

Two poems from Muybridge

(The speaker is the photographer Eadweard Muybridge)

1899. Animals in Motion.

Huge blue shoulders, the hills.
Some days a rivery breeze,

horizon a fluent line
where substances touch.

In whole midair a barnswallow veers, pauses
like a child in an orphanage.

*Time was a gold wire
between darkness and darkness.*

The horse walked, the horse, horses,
lowing heifer, billy-goat, greyhound, lioness:

they walked on, they walked home to the barn
whose plank walls the wind is.

They seemed each one
to be moved

forward as by moving air,
as if the air parted around them,

& the photo is still
as if the wind had ended.

1904.

I try not to dream, much;
it pries the night open, and it bothers the dogs.
But some time, on a broken day,

when it turns hard to tell
the difference between cloud and stone,

I'll lie down on the ground
and the black dog comes and lies down beside me,

settling her moist snout in the hollow of my shoulder,
warm, for a while, and,
eventually, snoring, lightly.

And then, because I can, because she breathes
so evenly we both are saved,

I am still, and gradually
I am in a room.

There I am brought forward in a body, convergent
as the whittled stub of a pencil

—though it does not feel exactly like my life,
it is so clean,

the light kind and lacking a source.
And it is a kind of relief, this white expansiveness,

a silence after bells,
full calm.

Not to be seen
not to burn or justify—

not to play that red ukulele,
its sparkly river of fleas

not to harm, in dailiness
not to work— not to make art—.

Left and right, beyond the blind walls,
there may be actions, animated things,

but I am this composure now.
Sometimes an animal is waiting

and I know
I do not need to avoid her.

Of course she is a kind of doubt
or death, some animal neutrality.

still, in the room, she watches, uncurling
her righteous improbable tail.

She prowls, she knows me, teeth
ragged with glint.

My skin
anticipates the pounce;
noiseless the claws, the slashing.

The lush whiskers tick;
I find it easy

to acquiesce.
She is not angry.
She is hungry.

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