

Karen Kelley

Air and Angels, Earth (*A Heaven for Armand*)

Substitute the words *sitting in a quiet room*
 for a body cavity in the memory of a long while ago.
 As a result, the surface of the apparent (as opposed to the real)
 seems a whorled shell or enlarging anterior claw
 or the coiled frond of someone fishing for a kind of odor,
 the smell of a loved one's hand,
 a kind of precise boundary.

*

"happening slowly" turns out to be
 a radical independence

ore body *a scattering of dust*

where Heaven appears in its correct orientation,
 a swimming pool gloriously *above*,
 a landscape, or a dressing room sloped down
 to the deep end of the pool and covered with a sheer
 stocking-like fabric pulled so tautly
 that it resembles frost
 painted a very yellow shade of green.

The body creates meaning through position and perception,
 a sprinkler going around in circles.
 There is a correlation between the sound
 and what you see, although one
 is not illustrating the other.

The sound, which resembles that of a film projector,
is projecting itself into something
that is beyond the physicality of the room.

These layers of perception (*are complex*) (*Bird in Hand*)
include strands of hair and bathrobes documenting a lost past,
the poetry of things: 10,000 objects
representing the experimental exercise of freedom,
a phantasmagoric mixture of lush vegetation,
serpentine nudes and enough gilded vicious circles
to cause us to walk away thinking that the history of the Self
has to be entirely rewritten

perhaps as: THE MADNESS OF THE DAY,
or: I HAVE LOST WHAT IS ALWAYS AND EVERYWHERE PRESENT,
or, more simply: A VOYAGE AMID ALLUSIVE MEANING.

Chambers of beeswax and rice.
You are not here is a flotilla of waxen arks
suggesting an operating table or the four corners of the earth.

A trace of the figural lingers.
The angel as air is a coordinate of stability,
enabling formal invention while rendering it illegible.

It seems increasingly apparent (*from/to*)
that the body gets in the way.

The partially-buried ruins of the recent past,
the casual fact of objects in the typographical consciousness,
so physically present and yet so mute,
are outwardly discontinuous:
ashes, egg white, grass, a pear.

Imagine you are hair, a handwritten note,
a landscape-with-figure summation
(*Living With Your Eyes*)—

An illuminated, seemingly glowing door
which resembles nothing so much as a starry sky crossed by a flying body,
a door composed of barbed wire and tumbleweed,
opens onto a canted line of trees
or a nude drying herself,
veins and knuckles disconcerting in their corporeal specificity.
Oh, brief blurring of vision
that accompanies the shifting from near to far
and back again. Vertiginous.
Burned or broken bodies are magically restored
and live again, bound fragments in seamless wholes—
a deeply consoling gift.
It is the grain of the image as a whole.

The buildings all look so very far away, caught in the past,
or perhaps in a dream more powerful
but less specific
than vision.

One is unable to stop the spiraling movement that transforms life
into a surface of sheer projection. The dimly lit interior,
punctuated by a translucent luminous curtain
calls to mind the graphic markings of late-day raking shadows,
the writing of light,
transience evoked through gesture
and uncertain balance.

also recognizable settings, such as cages
and titles
and the depiction

One can make out a cast-iron fence
and bits of dark leaves

suggests neither narrative nor specific detail, but a big cage, where the birds often do not actually look like birds but like beautiful appetizing lion forms and calf forms and male forms and female forms and fig trees and titles:

On Floating Bodies

On the Measurement of the Sharp Black-on-White Diagonals of M and N

On the Sphere and the Cylinder

On Spiral Moments

On the Equilibrium of an Idea of Birds in Which Each of the Beaks is Facing Right or Left

Great care has been taken
not to overlap.

This is not my cage (*strips off her glove
to turn over and kiss her hand*)

All images are jittered plus or minus 25% *drift*
and everyone transmits messages at the same time.

but an enclosure of a different style,
and the depiction of two circular plates where wires
converge

Birds are flying around in a big room,
emu, cassowary, the small rhea—

suggests neither narrative nor specific detail,
but a furtherance, where the birds often do not
actually look like birds but

like a series of repeated letters
drawn through carbon paper:

FROM NOTHING.

YOU'RE FRIGHTENED OF.

AND FORGET WHY YOU CAME FROM NOTHING.

*

The words have a *key* so that with careful attention one can discern lip, eye, and brow.
Whether your name begins in rage or from nothing from nothing,
your days are rug after rug being swept under
and held down by a stone,
by *The Annihilation of Matter*, a kind of *caving in*,
or an evening with animals moving, concentrating steadily on the terrain,
looking like beautiful wool when they bunch together,
obliterating their individual selves
and returning to the infinite universe.

envelopment rather than development

the secret gets entered into a sentence,
it chases you in the darkness and you are trying to find a place to hide from it
but know that you can not. It wanders around in you and profits,
its teeth correspond to your teeth
suggesting the chewing of leaves to make sponges,
or the act of stripping sticks of leaves:

Photosynthetic blade

this is how it tastes:

ancient

Untitled

or like a pattern
pronounced *dealing with a life known from fossil remains*
or: *in the blue surround everything happens and all at once and all the time.*

Men, stunned but otherwise unhurt, break rapidly one after the other,
break loose from the continent, partly floating free, partly riding over the land.
They are not fixed in the sense that land is fixed, but forever propelled from behind,
edges tending to bulge out, improbable as crossed-out sentences.

~~not too deep! white always looks good~~
~~on the borders of desserts: some substances~~
even change taste as they move through the mouth

You end up wishing for more excess, not less.
The delicately pointed trees are compiled in arrangements
not coherent enough to be called scenes,
which come off as a failure of nerve.
There is the recognition that your experience
has already been half-erased
just by waking.

The world wobbles on its axis of heartbroken
tenderness and incomplete gestures.
Birds' claws look like twigs.

This odd and compelling tension (vision?)
occurs in other forms:
sometimes in window-like rows
and sometimes random,
but always so distilled and so clear
that the bottom halves are hard to take your eyes off of.

Their implications are obscure,
a skein interrupted by shapes of the sort
one usually absorbs,
and still one is ever
wet enough to run.

What makes the earth the way it is, subtly luminous
and materially fragile, a reflexive groping-in-the-dark
(the delicate edges will inevitably be damaged)
molded from earth or snow and shaped with rocks
and traced in flowers or cloth,
tree bark, insect wings, sand?

And you a glistening glue amid a centralized mass
composed of thousands of sheets of paper,
shrunk into speech, the result being a translucent skin.

Nine black chairs of varying sizes are lined up side by side.
The smallest chair has a red seat of images
scratched directly into the lower levels
of the nervous system,
and looks like her cupped hands,
looks into your memory, frozen.
No play of figure against ground,
no subordination of small forms to large,
no reconciliation of live image to the containing "frame."

The greatest refusal
a refusal to distinguish figure from ground.
Dry chalky surface once loved but now lost.
You thought, once, *all will be revealed.*

But in the end it will be lost like the tulip trade.

The "cream" inside once included a scene, a frenzy of impastos
faintly tinged with yellow and lilac,
worked into a body strolling away from you at some distance
and as you watched, the plants and animals
with their double names connected
by the plus or minus sign of stereoscopic vision
dissolved into a reddish openwork lace through which birds,
turtles, insects and fish flew,
whizzing before your nose, dropping below you,
striking you behind.

Their stems showed above ground and below,
watertight with the relationship between cause and effect,
that deep resonant cry with a bitter kernel,
hinged, contemplative,
shaped to fit the outline of your investigation,
with its contour feathers rounded and plump
and extending from neck to ribs
and including your shoulder blades.

The chucking sound perched at the top of a lone tree
represents the expanse of the heavens
or a part of your human animal body,
clay ground and kneaded with water
into the convolutions of the intestine,
lapses in memory, deciduous
meat, the detailed
wing.

You recognize the thick fog between prehensile tale and the small
brackish fruit of infernal-sounding stories,
of a bark that yields a poison,
of long wavelike ridges of snow formed by the wind,
of a small bag of frames of reference moving in all directions at a constant speed
and covered with a thin layer of blood,
as some of the only explanations (the others very small in size and beating rapidly)
that you can accept.

Below lies an animal.
Who would this be?

The soul's rough manufacture crouches and is especially dense
and alludes to many kinds of meaning (*calligraphy*) (*crown of thorns*)
while unfurling with bizarre velocity,
an eating one's heart out
in every possible unrepeated variation.

How soon? you ask, and again,
How soon?
says your pain,
as night lightens in rivers
and hunger, the hunger
bears fruit,
the fruit falls
and the leaves turn brown and disappear
and there is a final, absolute point-of-no-return regardless of any further
activity of the viewer,
the image sequence remains active and
continues to be dependent on viewer, position, and direction:

a tree of knowledge with flaming branches
you extinguish with bare hands, bare feet.