
RED FORTRESS

JACKIE CLARK



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A H_NGM_N PORTABLE DOCUMENT FORMAT CHAPBOOK
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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.

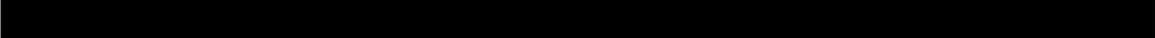
No one tries to sell me anything & I am
insulted. I am certain I will only think

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

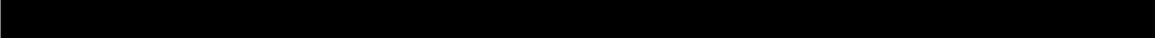
& smokestacks if I choose. The sun is strong
in February, casting over meadows of industry.

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

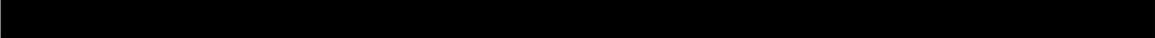
of waiting & sending
messages, coupled

with the rubbing
of two cavities

& the fact that you
believe in another end.

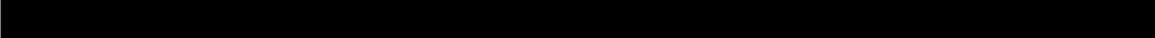
THE NEVERENDING SHREDDING PROJECT

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

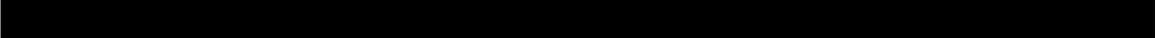
of anymore, of driving
through the green.

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.

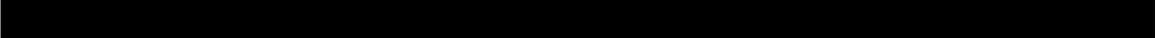
THE SMELL HOUND

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

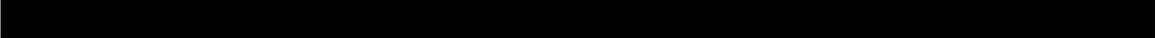
ridicule, your potted
hands in dirt and roots.
Your anisette coating

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



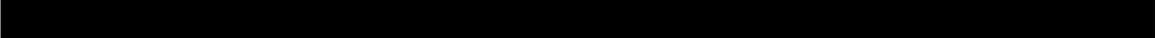
bookcases; things are
getting worse.

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”

