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SELECTED POEMS

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English Studies in Latin America
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Selected Poems

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THIS OR ANY FRIDAY

Lacking green water, knee high grass
they
 entered
 the café.
She ordered
 hamburger,
 a chocolate malt.
His salad lay
 in strips.
 The lettuce
didn't blow like
 grass
 in winter wind.
The check
 took pennies
 from a piggy bank.
A palm plant
 for their balcony
 to replace...
She spoke
 about the books
 her doctor recommended.
His wife
 too difficult
 her black moods
nursing ailments
 he couldn't cure
 even as tall grass bends.

THE INVISIBLE CAN BITE

The wind refuses to be shaped.
It re-forms the eucalyptus leaves

in its willy-nilly prance, avoiding
the eye. When it roars its hurricanes

only the damage testifies, unlike
the significant sun, bold-faced,

revealing my nakedness. Attempted
analogies fall flat. Ink and print

are caught in their inadequacies.
How easily we are diminished.

I hear the curse of no, the constant ache,
shared in my consulting room.

She looks to me believing what I say
can hold up the sky or prevent a deluge.

She's hungry for more than golden apples
with the coming of bad weather. A stranger

had gathered figs but her brother's wife spit
bitter wine too long held in her cold storage.

As wind rattles the window, it might be
the voice of Jove still striving for immortality.

A WAY THROUGH

Gray wall. A chair. A table.
Through the tiny window a cloudless sky.
The feathered eucalyptus quivers
in the staccato wind. It doesn't reach him.
Even the invisible eludes. He waits
for footsteps to follow. The nocturne
he hears repeats, endless as the press of dark.
As a boy, before his father died,
he could invent, almost believe,
the undulating ocean, gulls
cutting the salty air, each in its own
cotillion, a passport of wings.

In another place, a man not old enough
to vote, hangs by his thumbs, condemned
for 20 years, a deadly crime. He travels
at night to a far-off country. Rocks,
sharper than thorns, have bruised his thighs.
A camel transports him to a broad savannah.
Green wind. A bend in the horizon beckons.
He is free to follow, though crawling now
among the prickly bush. Earth's moist fragrance
quenches for the long haul. The dark finds passage.

LESSONS TO BE LEARNED

Though I forget to look for stars
the universe continues
its pirouettes, its extravagant expanse,
putting us in our place.
Bodies on the streets of Kabul
gather flies. Heroes pinned with medals
shine as though killing
were equivalent to a supernova.
Love, the supreme attraction,
generates a longing to embrace.
One day Andromeda will mingle
with our Milky Way,
a love-match we might emulate.

SHE DOESN'T WAIT FOR THE KINDNESS OF OTHERS

Morning greets its winter's tale, a fog
obscuring all but my hurrah for
 the nun
 of 84.

She storms the gates. Protest! Prevent
the deadly shame of nuclear devices
 aimed
 at war!

Behind the iron bars she smiles her
unrepentant smile. Jesus, Buddha, Vishnu
 forget
 to brush

their teeth as they applaud this legacy.
No need to kneel. The sacred work is done.

 Starlings
 gather
in circular murmurations, the air renewed
by a thousand wings. Visibility increases,
 the fog,
 a scrim,
no longer screens. How the oranges
hang their holiness, consecrate the day!