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Comfortables

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Thesis

COMFORTABLES

by

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I. Ever Berries
*Ever Berries*

One flower per plant, they sprawl
over a few vacant acres, spotting
the ground the way my dog, in heat,
would spot the kitchen floor.

No sign, you have to ask what they are,
or else you’d think they’re strawberries.
The look like the strawberries we picked
in Ipswich. They taste like them.
He says they’re sweeter.

Only two pints left,
only eight bucks a carton.

So I take them. In the back of my mind,
pinching a berry top off its bud,
remember what Parker said.

You hear things, when you talk
to farmers. Things like Dave
buying produce in Chelsea,
Selling, like it was his.

It’s in my mouth now,
but it might not be real—
Nobody’s ever seen them
anywhere else. Nobody else
has got them.
Casa Tatu

Have a look around
this house is very big,
no? Magdalena says.

Wander among countless
empty rooms to sit: couch armchair
ottoman. Choose a spot, any

spot, facing closed glass.
Sibling statues guard corners;
each beheaded, punished

by their sculptor, as though
we must punish beauty.
Books in English no one

can read. The books
sit showing off like
antiques, showing off

American Education. Gosh,
Sebastian, aren’t you
lucky to know—

Burnt toast, cereal in a jar
stays put; it’s antique too.
And the books

in Spanish everyone speaks,
they are dusty
too. See, blow a little here.
Trash Horses

The noise comes first
when the streets are dark, illuminated
in the center, drowned out at the corners,
when a figure steps out from a doorway.

The shops are closed. It is Sunday
and late. From a block away
the clacking comes like teeth
clicking against each other: teeth chattering
to keep warm.

They cover the horses’ eyes.
The men sift through a dumpster.
throwing plastics into the carriage.
There are no stables in the city. There are no gauchos.
They ride in, from the strips of land
where an acre of trash burns.
I saw the fires from the window
as we drove by, watching
as I watched the drummers
from inside the shop.

The crowd surrounding them, moving slowly,
in no particular direction,
obbing like red and white plastic on water,
not fast, not going anywhere, just placeholder.
Like the hand of the father holding his daughter
on the right, his flask on the left.
Every Sunday they march across this city.

The noise, the violence
was it out there burning in
the distance? Or was it
the thing that lit the center.

I saw the horses trot on,
back through the hills of Pocitos,
out to the country, to bring something back,
clothing and scraps, plastic to burn.
Pull-out Couch

I think of the movies,
Harmony Korine,
watching Spring Breakers
on the Cape.
It looked so easy
for them, all of it,
making a choice.

Mom always said
just give them your money,
what you have,
and hope that’s that.
But like bile,
I feel a fight
surge throat to mouth—
I haven’t given you
permission.

A pulled-out
couch, the door
open to let in a breeze.
It was impossible
to admit
without forcing
reciprocity.
I couldn’t move it
from my gut
out of my mouth,
like bile when I blurted
out I love you,
too.
Routine

A.

Twenty-gallon bag in each hand, kick open the back door. Things put into the dumpster strewn along the concrete.

The bags put back inside, the job unfinished, not wanting to step over the raccoon: an obstacle.

B.

It’s a direction that feels comfortable. I traveled the same way each day that you were gone, so it felt uncomfortable holding your hand. I hadn’t done it for so long.
I Prefer Egalitarian

I worked for a lawyer before
but I didn’t realize you were all alike
Disorganized yellow pads bent
and fraying all jotted with points
you can argue
You sound bored and you look
bored too with your fist propped to support
your head so heavy it risks falling off
you move your hand to take a note
and then it does your head plops
onto the table your glasses crunch
and shards pierce skin but it keeps rolling
and then drops onto the floor
it didn’t splatter open like a pumpkin
but I see bruises and blood as it keeps rolling
carried by momentum now
until it hits the wall
The panel on gender schemas ends
as the EMTs come in awkwardly
moving your body one picks up the head
from the ground and puts it where it belongs
on the stretcher and I sit wonder
how you might have finished
explaining why juries favor
aggressive male lawyers over aggressive
female lawyers and wondering
why people spend years working
to become professionally bored
Sodus Point

Remember Sodus:
the deadbeat town,
emptied restaurants,
three teenagers
lurking at the drive-in
with cheese fries.

Remember walking up
to the lighthouse
each night to catch the sun
drop off the edge.

Woke up to you peering
into my face, holding back
a laugh, slightly bug-eyed.

I wasn’t fast enough, you ran
out. I heard you
on the gravel.
I got up and dressed

swimsuit nylon feeling
strange so early,
the lifejacket cold
against my skin.

I hopped in right as you
got the rowboat
into the water.

Last day of vacation,
seaweed
filled up the beach.
Compromise

The sun rises. My side
my choice. Dark, keep it.
The sun rises. Clouds for
blinds. Eight, no fewer.
The sun never rises,
too dark. Rain in
morning dark. My room,
my choice. Eight tonight.
Dark, strongly. Blinds. The sun
never rises. It has to
be dark. Eight, no fewer.
The sun, outside.
Technocrats

Seat 12-E and Chuck begins his daily machination report.

They listen to the metadata. 
It’s them, they hold the power. 
You whisper listen. Go read the news, then write it back.

They put their ears against an iPhone, they auscultate for something.

But will it reach you, Chuck? 
I walk among the white oaks: can they whisper an answer for you— 
I wait. You pull the handle, 

back in Vegas now. The slots whirl, each sign indistinguishable, sedative.

You dream up new realities, you walk with Clinton through Rwanda. 
You wink at the airline attendant, and ask her for two cookies, please.
Another Theory

Systems interact
they transcribe signals
instantaneous
incorrect at times
round the hundred
thousandth decimal
the tree on the northwest
point between the water
and Inis Mor blows in the wind
pushes the wren from oak
to air it sends a typhoon
five years from that
moment to swell
on our shores
this is chaos
and we let it
happen move among it
motion or non-motion reaches
another further off
Imaging

This mirror returns
you, like property, protector
of your image, forcefield.
You face the wall, another mode
of protection, but the mirror
you’ve placed your trust in
betrays your pieces
to the outside world.
The mirror, a light flirted
across its surface, calls for alliance.
I too become your mirror.
I gossip, reflecting more
than your skin,
the arrangement of your features.
Kendall

One night you made the bells ring at the station, only one guy on the platform across. They started off slow, more notes sounding as you moved the lever faster, like a flock of geese crossing the path near the pond. I watched the kinetic energy, waited as it became motion. Noise. It’s all vibrations. I said keep going. I called you Quasimodo. No games at other stations. We don’t warm up the same way.
II. Antibodies
Communion

Andy said
guess what
he didn’t
wait for me
to guess
he said
I drank Jesus’
blood today
in church
I looked
at Mom
she nodded
Andy said
I ate
Jesus’ body
too How
I said
I looked
at him
standing
on the green
carpet stairs
of the church
at the end
of our street
Andy didn’t
save any
for me
Antibody

Look at the glass-blower,
how he dips his rod into the flame, spins it.

Venice left me with an old woman.
Draped in black as though she had no body,
she hugged the ground,
paper cup place in front of her head,
forehead to the stone. I didn’t wait
in the line that wrapped around St. Mark’s
because I was alone.
That’s why I bought the cigarettes,
trying to understand what it felt like to be of the place, not
just in it. Why the men in gondolas paint the oarlocks gold.
I don’t know what suspends
a city full of holes, like her body, filled with water.
The earth isn’t a sponge, but somehow it floats.

The glass-blower never lets it stop moving
until the shape is complete. It’s phallic.
He doesn’t speak and I wasn’t a sponge,
but it filled me.
Guess

I’m thinking of a tall man in a brown coat with a lump in his throat. I’m thinking of a burrito wrapped in foil, wrapper and all. I’m thinking of a delicatessen with quail eggs for sale—quail nest in the store back, pick your own.

Enter tall man, burrito in hand.

Man strides to store back, inserts free hand to quail cage and quail flaps. Burrito drops, free hand drops to quail egg pulls it up like a mechanical claw. Quail flaps.

Burrito lies on linoleum.

Looks at the burrito. His claw drops the egg. Quail flaps in its cage.
Comfortables

Grandma made the word up.
She borrowed one when she came over because the house was cold.
She wanted to be cozy.

Walking to the bus
stop, the smell of a woodstove
catches me: here is the woodstack
on the porch, rows even.
Here is Dad, smiling with a straight face, like the way he wiggled
his ears, standing by it,
in a comfortable.

I see Dad in the backyard
at the picnic table,
raising the axe, letting it fall
on the log. The bigger ones
took two hits to break.

The flannel button-up shirts
with worn-out collars and elbows
that were never new,
Dad wore them to take the dog out,
barbecue, and cut firewood.

But not all flannel—one was a sweater,
black with red and white zig-zags.
That was Grandma’s favorite.

Early fall, Andy and I walked
back and forth from porch
to Dad, arms outstretched,
asking for a little more
each time, swearing we were strong enough.
We begged for a chance
to try out the axe.

The wood piled easy. Throw it on,
straighten a bit. It wasn’t
a puzzle. Splinters and pieces for
kindling broke off. Stuck in a bucket.

Some nights I see him. He sits in a pew. Smiles. As if he belongs, as if his return could be comfortable.

(At some point, the clothesline vanished from the backyard, too.)

As if I never wondered how it happened. But jackets don’t disappear. That’s what the dreams are for.

We called them what they were. We borrowed, then shouted back, *Last time I used it, I put it right back where I found it.* I put it back where I found it. I kept it hidden.

Comfortables disappeared when Dad did, sometime between October and Easter. The time made simple by loss of detail. The woodstove replaced by a gas imitation. Nothing really burned, it had no smell.
Depth

The cyclops, for example, with his singular way of seeing. He can get stuck there.

And us—fortunate, having two mechanisms that work toward the image. Left adjusts right.

Self-correction. Inaccurate. The eyes’ guess-work never catches up to the gaze shift.

And now this bat whose own voice calls back the warning. Five meters of space.

The bat does not show whether she knows the path she travels, and you wonder when you open your eyes in the dark, a flapping having waked you, did she mean to come in here?

Or just avoiding another wall. And now, this bat cannot tell wall from wall, her cry only returns to say she is five meters from the wall.

Nobody wants to be right, always. Find a spot on the wall ahead. Close your left eye, open. Close your right, open. Not much changes, except the nose.
Control

For Andy

I.

The ants you said. You said you were trying when I said stop. You didn’t want to kill them, but you could not stop.

II.

The feeling of falling—you know you are going to fall. You feel it coming, but you cannot stop.

III.

Your body does not resist what it should, you feel a pull—falling.
Homecoming

We sit in the kitchen, listening for Mom’s car to slow, tires crushing loose stone between the driveway and sidewalk. Dad lets us run out to greet her, help carry her bags. The united family thing only ever happens on weekends when first and second shifts dissolved into grocery store and beer runs. So we run out to Mom’s window so she’ll see as she reverses,

she’s checking for black ice. I slip on the ice. Her tire plows over my leg as though pushing across a snow pile. I cry out right as Dad does. Mom pulls forward, parks the car. I cry until I see the tire tracks imprinted on my legs and Dad cracks a joke, makes me feel tough.

My face straightens, becoming how I thought a man would look.
Freedom

You asked for a blueberry pie the night before, so I made one. I biked up Beacon and back down for the crust, sugar, lemon. Spent the day inside with the oven on. You worked outside on the boats.

You worked late; the fourth is the busiest day at the marina. We met on the corner to watch the fireworks, walking with everyone down the center of the road, people dangling feet off Storrow Drive above.

It got later. Nothing started, so we headed home, just as the first drops fell—warning before downpour. Cracks and lights as we ran home, our skin warm and wet, shoes collecting water, slowed stride.

I locked the door. You took off your clothes, even the American flag.
Garden

It was still cold outside when you stooped and hammered the wood you found into boxes, moving the grass to make room.

You worked a hoe across the plot, in your hands turning it, forcing the dirt out of the ground. I watched from inside before I came outside, asked to help. You handed me the planks and four screws, bent to show me how to build the box.

As we prepared the next plot, I drilled the screw into the wood’s pulp and you filled the last bed with new soil. We didn’t sow any seeds. The morning covered the mounds in a gauze of frost. We diagrammed the garden indoors.
Spectral Evidence

I.

I feel you moving about, blowing softly
on my skin until goosebumps rise.
Specere, you are guilty of lurking as I sleep.

II.

There is a spectrum, an image
stored, an apology willed—
last night, I dreamt you out of the ashes
and into hiding.

III.

you, in the high driver’s seat
of the red Pontiac—
all of the radiation, though unseen, exists.
They stuck my head
in a tunnel once.
We had been sledding.
Linked arms
to go down the hill
all together this time.
The front pulls the back
over the hilltop,
inching like a caterpillar,
or it doesn’t.
The link broke.
The group separated in two,
like factions.
A hit to my shoulder
as I went down,
sizzling like bacon
on the snow.
You love telling the story
I don’t remember,
how my pee
filled in the white,
a broken yoke.
III. Animal Electricity
Twice

John Hayes, my neighbor. John Hayes walking in the street, safest teetering the yellow line, that’s why it’s painted. Fireworks from the pond, the light reached us in the basement.

I saw you: once in my dream then in my semen, dripping like licorice, I let it dangle along my cock. Did you remember saying the same thing twice?

The cement is cold, it’s full of water. She’s got shit running down her back, my pistol to her rib. This kind of gun doesn’t kill anyone. Take the picture, John. Make it nice.

John Hayes tell them I’m home. Tell them I’ve been here a year. I never swallowed. I never spit. You saw me, your face followed me.
This time it’s a flower. Closed, no pudenda, then sunlight hits. 
The stamen crawl out—
When I looked through the window, I saw 
the tulip. I went to it. 
You didn’t call out, 
you were with the others: 
talking, smiling, thinking 
of anything else. 
Next year won’t feel this way 
in winter. For once, I wanted to be first. 
When I bring you the flower, 
accept it. We know the fall 
is coming. We’ve been told twice, 
the wind has brought cold air. 
It’s a scab 
and it’s peeling off. Scratch it 
with your nail. This time 
it won’t bleed. 
The left-handed one 
in the room has to be the one 
who writes these things. 
You made me your blood bank, you kept me 
away from the light. 
This time no one tempts me.
Tacuarembo

Two women stop us
holding pamphlets for church.
They speak a foreign language.
They smile.

A boy gallops past
on his pony.
Friends follow, each one hoping
for the next turn.

On the corner
a man glowers
as he reaches finger
to shoulder, muttering

his curse: our dismissal.
We walk across the parks
looking for a cheap room.
There are four:
one unseen, guarded
by a hunched man,
the others dingy no toilet
seat, no heat. Four signs
welcomed us to the town,
one ominous. Four signs
too many, one out of place.
Four choices: the unseen
becomes a concrete floor
in a cold room.

Stepping onto the bus,
three girls laugh,
open mouths,
hair down,
eyes creased.
Autoerotic

You tell yourself
you’re home, it’s not so late

now. Eyes closed, hand moves
to the backside of a leg, a dimple.

It shows up in the mirror.
Forget it, picturing the faces

on the train, the women.
Picture it, crinkling like foil,

an orgasm. What they look like,
you move your face, trying

to learn. Practice as you look
into the water; splash the water

as you think of the faces,
let them cover yours. Come

back, a stroke, the image
gone. Only your own hands

know the way, they’re not cold—
On the street now, your eyes call.

Look, to faces, turned, look:
at me, for me.
Animal Electricity

Connect a wire
hold it up outside
in the thunder lightning
cracks you quiver
like the frog legs
you hold feel the
muscles contract
we are all electric
and like the severed
frog we can all grow
back given the right
charge they make you
feel like a sideshow
at the carnival but
you are a scientist
you stand behind
a table of ox heads
guillotined for a better
life science
and the oxen blink
grimace
wiggle their tongues
you touch the wire
there and he convulses
but we are all sensitive
there Aldini no fair
CURRICULUM VITAE

Publications:

POETRY

spoke: “Vibrations” and “Guess” (forthcoming Fall 2014)

Enormous Rooms: “Toggling,” “Legislation,” and “Projection” (Summer 2013)

Allegheny Review: “Not Godot” (Spring 2013)

Glass Mountain: “Party of the Century” (Spring 2013)

OTHER

Editor, Take a Teacher, Make a Friend: Students Write for Elie Wiesel (2014)

Fellowships, Honors and Awards:

Fellowship, Robert Pinsky Global Fellow, Boston University, 2014

Teaching Fellow, Robert Pinsky Teaching Fellow, Boston University 2014

Teaching Fellow, Boston Arts Academy, Boston 2013–2014

Selected Readings and Presentations:

Collaborator / Presenter, “Poets and Painters,” artist collaboration with Evan Morse, Boston University, Spring 2014

Reader, Writers at the Black Box, Boston University April 2014

Reader, Common Space, Café 939, Boston March 2014

Coordinator, Writers at the Black Box, Boston University 2013–2014

Reader, Mr. Hip Presents: Reading Series, Boston, January 2014

Reader, Breakwater Reading Series, Boston, October 2013