

DAY MADE WORSE

Day ages instantly, orange cones
at the corners of its eyes
you need to get out and pull
from the road. Whoever's
driving is my wife. Curdling shadows
of wires thick enough
to bump a pickup. Some people
have to always go back
to see if it was a body. I'm like that
with clouds

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Scree comes straight up
to the screen. I chip a brick
from the foundation
to prop the window with.
A traveling troupe
sets up on the stone path.
The whole yard is stone.
I drive a post just so
I have something to pose
a sweat-shaped glove on
in a gesture they think is their name

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The flute is the bone of something without organs, its sound is what breath
unobstructed through you should compose

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Twelve days they've trekked
moss back from the higher
parts in scraping cages
of goosevine, thread it
to trellis frames, like broad beans
climb, to fashion little sails
yellowing at the edges
they slip around hollering
EXEUNT at the orders of
the eldest, a river-throated
man, eyes small as salt

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You hear the one about the pioneer who, chagrined, unwrapped his mail-order *bridge*?

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Costumed primarily in pollens and pinecones,
they are indistinct to me,
interchangeable and muddled, misplacing my hearing,
except for one whose crotch protrudes its instrument from the faintest
meringue I remember from childhood.

Standing prismatic on a sedan, she claims
to whoever's my wife and I
who've attended the debut because we were going to eat cheese and crackers
there anyway

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From the darkness around me
a voice asks *how large*
is your mother's house she
gazes from a shower
curtain she dices with a fish
knife, tells the number
of roses in the yard *she have*
tits like yours another
rises, answers the number
of daffodils, they finale by towing a balsa-wood replica
of all of us through a pond they have fabricated
tied to her tongue, I cover my son's ears
at the applause, they should be to the next town in weeks

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In the distance,

a seaplane lands
on rock. The horizon turns

me on on
me me on

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Behold the discredited social studies teacher, our narrator, some months on at the store where everybody works, transformed by the accounted pageant—shaved head, white tank top tinged green, some tattoos we never saw when he was chalking around his antique globes—ordering dry roast beef sandwiches and an extra one with mayo for the skinny thing with him. He had a cane but a lot of people use them now: diabetes. You can't blame him. He filled an old orange juice jug with water at the tap outside. "Forty-nine

percent of people think they are in the minority,” one of his commencement speeches said.

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He had a flat but didn't want our help: he said a friend was coming, then squinted, questioned if we had a cellular phone, and—Cokey did—called someone hunched in whatever shade could be beside his car. The backseat was covered with Gatorades and finished word searches. The car's roof was stained in a blur, like from mulch. A solo heaved on the tape deck. His sunburn kept some white from his fingers when he stood, uncrossed his arms, paused in massaging his own neck. He thanked us before we could look away.

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They said ignore him at the auditions for community theater, though the director had given him a clipboard and several frozen lemonades. In the bathroom he chipped at the whiteness between tiles, said it was for the squirrels. His lips had their styrofoam aspect. He said to himself, “Even if you haven't yet, don't.” There was no year he was born in.

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From the top of the water tower that was really a gas tower we could see him. He let his dogs out and peed with them on his rock yard then peed on them a little, we believed singing. Tongue like a coming apart sponge in the urine steam. Past the dried birds hung on his chain-link like a hedge. The odor of scrambled eggs from his house. Skin of his arms like his sleeves were rolled up, though he didn't have a shirt. When the light in the house behind him flashed again, I was