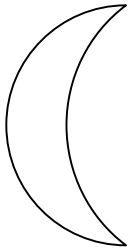


The Dreaming House



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Avocet: A Desert Vocabulary

Canyon Echo: Riparian Light

Elegant Thorn Review: Rain Meditation

The Evening Street Review: The Desert's Memory

FutureCycle: The Stages of Darkness

The Hiss: The Way Back

Inside Willo: The Dreaming House, Lost Neighbour

Main Street Rag: Trail

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Parting Gifts: Interstate Meditation, Deer, Directions to the Winter Trail, Starlings,

Poetry Super Highway: For a Tree

Presa: Night Calls

Voices on the Wind: In Miller Canyon, Metamorphosis, The Dreaming House, Lost Neighbour

December Walk

Beside a slender river
that mumbles to the stones
we walk in quiet shoes
with winter thoughts
and eyes for the silky light
falling on the cottonwoods
still holding to a few
last russet leaves.

One falls for the Chilean general
and a flurry scatters
for those who still support
him. It was right, they say,
to do the things he did
and not apologise. A tree shakes
unexpectedly

for the war that continues
without explanation
and we follow a dusty path
that tells us how long it has been
since rain or diplomacy.
Among the bare-limbed textures

of mesquite we are at peace
for a while. Nobody awaits
execution, nobody is tortured
until they cough up a reason
for it to stop, and nobody
stands in our way
prepared to strip us to our souls
before we continue
the journey. Along an uphill trail

we become ambassadors
from the country of grass
to that of rock and air. Back
in the shadows we report
to the water that clouds
are dispersing and the year

is drawing to a close
with unsettled accounts
and unburied dictators.
But as long as it flows
we will come here
to be with the trees
each one of which stands
as if nailed
to its place in the universe.

Interstate Meditation

The dry light of January
soaks into the fur
of a coyote dead beside I-10
halfway to Tucson
where the desert is parcelled
for easy sale
and imports from China
roll by slow freight
through the global marketplace.
Clear sky.
Hawks and mesquite.
White lines on the asphalt

run parallel to the stripe
along the back of a skunk
on the shoulder
with traffic's breeze
ruffling the long hair's tips
while a low flying fighter
streaks eastward
practicing for an exported war.
Distant palms.
Shadows in the pecan grove.
A shredded tire

curls in the sun
where thirst broke the rubber
as wheels drank back the miles.

Deer

A white-tailed deer at sunset
springs a cross the creek
beneath bare and twisted boughs
of a sycamore that holds
the full moon until wind
begins to skate
along the ice on canyon trails.

Directions to the Winter Trail

After leaving the interstate, turn
eastward and follow
the red-tailed hawk until he fuses
with the sky, then take
the road fate has given you
to the point at which it becomes
a bed of light and stones
twisting between the ocotillo.

Continue for as many miles as you need
to forget where you have come from
then park and look for a trail
that trickles down the slope
into a mesh of dry branches
and thorns. Take a deep
breath of silence
before the first step toward

the unknown country
awaiting you. It begins just over
the first ridge you cross
and extends for as far
as you can walk. With its greens
and purple cactus
it draws you in, threads you
through an eye in the rocks
and replaces the air you exhale
with the scent of wet mesquite.

The Dreaming House

The mantis on the door frame, the moths
around the lamp, and lizards
sleeping through the winter in the cracks
that hold our walls together
are signs the house is dreaming
on its old foundations

of the time when desert was walking
distance away
with its scents as rich
as the scarves of smoke curling out
from the Chinese dens

before they became history ahead of their time.
Nobody remembers Chinatown
and of the trolley
whose terminal was around the corner
only the schedules remain.
The house is a light sleeper

listening to voices trapped
beneath the plaster
that speak at night when insects
find their way
through space to our address

where they rest
like notes from the subconscious
to allay our fears
that cities outlive nature.

Starlings

A flock of starlings unfolds
like a sheet from which
other sheets are released

each in its turn folding
into itself before spreading out
across the air

then swirling with thousands
of parts synchronised
to fly with one mind

directing movement
until the many bodies settle
along wires strung pole to pole

before coming down
to blacken lawns
and pouring themselves back

into pale sunlight breaking
through cloud cover.
They are immigrants

who began in New York
and took forty years to reach
California. They never

appear alone, but viewed
close at hand and singly
possess a beauty easily demeaned

by being common. Nomads,
they come to us in winter
as a high pitched chorus

declaring their agreement
on whatever occupies their starling
thoughts when they gather

in earthbound conspiracy
before the word is spread among them
to return to the sky

as the pieces of its shadow
reassembling
as they rise.

Rain Meditation

On days of slow rain the house
shrinks a little, its rooms
hold their occupants with a more
than usual gentleness,
and its windows shiver in their frames
without sunlight. Grey absorbs
all thoughts while the radio
emits what warmth there is
along with a stream
of songs in Spanish. The hummingbird,
flicker, and two cactus wrens
come to the offerings
suspended from a porch beam,
each bringing its flash
of colour from the wild. Water slips
from the overhang
to pool among the dormant stems
of plants in winter,
and then sink into darkness
that runs deep in the ground
where the future depends
on resources available
for those who will take our places
at the glass, on a day like this,
listening to the minutes
dripping through the clock.

Lost Neighbour

Alvin looked across the fence
when it was still standing straight
and he needed conversation
whether we wanted to hear
about his family in California or not.
One night he invited us to the stars

and pointed his telescope
at an eclipse of the moon
that resembled the tumour
growing on his cheek.
Then he walked away down the alley
and reappeared months later
on the bench outside the Basha's store

in the company of others
whose teeth were as crooked as his.
I moved into an apartment
he said, as if it were a country
to which nieces send their uncles
when they have too many.
Weeks passed between
encounters. He shopped in different

aisles to us, picking cans
in preference to fresh
while his beard struggled to hide
what was happening to him
and the crack in his voice
couldn't help but reveal it.
New Alvins sit in his place
having slowed to the pace

of remembering how it was here
when people spoke first
and introduced themselves later.

For a Tree

The tall pine
at Third Avenue and Monte Vista
where the falcon came to find
a branch so high
he could watch over the city
before choosing the moment to fly
was cut down yesterday

thin branches first
then the boughs from which they grew
were severed
leaving the trunk
to stand knotted and bare

for the man to scale
with his ropes and his saw
which took a few inches
away with each growl
until the tree became the height

of the cutter
who continued to work
it to a stump
while the rest was fed
through a machine

that eats trees
and spits sawdust

leaving only the shadow
to pick up by its edges
and fold away
in a drawer
as a keepsake
with clothes that outlasted
their fashions.

Riparian Light

Craving green, we seek the light
that shines from leaves
along the banks of a river whose quiet
water eases between
the desert pinks and desert browns
that flow away toward
a blue horizon. Here is shade

and here are trails
winding through mesquite
until they turn to sand.
Here are the snakes
coiled around sunlight
and lizards that move
at the speed of sight. Here

we stop to listen to the calls
the shadows make in spring
among cottonwoods and willows
with their tallest boughs
swaying and scratching
against the sky

while they hold to the earth
as a windbreak against extinction.

In Miller Canyon

The light is just enough to see by
yet too weak to cast a shadow
as it guides the path
that enters a forest
where the silence of the oaks
parts to allow those through
who know the combination
to the lock on the gate
protecting the language of trees.

*

High into the alphabet
consonants are tall
and vowels long. The letters
are continuous and don't
form words, yet a narrative flows
in which nothing that happens
can ever be revised.

*

Along the path through the grasslands
inscribed with sunlight
and quartz, the trilling
sparrows ornament a rush
of wind from the rocks
where agave lean
until their roots have nothing
left to hold but the warm
evening shadows
that translate the hillside
from day into night.

Trail

This is the trail that rises and falls
through day and night,
that collects the rain in one country
and deposits it in another,
where the smuggler changes clothes
and a hiker believes
to have discovered the human soul
among the tracks
of animals who passed here
in moonlight. We have taken it so often
we know each twist and vista
where the oaks are open
to reveal the valley shining on its bed.
It is the trail of rare sightings
and illusions. It is a trail
where the leaves whisper and the tallest
trees are charred from lightning
that struck like electric nails. The mines
are boarded up with warning signs
that say it is dangerous to go down
into the dark where memories
float on still water
nobody could drink, even when cicadas
sound from the mountain's dry throat
and light is all that flows
along the streambed. This is the trail
we chose but never follow
to its end, leaving it to run
across the saddle between two peaks
where it narrows beneath
a hawk's wing and descends
to the border grasslands with no allegiance
except to itself.

The Way Back

The high trail is a thread beneath the sun
coiling and climbing
rocks interspersed with flowers
bursting open from a mesh
of needles on a cactus resembling
a smile with shallow roots.
It follows the black hawk and the raven
with a sprinkling of light
for the edges of their wings. We follow
it to the crest where it takes
a dark turn and is lost
in a tangle spreading out
from the creek with its liquid voice
saying

*this is the way come into the shadows
you will be lost here and the way
back doesn't exist it leads forward it never
ends it just changes direction until you
are back where you started where you thought
you were before you knew you were wrong*

A Desert Vocabulary

Few words are needed here.
When we stop

to look at detailed
markings on a lizard's back
we enjoy the moment's

wonder silently.
In springtime we chew the names

sand verbena, goldmallow, and owl clover
like a salad while
observing wildflowers

and point

at a phainopepla spinning
through sunlight
as we learn

how restraint embellishes the desert

in a manner parallel
to the long months of drought
ending in loud rains.

Metamorphosis

You awaken from a night of disquieting dreams
far from everything you know
where the vegetation wears a warning
and molten light pours over it.
Where are the trees? you ask yourself. *When*
will the river arrive? The air is temperate early
in the day, but soon you feel yourself burn.
When you call out
in the hope of finding company
there is no reply. A lizard runs from shade to shade
and a coyote appears between blinks
of your eye that doubts what it sees. The green
you once thought of as cool
is a hot colour here, running through the ridges
along a saguaro and from the root of an ocotillo
to the tip where it bursts into red.
You try to estimate distances here by the miles
that measured landscape in your former life
as you consider finding a way out.
While you stare in each direction
at mountains biting into the sky
you feel the changes coming about. You no longer
miss slow rainfall or meadows
and being alone feels comfortable. Surrounded by heat
you stand in a hall of mirrors
and cannot recognise yourself in any one of them.

Night Calls

With a kiss of darkness comes the moth
cloaked in dust to the light
of a lamp by the latch on the door.
We sleep in uncharted territory

each night with our borders open
and waiting for messages
from creatures with whom we share
the floating world to enter

our dreams. When the unexpected
owl in the tree at the window
calls, the notes glow against the silence
and line our ears with threads and small bones.

The Stages of Darkness

The first stage of darkness is the glow
brushed into walls and palm fronds
by the falling sun while mockingbirds fly late
with insects for their taking
as the moon swallows the cool breath
that passes over rooftops.

The second stage is moisture
rising through the soil,
a river of light on the freeway, and the appearance
of a moth on whose wings a map
of the underworld is drawn
just as the scent of the cereus
is layered over that of acacia.

The third is the stage of not knowing
what moves in the grass or what returns
night after night as a call
almost real, and yet so soft
you know it from your dreams, you
who speak only by day.

The Desert's Memory

Old shadows slip beneath the surface of the desert
and sink in sympathy with water
through the layers of darkness stacked
each with its record intact
of rainfall and heat
and the scent of the flowers that exhaled toward the moon
trapped between them. Here are tracks

made by shoes so desperate
they walked by themselves
through a landscape of thorns and searchlights.
Here are vestments edged with lace
lying next to the immortal leather whip
a priest had taken as his only friend.
And deeper are the footprints

of people who turned
from their fire pits with the stars guiding them
without leaving a record
of what drove them away
or any words of prophecy

regarding those who would come later
and build houses so large
as to suggest they believed their cities
would last forever.

October Meditation

October is the month the cowboys
at the art museum exhibit
history in costume, and lovebirds
chatter in the local palms
having made good their escape
and subsequent colonizing
of the neighbourhood.
We travel to the height of aspens
to see them shiver
in the first cool wind
and come back to the altitude
of clear reception for the radio
whose nerves are on edge
because of its obsession with hostility.
Changing stations brings the result
of the election a year before
it happens. The days are warm
with the outlook for extinctions
gaining speed, far away
at first. We go to a refuge to count
species close at hand, climb
the narrow path until we reach
an overlook from which the view
extends across waves of desert
mountains. A valley away
plans are drawn for a mine,
the road on which we came
will be twice as wide next year,
and in the path of machinery
we're helpless to turn the land back
to the way it was when the West
had pianos in out-of-tune saloons
and it took all six rounds in a handgun
for the sheriff to hit a bandit once.

Duck Lady

*Will you mind my tools for a while
the lady with the carrier says
I have to catch a duck.
She's been clipping the vegetation
on the bank of a pond
to reach a drake she thinks is caught
in twine. Thank you. Thank you.
So we stand beside her shears and long handled net
while she treks to a Mexican mallard
struggling in the mud
until she returns with the bird
under her arm. All she needs is
an injection. I take her home. I come back
in half an hour. Forty minutes at the most.
We promise to wait and meanwhile scan
the shallows for slackened wings
or drooping necks. An hour flies by
before a man stops to ask what we have seen.
A yellow warbler and a flock
of peach faced lovebirds. Then I ask
him if he'd mind staying here a while
to relieve us. Saving ducks? he scoffs,
You can't save ducks. Botulism kills 'em off
in hundreds. Nothing you can do.
He lifts his binoculars to follow
a black phoebe. It seems like stopping wars,
this rescue undertaking. Nothing
we can do. Bombs, missiles, torture,
generals giving orders, and politicians
talking up the mission. There's a melancholy
hanging in the air, until the duck lady
returns all out of breath and
struggling in her second language
to say I got to her early enough. She'll be alright now.
I don't know how many but one at a time I can do.*

November Light

Planes of gilded water
float from eye to eye
of those who walk the cursive path
between the teal and dowitchers
slowly as the evening
crosses open space and glows
on the mudflats.

An egret landing spreads its wide
expanse of white, flexes
wings and threads
its neck into the light
that flows across the top side
of evergreen leaves.

A flock of warblers sparkles
in a cottonwood before
a small hawk darts
toward them and leaves a shiver.
Jump and scratch,
dig and start, sparrows and towhees
rummage in the shadows

and turn to dust
before becoming birds again
as darkness laps
at the far bank of the pond
where a kingfisher cuts
an opening and the surface
seals itself back
with a swallow

.



David Chorlton was born in Austria and grew up in Manchester, England, home of rain and industry. He moved to Austria in 1971 to live in Vienna, where he developed his work as an artist and began to write poetry. He used to travel often by train around Europe to explore and to paint. Seven years later, he moved to Phoenix (his wife's home city). Within a few years, he was publishing poems in small press magazines around the country and individual collections followed, including chapbooks: *Assimilation* (winner of the Main Street Rag contest), *Common Sightings* (Winner of the Palanquin Press contest), and *Greatest Hits* (Pudding House Publications), and books *A Normal Day Amazes Us* (Kings Estate Press) and *Return to Waking Life* (Main Street Rag Publishing Company). He has shown his art work in several galleries and art centers, and he has given many readings of his poetry as well as occasional dramatic readings outside that genre.

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