



# You Will Island

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*I further will deny  
good got us up that broad shoreline.*

John Berryman

**I**

## Arise, Dissembler

I touch my forefingers to my thumbs  
to make a pair of glasses  
how I wear them with  
elegance but still can't peek  
inside you there must be magnets pushing  
other magnets around  
we are equally  
unattractive sporting our paradise skin  
grabbing at the salt in the air  
with our tongues we use to pick  
guitar strings  
a song of blunted thorns  
these teeth rattle like a bucket  
of hermit crabs toppling down a hill  
and we with our quiet  
little mouths hunting for a bigger shell

# Bullet Garden

Where do we go from here?

A houseboat in the desert?

Thoughts of endless red dunes?

There're people afraid

of the new new.

You're afraid of moving, me

of no wind. It helps

to lick your finger and hold it up

to the sky and soon

the answers will come.

Soon we'll know our voices

all wrong, then begin to question

the necessity of so many rocks.

We won't live like this

much longer. Our old homes

are making a comeback.

# Everyone Writes a Book

This isn't going to take long.  
My mouth is running  
away from me and you  
are trying to catch it with a net.  
I'm an armada of empty sails.  
Small waves of dust  
curl inside me. Rusted locks  
and lust persist. We lifejacket  
our hearts, stow the thought  
of what it's like to start  
over. This isn't going to take  
but a second. Never say  
monolithic. I found  
you butterflied and bluing  
below a huge moon  
and was going to spit on you,  
but you didn't cover me  
in luster. Night assailed us  
like a parade of single mothers  
clutching wooden swords.  
The streets gnaw and snicker  
at our delicate feet,  
but we are fevered, favoring  
the bright disaster  
burning in our hands.

## Return To

An old Cuban, shirt unbuttoned,  
sitting by a canal, cane-fishing at sunset.  
Pink highlighter horizon. The hour of leaping

mullet. Tarpon rolling like silver commas  
under the bridge. How even the herons  
hesitate to plant their legs in the shallows.

The road. The road right through me.  
Traffic like a Latin party, all horns  
and light. A green cloud of parrots

dashes from telephone wire to rooftop  
to a Spanish billboard advertising  
the best plastic surgery: *Tu cuerpo perfecto!*

My lost body. So many species of palms.  
The bougainvilleas purpling fences.  
Streets smoky with mosquito fog.

This thick, humid night. The raccoons  
rummage through the garbage  
and when I shine my flashlight

they look guilty. But I am ashamed. To have  
never noticed such wrecked beauty. Here.  
Under the barren mango trees.

## Making It

Then the cicadas gnawed  
the wrong moon.  
And, for a few minutes, I was dead  
to me. Of course  
the past was on its way  
back to us: turns out  
our heads, split  
and throbbing like cantaloupe  
under the sky's teeth,  
would be just fine after all.  
A map of Florida told me so,  
the oranges and astronauts  
meeting at the center.  
I threw my window  
through your window  
and we met halfway  
between the Alligator Motel  
and a landfill  
to have it out,  
tearing up mangrove roots, singing  
bones and numbers.  
Pretty sure every pier  
is out to get me.  
Incredibly I dissolve.

## You Will Island

Just sit still. Just move.  
Just swallow the fire  
blue tulip—tip of flame—  
and rip the rain  
apart: I'm coming through.  
Sun by noon, you by midnight.  
Sleep solves the wreckage  
in me. Down  
goes the ship in the sea.  
I'll keep stabbing  
the waves with these oars,  
my arms and my poorly  
suitcased lore. Whatever  
I try to save, let go. Let night  
surprise through the window.  
A mirage of vultures follows  
the distant blink  
of a lighthouse eye.  
Still, I am not my own  
guide. Another memory  
will cloud the grove  
of our dead loves.  
While leaves  
and bugs swarm  
the brackish murk, I search  
for my shadow in the dark.

Poem with the Word Poem in the Title,  
Twice

In me a shipwreck sleeps.  
Me and my

drowning. All along  
the shore I lug

a gutted fish, and pelicans  
follow. The sea, foaming

at the mouth, repeats.  
Crabs slowly back

into their sand holes  
and wait—how dark

it must be in there,  
like recalling the dream

inside a dream,  
archipelago of names,

the voyage  
I vowed to run aground.

## A Silence

Because the wave within the wave is like a swallowed seed  
Because the breaking simply belongs  
Because the seed is a fist  
Because my mother sat on the edge of the bed and spoke plainly  
                    of the noose, the bathroom, her mother hanging there  
Because the rock, the hill, the up and down of it all  
Because my feet are waterlogged  
Because when I speak nickels pour out of my mouth  
Because all day I wander around looking for something to do other than love  
Because I buried the camel with one hump in a desert dune  
Because my father dove in the Miami River and out to sea he swam  
Because a way out is a way in  
Because I wave my hand goodbye and it bursts into flame  
Because fire is light and light is hurried  
Because the hibiscus is showing off again  
Because this is how it always is and never will be  
Because written on every palm is the address of the wind

# So We Get to Meet Us

Cradling cellos  
in our sleep  
we watch a regatta  
break like glass birds  
into pieces I am  
at my narrowest  
and drooling a puddle  
of old lost socks  
under us  
I am circumventing  
the bed  
for you and the lake  
at night seem to agree  
to solitude  
and all its broken  
moons we urge  
revenge on our own  
slanted histories and murmurs  
pillowcase after  
pillowcase

# Vulturehood

1.

My tongue craved  
sawgrass blades

The sky was falling into the sky

I waded  
beside an alligator

surprised by my courage  
and cut my words in half

2.

I was tired of the sky falling

all over my tongue  
of swimming beneath leaves

Some words in the trees  
I've always stayed away from

grew into ruin  
a blue heron

drifted like smoke through the sawgrass

3.

I was alone with my words  
and with the water up to my waist

I was half swamp

mumbling  
to a flock of ibis

my eyes going up in smoke



Welcome

This is a small house.  
The deer barely fits.

Everything's going  
to be ok. The piano

has no keys, but the deer  
still plays. Songs

about a doe  
in a small house

under the influence of light.  
Outside, neighbors

gather to hear  
her heart's stone

note. Someone  
is knocking at the door.

## Yes, Yes Rockinghorse

I call you lightning when you phone me  
from a forest to speak  
of leaves, how they fall like tongues.  
Think of the branch reaching

as I farewell into the snow, my throat  
full and wild. I am talking  
to my pinky and listening to my thumb.  
I'm holding a banana.

You explain how to carry a bird  
and a river at the same time. I forget  
a lot of things. How much wind  
is needed to weave these words into sky?

Remember the night oozing out  
of the sea and shore. We were ghosts  
grabbing all the abandoned shoes  
our loneliness could carry.

I Have a Voice Somewhere Far Off and  
Waiting

Everything at once, reflected

upside down

in a spoon. And another

pool of night droops

across the sky

I am underneath

sometimes begging

for miniature explosions

and a new disguise.

Canoes and yellow dreams.

There were boats in the streets

after the flood

but our houses

did not resemble islands.

I swam for days.

And everything swam

like a cloud, falling apart

for no good reason but to fall.

# Without Maps

We watched trees quiver.  
We fried eggs and hot dogs.

We swapped eyes  
so we could see

new all over. A hummingbird  
slept inside a flower.

After juggling three pinecones  
on the riverbank

we drank ink from the cups  
of our hands. The valley

held heavy shadows  
of mountains, in which we stood,

stunned by dusk's slow  
migration. We leaned

over the balcony and licked  
the black of every night, wanted

the coyote's howl to be  
our hunger. Our throat stone.

## Out of the Blue

This is the time I go too far. The time I wait  
like a window. This is the time  
you whalebone my body to shore  
and all the waves come home.  
This is the time I swerve. I skim  
your skin. This is the time I release my dull glow.  
This is the year I slap dragonflies and say  
I feel impossible  
and I cypress into the sky.  
This is the night we're in an airport motel  
trying to make love while the TV is on.  
This is me at the mirror  
dancing like a cartoon. This is you.  
This is the time I am a rerun.  
The time I leave and come back. This  
is the light beginning to swim.  
This is the rake lying in the grass.

## Dead End

I am riding a unicycle  
down the avenue  
with too much wobble  
in my pedal.  
You toss your eyes.  
They are stones,  
not the color  
of fish scales under light.  
O holy mackerel.  
Sequence of sequins,  
I can't say I love  
your dress this evening  
unless the world is a ball  
of lint hidden  
in your bellybutton.  
The trees tip their hats.  
The sky reeks of stars.  
I'd very much like to stand  
on the end of your finger  
like a pier where I might fish.

# Archipelago

Part propeller, part rock,  
all water-music. Part glue

and the bruised stories  
of winter I can't shake.

Strange clouds plummet  
behind the fence

of last night's dream  
where I held

a flower's tongue hostage.  
I house tiny

houses of shadows.  
They buzz behind

my eyes, and never blink.  
But me? These days

I'm losing more  
and more of my goodness.

I'm scratching my ghosts.  
Part of me decides

to split. Part of me uneven  
and a razing new color.

# Portrait of an Aubade

if I hadn't beaten the night into day

if I hadn't kneed the sun's stone stomach

I am falling asleep dear blue you

and the moment, tearing itself to pieces

and the pieces becoming a storm of mirrors

all over my face meets my face

this ruthlessness that I am unknown to me

a silent box of stars, a gift

for the terror in my gut

if I hadn't drawn a window

on your chest, colored in some trees

the morning would boil with birdsong

and you'd sew the air with questions

of skin I've been dying to get in

## Aquarium Poem

We were trying to mimic the grace  
of jellyfish so long I began drifting

into my own purple light. A crowd  
had settled around us. Some were stunned

by the tank's slow repetition of bloom,  
others feared it's terrible monotony.

I could see the brief dream shine in their eyes  
like a knife. We stood there, all of us, buoyed,

then moved on. We went where fish always  
swim in circles, and you said we could learn

something from that school, those circles.  
Seahorses tangled and untangled

their bodies like vines. A dead reef, painted.  
This world measured in gallons.

Everything exudes a new significance  
when on display. Put us in tanks and we might

learn to be simple, and sing of it.

# The Book of Islands

Hey, I have a body too.  
Except on Sundays.

When the volcano gives  
birth to another isle

the sea urchin lusts  
after a pineapple.

Are those stars  
on your tongue, or did I open

my eyes under water?  
Sometimes I long

to be a hammock.  
Sometimes my body, tangled

like mangrove roots. A crab  
with one claw still gets by.

The sky wears a sarong  
of clouds and I am peeking

at the sun.  
Sometimes I close my eyes

to see what's not there.  
Usually an elephant

in the shape of a cloud.  
Usually a cluster of islands

glowing in a black sea.  
I'm stranded on one.

Can you see me  
waving away the pelicans?

**Curtis Perdue** was born and raised in Miami, FL. He has received scholarships/fellowships from Squaw Valley Community of Writers, The Key West Literary Seminar, and Emerson College, where he received his MFA. His poems have appeared in *Bateau*, *H\_NGM\_N*, *Horse Less Review*, *LEVELER*, *Willow Springs* and elsewhere. He lives in Delray Beach, FL where he teaches high school English and College Writing. He founded and edits the online journal of poetry and art, [www.interrupture.com](http://www.interrupture.com)