
Life rippling with change

Did I ever find the self inside a skewed image
fallen By the Edge drinking
a sca(r)red animal
in Mirror in River
I in-form on these Reflections

Fished out from river or tomb, or the humid air between us on the drive home, eyes that don't meet, fixed on the ever changing sky. It Never Meant I lost you. I am clutching every piece.

Adrian Cole is a weaver of many threads, a wanderer, a guide to those interested in being lost. His works have been included in *The Atlas* Vol. 13, and *CitySpeaks*; a collaborative work between local writers and the Quad Cities Symphony Orchestra. Most recent publications include; *Shattered Constraints: An Anthology of Radical Hospitality* and *The Body Open Source: An Anthology on Being Human in the Age of AI*.