

## TELEPHONE PROJECT 2

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*these toys [*

after and with Sappho

*The hope gets hold of me that I won't share  
anything that the blessed gods [themselves desire—*

no lending those toys that smell of clay or graphite  
however much apportioning was thrust

into tissue, gray or pink. I'm sick  
of placating them with string or wax—

after all I have to work.

I look toward the beekeeper keeping bees at home  
that she knows damn well will sting and swarm.

—KIMIKO HAHN

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*elegy for the beekeeper*

How dazed the body after stinging, how drunk  
with death & venom. We wear our good shoes

to the funeral. & our black eyes, fat  
with hallucination, hold the image of the swarm

& take it everywhere: the streetlight, to church, the coffin.  
Even now, the air is wild with the fever-pitch of wings.

Our girl, small graveyard of marks & stings—  
so fast.

We leave her to sleep outside like a cat.  
We climb into our houses & our beds, & we miss her.

For years, we dream our deaths little  
as the bee's.

—ARACELIS GIRMAY

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## BEE AT THE BEEKEEPER'S FUNERAL

When they say "swarm"  
What they mean is us.  
What they mean is black  
Mass of wings, a thousand  
Thousand chanters. Unison.  
What they mean is body.  
What they miss is brain  
Born of lifetimes, mind  
Made of centuries. Sacked  
Catacombs and tenements  
And what is most sweet  
Is what they both breed  
And box us for. Swarm,  
What they call swarm,  
Is the imperceptible  
Rumble in the gut,  
Years inside of other  
Years, the stinger's ache  
To break free the abdomen.  
What born warriors know  
As Noble Death. And there  
Is me, the dreamer drawn  
By a laughing daffodil  
Away from the others,  
Brothers and cousins,  
That massacre afternoon,  
Away from glory, now  
With only this to do:  
To witness, to tell again  
What the eulogizer said,  
The beekeeper dead,  
And of these wreaths,  
Their raucous stink  
And hues. I'll tell how  
I put my face deep in the bell  
Of each and every blossom  
And breathe deep. Oh, child,  
I breathe so deep.

—JOHN MURILLO

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## TRANSLATOR'S BLOCK

The poet translated the poem with fear and trembling,  
as if somehow unworthy of the source text.

His writer friends thought his suffering ridiculous,  
and perhaps they had a point.

Hardly difficult, this poem. A simple narrative  
in modern Persian. For setting, the clichéd garden.

Basically, as two lovers kiss on a bench  
a bee stings the man on his thigh.

He's allergic, so the ambulance arrives.  
The woman can't find the key. (Fearing exposure

they had previously locked the gate). One paramedic  
hoists the other over the wall.

On the verge of anaphylactic shock,  
the semi-conscious Romeo gets injected

in the same spot of the sting. He survives.  
Afterward, the key's found in his pant's pocket.

"Perhaps," says the poet's shrink, "it's too accessible;  
It opens your heart to love, which means danger."

As she's talking, the poet unconsciously clicks and unclicks  
a ballpoint pen into his thigh.

"You have a point," says the poet,  
"but I can't see how the lines could hurt me."

—ROGER SEDARAT

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## BALL POINT PEN

I had never meant to take the ball point pen apart  
and yet the spring leapt away, the coiled metal  
leaping into the lap of the football player next to me

in Algebra II, the class I walked to the High School  
for, where I was widely considered a math prodigy  
despite merely being a year ahead. He could have

destroyed me. I had done something terrible. Allowed  
myself to explode into his lap. Allowed the pen  
to dissolve into its component parts, each a platonic

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ideal. The ink pure inkiness. The spring pure springy-  
ness. I wish there were more here. A story about  
how he turned to me and fell in love. A story about

how later on he kicked my ass. But this is the end.  
He put the spring back on my desk and returned  
to his own, hunched in his letter jacket until the bell.

—JASON SCHNEIDERMAN

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MOTHEROTHER

*Inside me:* don't think  
this. If inside is a place  
then I am thinking in the suburbs  
in the mud/grass  
but I hate driving and pizza.

I'd consider *mine*:  
"the boy is mine!" Or, "before,  
mine was mine." (This is  
my head. Where is your head?)  
Before...I can't remember.

Before one tree was touched  
before another and this  
was a lovely diagram  
for putting together  
a plan for making it a-ok.

If I allow myself an inside,  
I find component parts (coiled  
metal, archaic weaponry,  
plumb line). Some are  
for me and some for him.

How generous! But no:  
inevitable metal. Shoot  
into water the find a lost  
bridge. Or there might be  
someone. Instead: we walk.

—JENNIFER KRONOVET

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## THE MOTHER

No one saw her but me  
 As she stumbled through the living room  
 Whispering to herself in tongues  
 I'd not heard  
 Before, limned, here,  
 by the streetlamp's spare  
 light, her hushed words  
 now become a song  
 I think she was giving to the moon:  
 Why, why me?

—ROSS GAY

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## INSTRUCTIONS

Why not you?  
 He will think he has given you the moon.  
 He will think you owe him a song  
 with words like hushed lights,  
 light from a streetlamp muted  
 by mist and limbs and sheer curtains.  
 Look here.  
 Anything he ever says he will say only to himself  
 if the first time he stumbles through the living room  
 your only word to him is *no*.

—H.L. HIX

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## ANYTHING HE EVER SAYS HE WILL SAY ONLY TO HIMSELF

As if talking could cure a slammed door,  
 you follow, walking through like an apparition  
 from an old relationship. And what else does  
 an apology hold other than the mist of mistakes  
 from the past, rearing their past addictions?

But you follow not with your feet  
 but with your words, writing  
 a letter from this downtown café.  
 In the background, a voice  
 talks over your written words  
 with a mouth like a sunflower  
 breaking from the concrete,  
 but you keep writing to him,  
 in the spirit of this voice.

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Look, you say, people are living  
all around me and I want in on it;  
children are walking like families  
of ducks led by their teachers;  
couples have a hand in each other's back  
pocket; a woman is carrying her laundry  
in her arms. I'm sure any one of them  
would say they want more: The children  
don't want to trail behind a teacher;  
the couple wants more than passion;  
the woman wants the comforts  
inside her home. But I'd take it  
all. Sometimes, I just want to step  
off the curb of the past onto whatever will stay  
beneath me. But, over time, I wonder  
if asking for nothing, when all is said  
and regretted, too much to ask for?

—A. VAN JORDAN

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APPARITION FROM AN OLD RELATIONSHIP

*What dark/men you aroused in your young man's veins.*  
—from "The Third Duino Elegy"  
Rainer Maria Rilke

Ancestors gathered to the pulse of hate  
generations past still drum in their heirs' veins.  
Those who had guns and gold, those who had naught,  
those who were pushed aside, those who wore chains:  
their histories continue to divide  
neighbor from neighbor, like the ghosts of love  
turned cruel. How long memories take to fade.  
And those we can't forget, we must forgive.

—MARILYN NELSON

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(UNBUTTONING HER SHIRT...)

Unbuttoning her shirt in the second dream, she pointed to the hole in the  
center of her chest, mouthed *Look*.

I am not any closer to saying what I mean.

Kneeling, with my hands on her hips, I closed one eye and peered into her  
chest, which was filled with water.

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Love has made itself so quiet, a few red fish moving in slow circles.

I want to say like blood.

I want to say like forgiveness, this obedience, looking inside her on my knees.

I mean to cease to feel, to cancel, to give up all claim to—

At some point, she rested her hands on my shoulders and I thought this is my face housed underwater.

This is a death letter.

Every word but *mouthed* erased.

—ALLISON BENIS WHITE