



petulant grace,  
salt fever

Allison Grimaldi Donahue

# petulant grace, salt fever

poems by Allison Grimaldi Donahue

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*Voi rubate del tempo alla fretta, a noi il mare ci impone lentezza*  
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if you step down too hard on  
the sea wall steps  
air still too cool for a full bath  
immersion into skin bathtub baby  
the petals of flesh to scale  
becoming fin in descent  
enamel to rubber stuff  
lebensmittel for unruly bodies  
protruding into our gums  
same as pinkie toe  
as birthday bash  
saltwater suckers drinking champagne  
to sweeten their tongues

extending a long arm of prosciutto

tossled fizzled shaken—these pebbles chip off

——skid

nearly into the street, into traffic

——danger

it is morning, it is humid, it is hot

if i were a dog i'd cut my hair

the only cure comes with its costs

on the border with croatia i am squatting  
over a turkish toilet as siri tells me how  
to get home

in the echoes she's drawn a map  
southwest of here and it'll be

slowgoing

walking a thousand meters above the sea

i am completely unconvinced of time moving faster

up there insects buzz, bees chase

deeper and deeper into the forest

a yugoslav highrise, a pile of abandon cars

the coven of light drunk banshees

their liquor plumped lips

—for giulia

the salt gives you fever  
to be healed with salves and  
an induction oven

the salt gives you fever  
a straw in the ear  
over flaps of rawhide  
this bedroom quivers on the top of the world

the salt gives you fever  
so i kiss your eyes  
lick them fierce for sodium

the salt gives you fever  
and with a cold compress  
i feed you tomatoes from the garden  
mmm they taste good in my oily mouth

the salt gives you fever  
so i try with sugar  
cubes packets cane

search through chemistry books  
the whole internet to find  
lemon balm and love making

the salt gives you fever

## Essay on Virgil

The variety of sacred things is infinite. We parked the car near the lake. It was already dark and already I felt like Dante—alone. It was quiet and the quiet disturbed us. Is there a wide gulf between exile and abandonment? All of the gates are closed and the statues within them sacred. In our youth we attempt to lick the philosopher's stone. The desire for the neutral is a pathos: it wants to baffle, it wants to shed meaning. Virgil places his sorcerer's wand on the table. Virgil sleeps, now grown in his basket. Mantua is weary and we drink negronis until we are sticky sick. We look at each other like bones to gnaw on and piss in the street, laughing. I gloss my finger over the church wall: The vanquished. Give me to the Greeks. Once more. Strange, isn't it, how the message makes some sense. The hollow of its flux, the collective sum of loss. For not every possibility is actualized.



ovi duri  
eggs and secrets  
something to suck on

the scratch of a plastic chair  
on the cement  
but mostly between the cracks

there are grasses growing  
snails slurp on by

who would ever know if  
there is time for this  
space or knowledge

fullness as a concept  
as nothing left to tell  
laid out on the shower floor

waiting for water  
like a mortal sign

—for marta

how could i ever think that the gift is impossible?

birds bird birds birds birds birds birds birds  
birds bird birds birds birds birds birds birds  
birds bird birds birds birds birds birds birds  
birds bird birds birds birds birds birds birds

clothed in in its tendency to immediately universalize its  
production of concepts into general laws

fish fish fish fish fish fish fish fish  
fish fish fish fish fish fish fish fish  
fish fish fish fish fish fish fish fish  
fish fish fish fish fish fish fish fish

everybody tries to show the other as different. but not everybody  
succeeds in doing so.

mammals mammals mammals mammals mammals mammals mammals mammal  
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mammals mammals mammals mammals mammals mammals mammals mammal

in a time without time, forgetting forgets

tucked away like dark chambers of this heart  
i didn't say mine and let's be clear  
the sea opens cold and rough  
to deep forests and silent caves  
a torchlight flame extinguished  
before it can breathe to light  
under the branch burnt chlorophyll  
i try to buy our way with coins  
in the pockets of my pockets  
and faces stare from the  
angles of angles no light  
but a ledge, something cheap  
osmiza after a field and a snake  
dividing walls low and mossy  
like home in the months of  
no home

after work rec center in the long tunnel by the sea, this familiar  
foreignness

Here is one of my practices:

Listen to everything until it all belongs together and you  
are a part of it.

voices i can't understand rush through my mind all night  
yr best friend in the nurses office  
falling off a swing or a mental breakdown  
the cover up, the truncated guttural chatter  
charlize theron buys me a beer and a chicken cutlet sandwich  
we make-out by the waterfall                      en-masse

my grandmother sees white horses  
through the bars of her hospital bed

thin glassed chalice falls  
at the wind outside

i see movements  
from the corners  
of my tired, fluttering eye

katherine hepburn's front porch where we fucked and it smelled like the leather seats of yr dad's old bmw. with cold hands and singular sand over a smooth surface.

high definition sounds of the 2000s with all the clumsiness of a hand reaching over the shifter and into my vulva as waves, i'd say crashed but they didn't since it's long island sound and quiet and slow. again, as waves lapped over sea-shelled sand where we'd spent childhoods and cheap beers.

handholding and handwringing with drunk eyes into traffic lights. the movie theater popcorn under the console and the voice of the late-great-kate in my ear with long vowels and canvas sneakers. to look at the sea, any sea, it to become what one is. over and over again, renewed like a seaweed peel, i am young again.

serious like a mustache

i would like to tell you i was born here  
under such cataclysmic stars

wandering into the free port  
loaded with timber and coffee  
ducking swinging cranes  
cement rivets

sucking the raspberry marmalade off my thumbs  
i realize i feel different about you now  
how many ways i can focus on yr voice touching me  
after you spend a week on the plains  
dancing in wigs  
eating dinner in an uncomfortable chair  
drinking tannic wine and listening  
to someone else's heartbreak  
i want to hear your voice  
through a cord not through the air  
like we have now  
the crisp analogue crack  
like a wet smoker's cough or a milky hiccup

someone else's voice, yours  
sends shivers down the back  
of my head which lately  
gets numb when i fall asleep

people in the picture are sharing gum tree drops and leather  
saddles with round round butts  
it is idyllic, it is pastoral, i ride you  
pony



rome, giant  
gas station  
of our ruins  
that glittering paunch  
folded into yr  
petering motor  
no symbol  
or rite  
can make this  
point any less  
sharp in the  
soft parts  
the prayers  
are always  
for the soft  
parts spilling over  
sides of the road  
pasolini magpie  
you stuff yr  
face with  
ricotta so  
fetid white  
swarms yr  
mouth so red  
there will always be  
trash heaps  
where we stand

in rome the most aggressive seagulls you will ever meet

in rome you can get drunk on a dime and cry yrself to sleep for free

in rome there are the most beautiful women to stomp crooked and reckless on yr heart

i'd eat it you say, the red and my lips

in rome you will pay for sins you've never dreamed of committing

these cigarettes taste like cocaine

there will never be a year that sounds romantic and yr gasps sounds like promises

i am a tiger, i am a phoenix, i spent my adolescence as any number of animals but never a human one with a vagina and a soul

if i could change i'd be more willing, to love, to others

in the winter our clothes are damp our hearts closed

american spirits last too long, like um, my feelings for you

i ate a peanut shell and you made me bleed to save my life

i am ambidextrous  
you are bisexual  
this is the story  
of our love affair

