

George Murray / THREE POEMS

THE CHAIN

The first horseman to wander into this valley
was once again mistaken for a monster —

his thoughts were broken, his body split, not how
a tree might be in a storm, but how a couple

might, unexpectedly, after twenty years. It's good
to see the apples have completed their cycle —

green to red to black, sour to sweet to bitter —
proof the world goes on somewhere, in pieces,

uninterrupted. A man on an empty street corner
is the first to be seen in days and all he has

to say is that the garden of earthly delights
is covered in dirt. Imagine! Volcanoes

go off as though they were stew
left too long on the stove —

the seismic spike recorded on paper
is wholly different from that recorded in earth.

Are you confident enough to say definitively
these earthquakes are not of biblical proportions?

Scattered about the countryside are signposts
that point to towns that no longer exist.

The water refuses to run in expected directions,
machines will not vend their hoards of candy

and soda, squirrels and mice are giving lip
to old ladies on benches, starlings

are committing acts of fraud in the very trees
above! There is not a lick of shade left

in Britain, not a grain of sand in Egypt.
The kilns of this world have no walls,

yet still they cook, the ovens have no elements
and the hearths no chimneys,

yet everything smokes. Has anyone figured out
that graffiti subscribes, on the macro level,

to some sort of fractal pattern? It must,
or how could it become so much a part

of the visual background noise?
Five Christ figures stand in a police lineup

and those behind the bulletproof glass
are hard pressed to pick even one —

someone mentions acidly that the only memorable
conversation at the Last Supper

was about the amount of salt in the soup.
That day the hydrants decided to withhold

their water and ignored our requests
to douse the nearby fires was the same day

the only city on the planet that didn't burn
was Atlantis. Half-naked is half more clothed

than we need for what is to be done —
dress yourself in the costume of a Greek athlete

instead of the torn garb of a Sabine woman.
When we walk through the victory arch,

so prematurely built, we will die
and be born at the same time —

as with any door, the person going through
is not the one coming out. Any good Centaur

knows there's a chance he'll be mistaken
for a horseman cresting the ridge —

so when the road forks beneath you, wisdom
dictates you take the third route, that leading home.

Take a look around when you reach the horizon.
A chain dangles from the sun. Tug on it.

THE STORM

The river holds many secrets, not the least
of which is the horizon, on one side
a jagged cityscape, on the other only a hill

and trees. Huddled on one bank a man waits out
the storm to gather information about his fate —
where will the lightning that drops upon his life

fall? Where will its marks been seen in the earth
of his skin? He has questioned before —
is he the shore or the wave that breaks upon it?

Is he the earth or the river? Is he the blue, or the bolt
from it? Hunting in the deep of a wood,
it will be the last cobble stone of a long dead society

on which he steps and cripples himself.
This portentous thunder sets off
the alarms of the future, sets the prophets

to mumbling, sets the illustrated deck of cards
near the window sill to whirling,
sets the world's pregnant women to labour —

their fruit being spilled in a forced autumn
with no uniformity of ripeness.
Why does the fading storm, moving into

the distance, not trigger the same apprehension
as the one approaching? What some
might call hope, others call folly. Wild accusations

require villains to be taken seriously —
so if you are going to create one, consider
creating both. A tame flock of white doves

has been groomed and trained to return
to their cages so they may be released
time and again at special events —

we have constructed ourselves as creatures
of forgetfulness to accommodate structures
such as these. Mercy is on ration,

goodwill in short supply —
if we hoard, we may survive, or perhaps
our preserves will spoil in their stone jars.

Stand facing a wall that rises to just above eye level,
look at the strip of sky that kisses its lip —
ask yourself whether this line of blue represents

the horizon. Do the arms of your fellow man
hold an embrace or a strangling yoke?
Who set the fathers of the world to weeping?

Who can make them cease? What thunder
truly breaks that does not bring
with its flash any man's momentary fright?

Ask yourself, is there a person alive for whom
the rending of the air holds no significance?
In this regard are we not all prophets?

Much as we have recently realized
that the river continues to, at the very least,
somewhere around the bend —

is not the knowledge of our own frailty
also a version mass prophecy,
a telling of the future momentarily upon us?

THE ANCHOR

Here he comes. This is a man whose approach
could kick up a dust cloud in a land of fens, a man
who flings himself into the lives of others

as though a shell shot from beyond
the horizon, a man of few words, but these. Perhaps
we should just cut the world's flagpoles

in half and be done with it. The penitent have taken
to licking the floors and bedsheets
in leper colonies, to bathing last in the cold water

left after a long line of plague victims
have been washed for burial. The words *apathy*
and *sympathy* are reclaiming their relationship

to *pathology*. The planet is a pill in a pestle
and night is just the shadow of the approaching
chemist. A ship drops its anchor of salt

off a shore comprised of sugar, the ocean water
eroding both quick enough that before the men
can disembark they find themselves lost at sea. Cream

refuses to mix with coffee, apples stay green
and sour, leaves cling to the trees and die
without turning, fiddleheads fail to unfurl into ferns

and the loam of the forest floor is bathed
in sunlight! Pavement never cracks
and thousands of students go unemployed, the pens

of the world simultaneously run dry and ink pots
tip, the sun stops directly overhead
rendering sundials useless and stealing

from humanity the ability to check hairstyles
without the use of a mirror! Coincidentally, the foam
of ale that clings to the inside rim

of a young woman's pint glass relates,
in the original Arabic, the adventures
of one Scheherazade's fifth cousin. In a distant galaxy,

a pulsar lets out one long burst that shows no sign
of subsiding, thereby decimating
the planet's astrology community. The elderly

are disposed of in landfills, tamped down
into mineshafts with heavy machinery, legs
and arms sticking out everywhere. Maybe

the war crimes tribunals of the future
will charge the invaders with littering. The juries
should be comprised of children to ensure

swift and remorseless death
for the convicted. Buried beneath the forest floor,
a protesting monk rings a bell over and over

as he meditates towards his death,
a surprising two weeks later. The gods, he says,
are drinking a tea boiled over the embers

of our homes and bones. The people
bearing witness in the jungle above
likely don't notice the final chime of his bell,

their ears carrying on the task of listening
long after the monk has fallen over,
cross-legged, onto his side. Here he comes,

and when he finally arrives, he will preach
of the dangers of loving in an end-time,
when events decide the length and quality

of bliss and retaliation becomes the institution
which governs all relationships. In return
for this wisdom let us prepare a great gallows

from which he can be hung, and wait patiently
for a rent to form in the earth, into which
he shall be thrown, our own anchor of flesh.

