



WEAKEN

Tom Snarsky

Argotist Ebooks

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For Love of the Mystery Moon

In a dream you revealed
Nothing to me

So I kept worrying
That song would die out

To unmake the world
First you whisper

Then you scream

Wholesome Ghosts

After seeing the hole in the bottom
of this heart I borrowed from a man
& turned into a murmuring ocean,

I thought maybe I might be in love
with the receding tide, how I knew
it would be back in twelve hours

& twenty-five minutes, enough time
to learn a dance I have never seen
the steps for, or at least the idea

of it, how it would look if you did it
with some nameless partner on
a dark stage, the house lights out

of time to intervene—it begins &
you're already spinning, trying to
catch the specter in the corner

of your eye that can never stop
moving, since otherwise you'd see
it isn't really there & struck dumb

with this revelation you'd forget
about the tide, inching hourly back
up the shoreline / to claim us both.

Suppose You Wish to Cut the Grass

You will need some lip service about love
and a very cooperative garden snake.

You will need one precisely greasy peach.

You will need to find a flaw
where none exist, like when the guard

can tell it's two kids in a trench coat

instead of an adult who pays bills
and complains about the weather. You will

need the music paused for ~20 minutes.

You will need two Ken dolls: a be-
spectacled Ken doll and a Ken doll ready

for the beach. You will also need a plaus-

ible backstory over the course of which
they (the two Ken dolls) fall in love. You

will need tracking devices on all the trees.

You will need a lake poem like "The Lake"
by Daryl Hine, but cut out every other in-

stance of the word "lake" with safety

scissors. You will need the color blue
to take a break from being seen

for long enough to smudge it out

of the jays and their small shadows. You'll
need the same thing from the color black

but tell it separately so it doesn't think

it's just following blue like a bit player
follows the lead. Lastly you will need

bandages for when the grass cuts back

on its withholdings and leaves you
with whatever your flexible spending plan

can buy at Rite Aid: burn lotion, some eye

drops, a heart rate monitor, and a Milky
Way Midnight you paid for yourself, out of

pocket—your quiet tradition, most Fridays.

Principle of Sufficient Reason

The arc of the surgeon's arm as she lifts the skin from your left buttcheek and reinstalls the strip over yr burned area, good as new like a commodity only it went from on you to on you rather than from without to consumed. If you assume the ark has enough room for all forms of life then perhaps you think there'll be a lot of empty rooms, seeing as the undersea fauna have no need to come on a boat and even less need to be led there by humans. So you can sit in the vacant chamber reserved for two blue whales and nurse your newly-dressed wound in front of the green background you thought would look so good against their huge, majestic bodies. You can stay there and scroll through pictures of them on yr phone for hours, failing to notice that you haven't felt the itching in the affected area since your back slid down the green boards and your first set of search results came through.

Maddening Indigo

Love, like god, is the only thing
With total power to squash
All doubts that arise about
It, so long as it continues
To show itself through time
And not retreat into some
Overwhelming cave, where
Thought or human feeling dare
Not enter. Break a leg and
Bring garlic for the vampires.
When I look at you I see
Movies late at night, the
Credits not rolling til sunrise.

Our collective investment in
Death may seem regrettable
Now, but just wait and see how
Regrettable it will be *later*. If
I put my arm around you for
The duration, it's because
I'm scared in a very plain
Uncomplicated way about
Losing your breath in my ear,
Like how scientists fear our
Murdering biodiversity
Or truth altogether, as if
We let go of a red balloon

That we can't still all agree
Is red but that we all felt
At one point was beautiful
Enough to keep close at

Hand, weighed down to this,
Our common earth. My
Working memory is running
Low because I am always
Deleting things that aren't
You and feeling betrayed
That the world keeps trying
To rewrite our scene with
Weaker, more manipulable

Characters. I can't recall
The stage directions for
This part but I'm pretty sure
We kiss now, so ad-lib or
Otherwise let's hold
The rain back up against itself,
show it the contours
Of our soaked bodies as we
Ruminate on the theme of
Tenderness in modern poetry,
Where we met and where I
Hope we build our home, from
All these sticks and stones.

Hurrying There

I had a diamond reader read my life
out loud by a fire to no one. She said
that all the fluorescent nonsense I'd made
wouldn't last. I agreed and asked her her
opinion on crystals: what can matter
be when arranged, regularly, with care?

"If we could build a house with many rooms
that all looked approximately the same
I'm not convinced we would. Instead I think
we'd set fire to the foundation and sit
in the resulting pit to talk about
all that has happened in our history, its
self-similar twists and (re)turns—
and we'd make it glow, softly, like plankton."

Entirely Too Much

I am sitting
in a dream
house full
of objects
tin prince
little spoon
dollhouse
alleyway
& tree bark
lining the
floor—some
times phil
osophers
call us
"spacetime
worms" bc
we are

extended
shapes in
four di
mensions
I think
that's true
& I am a
leaky worm
my five
hearts work
so hard to
love you
with a flesh
y sweetness
like rhubarb
& I want no
more than
for you
to pass yr
opalescent
evenings
with me

here

for all

our days

which is

to say I

want en

tirely

too much

& just

enough

Cardio Theater

This flock of birds feeds on willingness to merge with others in a common flight over our quantum terrain of meaninglessness, our perplexed transvection an object for discussion or disdain or distant mistrust, at least for as long as our fathers are still around, seemingly always recited in the King James translation, "who art" &c., & who indeed, feeling like Geoffrey Hill on a Monday afternoon, could be in heaven? & still a fixedness gets us, holds us in arrears, tells me jokes but won't help me fix this tie or finish my eulogy, not mine but one I'm meant to deliver, like fireworks or cigarettes over a state border, a curve these same birds traverse every day, sometimes even shitting on it, on the very idea of separation, as their shifting cloud tightens & then (at last) begins to disperse into the reddish-pink of this finished day.

Promiscuous Mode

The "in" in "in love,"
not the "in" in "inn"
wrecking itself with
its liquid excess, that
second "n" a quest
for completion that ends
up ending anyway,
temporary, like a room
for a night with
the person you love
which (open secret,
well kept) actually lasts
as long as memory—

Poem with Last Line by Emad Matti

Every year of my life so far I've looked up
young artists who died
by suicide

when they were that many years

old. I hold them

in my head for one revolution
at a time, & then I graduate
to a different decisionmaker.

It helps, I think. A balance be-
tween maudlin & honest. It keeps
perspective close at hand, here
where, at the end of our mild day,

the death angel is coming for us all

Unthinking Miracle

I spit the light out onto the floor. Francesca Woodman
Still exists. There's a character in the woods who sings
And who has created sixty-five new metaphors for light.
Their name is Blind Justice. Thirty-four days ago Blind
Justice met a friend of mine for the first time, a friend
Who is a writer in love with winter. My friend asked,
"How far do the headlights penetrate into this eldritch
Darkness?" Blind Justice just laughed and looked away.
Blind Justice sang "Last Kiss" by J. Frank Wilson and the
Cavaliers as they receded into the vacant moon. "Our
Ideas are too thin for this light" is something the moss
Opined that was not taken up in the Senate. They made
A movie about Francesca Woodman and her family. It
Was well-received and I still haven't seen it. The moon
Looks honest & fair, which is its greatest trick. Some
Abstract party is ending now and people are going
Home, some of them together, some of them never
Again. Bargain basement lighting of the heart. I told
Him once, in my dream, and I convinced myself that
Was enough, that it wouldn't make sense now, not at
This stage of life. High modern yellow meeting green.
When they turn the furnace off, that's how you'll know.

The spatial trauma of the sun knows you can love with-
Out occupying, occupy without thinking, and read the
Branches to a lover without a whiff of malicious intent.
Try telling that to the form of the Beautiful. Strike out
"Comedy" and instead write "Dire Fuselage of Living."
It's more accurate and less marketable. Actually, just
As marketable, but that's much better than the fore-
Cast numbers so what more do you want? A little
Song, a little dance, a little rain. Some choreography

To smarten up the evening. The rainbow over the river
Could not be painted; the gentle fox who served as
Messenger brought dire news from the north. Maps
Have died for less than this. The other animals weren't
Dead, but they were certainly in danger, and far from
Home. Close your eyes and picture an ocean
Of diplomats. What is it that we expect of their souls?
I made an anarchic diagram of the future that no one
Could read and I buried it right there in the middle
Of the street, where cops grow (if you water them).
There's a miserable kind of fear in landscapes, one that
People really respond to, especially in the dark. Vanta-
Black microwave. The one unpublic love I have

To break. Can you torture a secret or just keep it.
Blind Justice sang "Dusty" by Connor Kirby-Long and I
Entered into a bruised sleep, one that begins & ends
With the lights on. J. Frank Wilson died of alcoholism
And complications from diabetes, says Wikipedia.
I'm reaching for the gray that will let me look at any-
Thing and see the world, a specular sufficiency that
Roils in the lower gut like a tainted vision on fire.
Jake Byrne wrote a poem that says, "I laughed and
a little jet [//] of blood shot from my mouth [/] into your
eye. How embarrassing. [/] *Please, let's not do this
here, you said.*" Everything about the need
To get away makes sense. Strike out "Tragedy" and
Instead write "A Quarter Turn Away from Madness."
Our green green souls in a material world. Okay, now
Try it with less darkness, more in the hands, less on
The tongue. Exposed shin bone evaporates the mood
And greater beings than I have been sprawled out on
This couch with you on their minds. A sinning fever.
Tracers continue undetected in the water, the bullet
Of their form mirroring the salvo of their content. I
Think you will need a warrant to move forward with

That, and all the small animals have correctly vowed
Never to assist the law in desperate times. Connor
Kirby-Long made beautiful music as Khonnor for a
Few years. I don't know what he's doing now. They

Made a little documentary about him, set in his
Hometown of St. Johnsbury, Vermont. I watched it
On YouTube and remember a lot of feelings. I also
Remember finding a recording of Jackson C. Frank
Performing "(Tumble) in the Wind" when he was
Older, his voice like a dead aviator, soaring but also
Barely mobile. "I wait for it to begin" and "Hurry home to
your loved ones now [/] Wintertime is near." Blind
Justice knew all about this, but of course they
Didn't say anything before disappearing into a hole
In the sky. Sex is like love in that I'm really fucking
Arrogant. It's a pretty unsettled question, how long
You have to wait before you can go home. If we
Picked you your flowers would you still be dead. If
No one understands the marketplace then I think
That means everyone understands the marketplace.
My friend put their jacket on and pulled me out in-
To the world. I bristled like a thoughtless policeman

And quietly died. These borders are militancies, but
Ugly ones—they hover over our capacities to love
With bricks in their hands they're unable to throw.
The black plastic's mysterious coating helps me ask
A question: "Did you have anything left [/] As salve or
sovereign [/] Anything left to chance". All these
Beautiful stolen mortuaries. He is off wishing some-
Where, probably near a fire, probably not alone in
Body, definitely not alone in spirit. The fake lemon
Next to the real lemon on the countertop. I fought
The true and the [/] true won, but decently. A gun-
Metal sky and the load that it bears. A continuous
Fracture building and building with the sound that
Night keeps locked deep in the pulp of the rotting
Trees at the perimeter, arranged in a half-moon to
Which the wolves are never not listening. Breath
Meaning birth and birth meaning unimaginable
Pain. The hands, though close, do not communicate
In whispers or shouts or hums or songs—only in
Mysteries, told one town away and brought upriver
By well-intentioned wanderers who wrongly think
Music only ever brings joy. The harvest coming up

Short again, brutalized by an inability to keep up
Appearances in the face of purest evil. "There's a
Natural history with your name on it," my friend
Said, in an attempt to be encouraging when we
Both knew we had missed Blind Justice and might
Never see them again. I imagined Blind Justice
Singing "Ever-Lovin' Sam" by Odyssey, one of my
Mom's favorite songs. *Samuel* means "God has
Heard", I think. I googled it once because I was
Going to write a play or something with a character
Named Samuel who never spoke, only listened,
Maybe for medical reasons. I have a recording
Somewhere of my mom singing "Ever-Lovin' Sam"
Over a backing track I crappily edited from You-
Tube; we were making a CD for my Papa of songs
He liked, where we all (even the ones who couldn't
Sing) recorded a song for him. My sister and I did
"Ain't No Mountain High Enough", and my dad did
"You Got It" by Roy Orbison. "Ever-Lovin' Sam" is
The best one, though, because it's shot through
With the knowledge that my Papa was going to die
Soon from colon cancer that had gotten everywhere,

Even into my mom's brain. My friend tried a new
Thing: instead of writing about winter, they wrote
A paean to spring. It was good and they liked the
Way it came out; they read it to me several times
As I fell asleep, and when I woke up the window
Was still open on their laptop. I have been to St.
Johnsbury, Vermont one time, but I don't recall
Much about the place besides the green. There's
Other colors to think about, especially right now,
But green is the color that comes from the root
In Proto-Indo-European that means "to grow".
I don't know how they reconstruct the old roots
But I believe in the hiddenness of the third term.
The heart might not be sure how naked to be
In all this. When love grows, it is rarely green, or
Maybe it is always green (i.e., behind the ears).
Confer with Attar, as translated by Sholeh Wolpé:
"When the sheikh fell into the jaws of a crocodile,

you all quickly ran for fear of infamy. But love's foundation is infamy. Whoever shies away from it is unschooled, green and crass in heart and head." So green is different from love, but not

Eternally separate. Thesis: no two things are ever Eternally separate. Like green and the crocodile. Like James Dean and the higher concept of *Rebel Without A Cause*. Maybe Blind Justice will reappear Singing a new song, something they composed just For the occasion. There's something bleeding in The art and that seems okay, even necessary. Not Necessarily for everyone, but what is? What is Necessarily for everyone? A posture of openness? Life itself? A window made of the kind of glass that Is slightly deformed by time, showing evidence of Its imperfections? This is usually the point where Sirens sound in the distance and you either give up Or embrace ideology. My friend told me once that They had made the same wish every single day Since they were twelve or thirteen years old. They Wouldn't tell me the wish, since a told wish might Not come true, but I was honored that they told me Even that much. A field of wreckage separates you From me, and the wreckage is mostly mine, stuff I Never claimed. The future we build together will be Made of doves that do not know which one of us to

Answer to. Think of the structure of bird language, Which is probably somewhat well-understood but The rulebook is hiding somewhere deep in the base-ment of a house you don't know well enough to feel Comfortable in and every sound you hear doubles An early trauma you'd rather not discuss with your Hosts, who have been inerrantly kind but whom you Cannot bring yourself to like. When empathy fails, Goodwill can try to play unaccompanied for a little While, long enough at least for a reed change or a re-Entry. I've never recorded a song but surely I sing To myself a lot—car radio, shower, a forgetful hum In the presence of others. This is much, much less

Important than listening. I am prorating a part of the
Infinite project of language to lay out at your door-
Step along with a bundle full of expectations, some
Of which you've already flouted and others we have
Not discussed, but that I've thought about carefully
And that make me wish beyond all hope that you'll
Hear me. There's a whole catalogue of lost sounds I
Cannot play for you now, though they ring through
The bullshit with a pronounced clarity that I envy

And have yet to successfully emulate. We grew up
On streets that intersected eventually, kind of like
Our lives, which go on & on without my permission.
My life does, anyway. My permission doesn't mean
Anything for yours. The possessive is the most pre-
Tentious thing I could imagine, but it sits in my body
Like a heart and lungs and for some reason I cannot
Shake it. Bright yellow dishtowel have mercy on me.
"Do you still love me, really?", the wood asks the
Paint, and the paint is not ready to offer a reply. I
Feel about you the way a song must feel when it's
Shoved into a different key: it maintains coherence
But not the absolute pitch, which is black like night
On a staff half-written in memory of an arrangement
That doesn't obtain anymore, in this weather. There
Is something acrimonious hiding in those woods. It's
Only quarter past eleven and the mind is tired but
The spirit is ready to pick up the slack, serve the sub-
Poena. Life itself wobbles when it walks and it sings
Happy songs even when they don't apply. The water
Hangs like a suspended myth over the region, as if
The lake were still a question rather than a deed.

When you are a guest, you are more present than
The rest because you are aware of your precarity,
Which no one is taking great pains to alleviate be-
Cause, as guest, you are never really allowed to be
There. The victim is being immolated on the marble
Surface and it's high time you paid the fuck attention
To what got us here, burning bodies in the woods
And rephrasing our chimeras so they look like the

Ocean, with all its febrile lies and unassuming, un-
Dulatory ways. The blood of a pig flowed that night,
But in a different context. I am Rimbaud and you
Are the sea, telling me beautiful stories about the
Way my joints work. To understand the photograph
As pulse is one aim they had for me, aspirationally
At least, even if they never thought I'd get there.
The tragic voyager is set against a backdrop of deep
Space and we are immanent to it, selling cotton
Candy as exchangeable currency against the unit
Of total darkness that hasn't yet been named or
Given an economic function. I know the struggle
Has been consistently repressed until now, and
I'm really seeing it with the bald eagle vision the

State has granted to my heart, which walked away
From the crash unharmed, a complete miracle. I
Followed the sun here and then waited for some-
One to sing it so I'd know what to do. My friend
Left me here long ago, at this Greyhound terminal,
Company- and luggageless. What a great place for
A funeral. Katie Peterson, in "The Massachusetts
Book of the Dead": "It was said of the recluse: she
loved music", and I like to imagine too that music
Loved her. I am giving living a break from itself to
Rest and keep my name hidden from me—I still
Don't know it—and nothing beyond this operates
On the valence of flowers, so here I'll be picking
Them until the end of time, or at least the end of
Blind Justice's erstwhile song. Time has kept my
Friend away from me, but if we generalize, so has
Loss, which is also being immolated if only to be-
Come more permanent. I love you in linen, I love
The necks no one mentions. I love your burlesque
Way of reminding me I've disappointed you the
Old way, the old-fashioned way, the way that in-
Volves breaking a promise. I am terrified of the

Force of the present unmediated by your face,
And I don't know how I will continue to live in the
Actual world if I have to do it without you. A liver

Is only a manifestation of an idea of sadness, of
Course New York must have taught you that. We
Decline in the same way but no longer at the same
Time. There is an archer and he is substituting love
Arrows for some fake version of the same thing, he
Is shooting men at random and what am I to do but
The relevant follow-up, enacting a cute division of
Labor that is catlike but also hungry. I manifest an
Entire convention of clouds that you probably have
Never seen. There is a film called *Worm* by Andrew
Bowser that reminds me of this night, one of the
Only nights that I nearly killed myself with alcohol
Because I was sad or experimental, or something
Less simple, but whatever way you think it that
Film was the one playing while I cleaned the world,
Tried to scrub it of my influence, played music that
Was sober and responsible but would not translate
Well into the dog and pony show I have imagined
For myself this night, without ever pausing for time.

Jonty Tiplady: "Nothing ever happens except that I
love my fucking life through you". The gentle fox is
Worried about the status of your soul, and tells you
As much. He's holding the tarot deck behind his
Back a little sheepishly, hoping you'll suggest it so
He won't have to. In this scenario, the gentle fox is
Me and I am that third party of silent smolder, this
Fake dream as just another way to carve out some
Happenstance intimacy for us to fall into together.
Explanation is a funny thing in that in love it doesn't
Work. Don't tell me to hold my breath, I've already
Got a ritual to die by if it goes too far. I don't recall
All of the details of *Worm*, but I remember there's
Something like a torture scene in a bar, & of course
It was also one very long continuous shot, which is
Amazing to think about. It really gives me feelings
In the gut, both as art and as flora memory, which
Could well be the same thing. Sorry if I'm fifty years
Behind painting. You put your lips against the bleed-
ing and ask if I'm okay; yeah sure but now my heart
Is on fire. Googling "how to be less self-involved",
Opening thirty tabs, reading one and then going to

Bed. One of the best-known actual dog and pony Shows was originally called "Gentry's Equine and Canine Paradox", which was apparently a common Naming convention since there were also "Morris' Equine and Canine Paradoxes". Robert Lax loved The circus so much he traveled with one for a while, Performing as Chesko the clown and being amazed By the artistry of the Cristiani brothers, especially Mogador, who rode horses. It's hard not to fall in Love with Mogador, reading Lax's poems about him. Like Augustine meeting the boy on the beach. Like *La música callada* of San Juan de la Cruz. Blind Just- Ice could sing no song at all, really. No song with Sound. Kierkegaard called paradox "the passion of thought", and talked a about how passion seeks Its own end, so thought seeking paradox is thought On fire with the unthinkable. The turkeys walk like They own the place, and we find Socrates "stalking like a pelican" in the *Symposium*. No fire here, but Certainly the unthinkable. If you share language With someone, be prepared to be washed away by That oceanic force, the forgetfulness of the spoken.

Sacrament 1: A heavy heart. St. John Bosco wrote that evil boys tended to attract one another with remarkable speed, as if they were guided by some "malefic spirit" or a "diabolic magnet" (his words). Could I maybe get one of those, put it in my pocket, and run through an open field to meet the evil boy who will be waiting to find me on the other side?

Sacrament 2: Fireblight. Camille Rankine: "It is easy, how the night [/] is beautiful. The moon bows to the earth [/] and is swallowed by the sea." When I read that the first time I drowned too. I can't walk beside lakes alone anymore. I can't feed the plant names

to the internet in the hopes that something new will come up. Please, if you find this, just / bury it.

Sacrament 3: Unknown. How much of life is blurred faces and the burning need to eat the sea. Like many Americans I'd like to scream into the mouth of Ryan Gosling and hear my sound reverberate. The violence tells me he's okay. It opens its slime mouth and tells me he's okay, but could maybe be improved, just a bit of tinkering before the universal death sets in.

Sacrament 4: Suspicion. It is hard to think about jealousy one unit at a time. No two things are ever eternally separate, but if you let your thought be like a lake—still, greenish, flush with mosquito eggs—then maybe they will never come together, at least not while you're alive. This is, of course, not a wish. Everything up to now could only be called a warning.

Sacrament 5: Elemental violence. Partly there, you are lost / Time building a tunnel to somewhere else, the broken mold / Shaping your destiny but not / In any adequate form, not in the shadow of the sun, not in the / Way this religion might require. // Two losses, three dreams, the lightning way to remember a home. Death / Is a force and so, by god, are you.

Sacrament 6: Mortality. Derek Gromadzki: "held up to a fire's glare [/] that greed of evening strips to embers"—the twilit rounds emptied into night skies in heartland USA, some of them ever-lowering. Think of ownership as owning a gun, dismantling the object of possession to keep the children safe. What if one died in your house, as if by your hand. What then.

Sacrament 7: Infancy. The phoenix as a brother to the lost, a comrade-in-arms of their inner story, sitting in the pile of ashes and listening to the tales of the dead.

The phoenix's shriveled head has just developed ears for this task—impressive since we've been around for centuries and still haven't. But there are some things. St. Macrina the Younger, it is said, could heal the blind.

About the Author

Tom Snarsky teaches mathematics at Malden High School in Malden, Massachusetts, USA. He is the author of [*Threshold*](#), a chapbook of poems available from [Another New Calligraphy](#). He lives in Chelsea, Massachusetts among stacks of books and ungraded papers with his fiancée Kristi and their two cats, Niles and Daphne.