

Leaf-Out

This earliest aspiration to the serial green overstory is stalled, sticky, stuck, mid-leaf. Our streets have not yet darkened with design, to make summer livable. Daylight is not yet switched off by shade. The bare trees could not turn off the day, but look. Already the coppery color of late fall leaf-rust, these are as famished larvae. If they ever open they will turn to an early autumn yellow, then to the first pale tentative greens, sickly, translucent, pale hesitant greens of fall. Spring colors resurrect fall colors. Spring backs into being at an abrupt edge, where prairie begins, a borderless zone for grosbeaks, robins and blackbirds, those singing black holes. Spring has contracted the light to unfolded hands that open up to suffer without ear, mouth, or word, as see-through as the night sky.

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Who wants to be first. Another. Hundreds. Hanging like unfinished escapees. To open will be like eating nails in slow motion, as we don't know these struggles, we refuse to think suffering is anything but human, as if we invented suffering, as if we invented God, death, ourselves. It's that dark and unaware when lives far more internal than not hang frail but invulnerable, out in the open. Until the underworld unfolds blueprints of the tree itself, inner and outer tissue, mesophyll's palisade layer and spongy layer new leaf and old tree, these won't even listen to the wind: even when it turns them upside down they are too intent on opening up into themselves and their stomata for vapor until the deep green assimilations called photosynthesis begin their violent givens.

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Epidermis for glove, each leaf surfaced by hundreds of pores synchronically opening and closing like mouths with green darkness to say "day in day out night in night out," veins made of tissue for interior transport, for shape, for form, or process.

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Then more than process: then the see-through pupal stage, where the fresh pinks seem at one with the clear pale blue green the sunlight makes that way by passing partially through, the rest unfurling into the one winged angel of the life cycle that a leaf is, though at this stage you can see through that very cycle, that enclosed circle, of life and death's sad perpetuities which you can also see through, though seeing through is a little too close to seeing from inside and we don't.

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With no field book, see through as you might your own eyelid if some enhanced interrogation held a klieg light to your closed eyes: these would be leaves hanging upside down in your dearest thoughts, the ones no one has beaten out of you.

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These hang down their faces long-faced already with gravity, like spectral bats if bats had no skin or hair, if bats were flensed, and naked to our naked eyes, and if there is darkness palpable there is also darkness invisible as Milton now is, not palpable, invisible darkness veining in place in all these words I've given over out of another morning of earth which is still cradled in the darkness from which it turns, darkness to which it turns, darkness without which not a planet gems the now vaguely dark city skies, and not a single leaf that isn't bound for a life of being slack-jawed, and anchored by a stem.

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They hang like nooses, from the skin of their teeth hanging. each a chrysalis in chrysalism, as if they were still indoors and tranquil during a thunderstorm of pattering rain like an upstairs of parents arguing over whose heart breaks the most.

Each hangs of its own design, more afraid of not holding on than of the light that inside them contracts to a diamond of the obscure sorrows and joys like ours only without resurrection into books that are shining open, they came up, they walked right up and out of what's sweetest, not the rose but what's beneath, there they are now, not yet a wilderness of voices at the edge of a best life, an endangered prairie field. Hesitation and delicacy eat the air for our spiritual dioxides, but first must not remember anything of the evening or the morning, they are too young to live in the living sea of wind, every generation from forever to forever consumed like a sigh. They miss the depths that were before the first tree was born, before earth and moon: exiles spawned from an incineration.

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If not a single leaf, if not one by one by strength of spirit, if not these aggregations of the freedom to have lived and to have died to nothing but sunlight, and soil scattering like generation after generation, if not these leaves, then no leaves unfurling a life-bearing darkness for which I am always making a case. For the basement-bargain heart buried in me, coal hunk contracted past diamond to a muttering black hole, the unlit heart that eats and eats at light so that it long shades its earliest and therefore most likely to be blighted thoughts.

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They hang there, unfinished, day-of-the-locust stragglers in larval suspension, soon to metamorphose like gods and god like heroes into living legends of proportion and focus, legions of legends soon to be maple, which by autumn produces in wind that sound of sand sanding dunes of sand. They are not remotely human. Nor was earth their father nor mother. Who would want that for them? It's not like we don't get enough father and mother. Streets buckled by tree roots were never their doing. These Stigma in the air, green veined now, all tight coppery ruffles wizened, without edge, or margin, topside or underside, they should take a leaf from

each other's books, they could with their leaf noses root out the stars for all the stars care. The earlier each year the budburst, the longer and longer their dormancies, the closer to cause and truly copious the climate studies. Their openings will extricate their own being. They will bear their own deaths. So will their offspring. Their dreams are of a lasting containment, they are invented to be closed books, yet secrecy escapes them. We can see through their stall just as the sun does, yet they are unreadable. While we so require our privacies to be represented. While we read ourselves into everything. Look at them: unlikelihood. Who wants to open?