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# **RED FORTRESS**

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**JACKIE CLARK**



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DESIGN BY NP



## FEBRUARY

The run-off to the reservoir  
is frozen. I spend nights falling

asleep with the lights on, stepping  
over salted wooden steps & feathers.

I am tired of sharing. In New York,  
the subway stations are as cold

as it is outside. Everyone is driving  
fast in February & looking for parking.

No one tries to sell me anything & I am  
insulted. I am certain I will only think

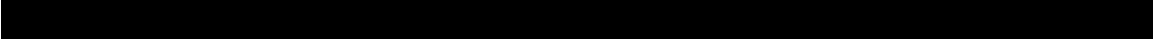
of myself & that you will allow me.  
Every morning I can read about killings

& smokestacks if I choose. The sun is strong  
in February, casting over meadows of industry.



## MOVING

& the sirens expand down  
the avenue & then into the distance  
& then to every place my extensions  
have yet to reach—the same  
thing which wakes me & drives  
me to sleep & why it is that I accept  
this will be here in the morning  
after the excitement of having  
something up my sleeve passes.  
Nights of creaking by are over.  
Here it is mostly quiet except  
for someone's car stereo a few  
doors down. Mostly the sidewalks  
look the same & and all the building  
faces are signed. Now just a nightly  
thumping & once level ground  
skewed toward doom without a closet.  
It's hard to say what one would choose  
between commodifiable sighs & what cowers  
under the couch. These hard woods  
speak nothing of desire, they only  
buckle, uncertain of stature & voices.  
Framework is the easy part. Magnetic  
wanderings only have so many options  
& continually let negotiation slide



down its side. In fullness this naming ekes  
out diversions like my quick miss against  
the curb, tapping forward each colorless  
instrument before perching at the throat  
of my ego, knocking at my teeth  
each time there is a stirring & is spun  
among wires outside your window.



## AS YOU WALK TOWARD A PLACE I CANNOT GO

I shut the storm  
windows & shut  
the storm out.

Balance      Balance

The corners here curled  
under the leaning gaiety,  
hulking under doorways.

A hand wraps itself around,  
*hence* is now in sight,  
peering back to the April cold.

Demands      Demands

Unilateral faculties are  
pacified through double doors.

I shut moving  
for you & ask  
for mile-markers.

Devour:  
tell me things



## MIDNIGHT

There is nothing left  
to lift, having looked

in elevator shafts  
& other places

where darkness lives.  
Against the same

negation I nestle  
neck-long, undeveloping

what you create, the grey  
& emboldened etchings

around the edges  
of your figure, shying

& hiding from what we know  
to be day. Another evening

of waiting & sending  
messages, coupled

with the rubbing  
of two cavities

& the fact that you  
believe in another end.

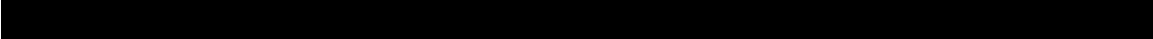
## THE NEVERENDING SHREDDING PROJECT

Happens even on sunny days, peeling away  
from what is evenly distributed & what is not.  
Drawers hold folders that mostly hang in darkness.  
In exchange for depressed teeth make me a plea  
long enough for this to develop. In any event,  
there are more piles to pull from & without you  
there it can happen in closets or quietly on the floor  
& will happen after you don't care about blowing  
smoke out the window. Or it happens quickly  
after you open your eyes & decide that you could  
have been anywhere & the pillows lie excommunicated  
& the phone without a message or with one,  
which reads "forget about metaphor & feel the floor  
between your toes." It is also sometimes a pile  
of papers with words & papers without & papers  
with one long line drawn across or my bar stool  
leaning into yours. To say that it ends in pieces  
is obvious, curled & fluffed through whatever invisible  
chamber exists in there, eating whatever reaches  
its mouth. We can politely dispose of it,  
like the document I made as you moved the hair  
from my face. The potential is endless & always  
a burden: stepping over snow, getting out of cabs,  
getting out of buses. Or it is my imagination  
never more than single sentences, unruly and long.



## **A SEMI-CONDUCTOR FLAPS ITS WINGS**

Today the water in my Poland Spring bottle tastes like hot sauce. When I walk outside it starts raining. I think about you & groan silently to myself. My catalog of discrepancies hovers over the picture of the knife-holder that I found, the one where the knives go through the heart & through the leg & through the pelvic region. I mentally chain-smoke as I watch the lights go from green to yellow to green again. The water from week-old flowers would taste better than this. Paige doesn't return my messages & no one else sends any even though I am sure I deserve at least one which accurately describes my sensibility, the coveted glove & the way it is politely removed. We all have ideas about the way people are. I can't go out some nights because I have too many. I've walked at least five blocks today with an upturned umbrella. My personal submarine may never resurface & the noise of fish faces bumping up against my little window might be the only thing left to lull me to sleep. Everything already feels crafted, combed through exacerbation like glued



together driftwood. How does this represent  
the *after now* or the *before*? My expository  
glands are already sweaty in anticipation.  
My *least of all*, my *at most*. I don't know  
who I think I am, stop asking. Go prop  
yourself up against the depth of the yard  
& the reach of the grass, over there where  
the worlds ends. I'll take the sample-size  
exaltation please. You can analyze my face  
from behind a well lit counter while I push  
an empty cart from entrance to exit.



## AT SEA

It matters less  
the distance drawn

in lengths of spools,  
spinning prowess

& lean instruction.  
Pressure pushes

forth through the days,  
the yawning fold

of anymore, of driving  
through the green.

From here I see  
the tops move along.

There are reasons  
why the grass grows

straight & why  
winnowing pride

stalks around  
on long legs.



## **(STORY)**

The girl aligns all the objects in a room. She takes photos. Heralded in the corner, she pushes record and answers unheard questions into a pink and green box. The girl changes colors. She sleeps in bathing suits and thinks up instances when someone she does not know stops her. There is driving. There is no time to look at what's leaving. There is no time to read about it in a book or underline its shapes. The pink trim speaks to the windows. It swallows up the corners but lets small buckets fill up below. She sleeps on damp blankets and doesn't move. She dips her hand over the edge and reaches for familiar shapes, unsure of who she is lying next to. In the grey house there are two beds. One of them is close to the floor, where once she found four hands. In the house on the nameless street, the bed folds open and withstands little pressure. Her body as light as it could. She thinks about water and then packing and then about giving it all away.

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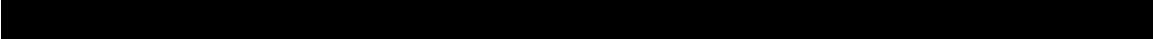
## **THE SMELL HOUND**

Chirping from behind the refrigerator door, degrees vary in warm bodies & pinched luck caught in garbage cans. Concession is made for larger skeleton hands. There is either feeling good or feeling bad or running around with explosives duct taped to your legs.



## RED FORTRESS

Red fortress, I'll expose to you  
my undersides, my concentrating  
mastery and derelict non-futures.  
Carrying electrical direction as  
a frame enters the ordained position  
where we are caught. My legs  
and the washing machine, a metal  
coil and windows below as headlights  
return. Barracks expand slightly  
with side streets but always nose  
in the same direction. Diction and sarcasm  
are a constant predicament. I was certain  
you only existed when I was there,  
disbelief in your alacrity, your ability  
to be seen by others. Fair tenderness  
opposes inability. I have other ways  
to conjure remarkable flooring then the idea  
of hair and shaped chin. A weight  
looking down upon the hollow,  
feigning repose. My back wall against  
introduction allies what is intentional  
and what results from chance:  
the whitening of extension. Serenity  
articulated and refined through  
fingers like industrial boxes in the distance,



releasing what they have successfully  
altered. Journeys and shoulders  
and nudge-nudging, a repetitive chorus,  
an octave according to blue, according  
to the box it emanates from. The constant  
intake of ways to get out of here. Ownership  
is achieved in bunches and bellows  
from the height of the shelf, arms stretched  
upward at nothing. Hands open wide again  
and again in their well-exercised routine.



## I ONLY SEE THINGS WHEN THEY MOVE

Restless construction,  
your grievances  
shake your frame

in unflattering  
ways. Everyone is  
dancing

like whirlpools  
and when they tire,  
couples sit and kiss

on couches that move  
like whirlpools.  
Green-line guard,

you are the keeper  
of depositing places  
and relief. Low

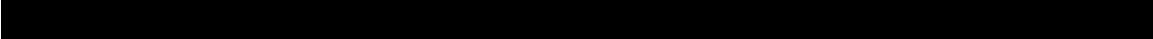
ridicule, your potted  
hands in dirt and roots.  
Your anisette coating

knocked back briskly.  
Our movements under  
the microscope show

steeped edges with no  
mysterious cry  
that adhere

to the surface  
when made to adhere.  
There is no misconception;

testimonials bore



bookcases; things are  
getting worse.

Brief tidings  
jut out from  
suspension bridges

but aren't mentioned  
until they swing  
loose. I am

encouraging applause  
because it is pleasing  
to be in agreement,

in red velvet  
saddles, provocateurs  
of the fourth wall.



## HEY, WAKEFUL PREDATOR

At night we do the nasty  
in some other dimension.

Our hairs mingle briefly.

The entire café was one muddy mess  
but the back had a garden ceiling  
and we kept saying how much we liked the light,  
how the light was just right.

There are other red sofas in this city.

Here the whisper jurisdiction ends  
as soon as the door opens,  
as soon as wood drinks wheat.

We could have watered avocado pits,  
propped up by toothpicks.

We could have found  
somewhere to set the glass.



## RESERVATIONS

Like various places  
with the same song,

same seat, the same  
following through.

Contained places,  
judging gradually

& making note while  
sitting under nighttime

skies. By day, one  
can either sit facing

the window or away,  
sun as supplied advantage.

Somewhere the lawn  
is still green & promising.

The you in this poem  
is far away & knows


that all the speakers  
it has ever met

have left, gone to stand  
at another precipice.

Not knowing any better  
is all primitive means.

## WHAT YOU THINK ABOUT AFTER

Before I leave your place, you tell me that our time together is *precious*, and I'm barely able to keep down the hard-boiled eggs we watched float to the surface just moments ago. How embarrassing, that this word should describe my pants hanging off the lamp last night. I mean, it's not that I'm not sentimental but really one could go out to the corner any time of day & count the cars that go by, nodding to each little face behind the electric-powered glass & that could be considered a *moment*. Who gets to measure these *moments* anyway? No one should be asked to handle *Metro* so early, or this morning, Pam Anderson without botox. I still get a kick out of buying fruit on the corner & I'm sure that even the man with the fruit knows that *precious* is a quaint way of making something untouchable. Imagine if he spent the entire day trying to sell *precious* bananas, how ridiculous that would sound.



Many thanks to the following journals where earlier versions of these poems have appeared:

***COCONUT***

“The Neverending Shredding Project” and “Red Fortress”

***DEATH METAL POETRY***

“February”

***ELIMAE***

“(Story)”

***SAWBUCK***

“Moving” and “Midnight”

***SOFTBLOW***

“I Only See Things When They Move”

***SUB-LIT***

“What You Think about After”

***WEIRD DEER***

“A Semi-Conductor Flaps its Wings”

