

CONTENTS

Foreword by Mark Doty ix

I

Wanderer	3
Derecho Ghazal	4
My Love, I Want to Tell You of Today	5
Dear Epictetus, This is to You Attributed	6
How to Flinch	7
Landscape, with an End and a Beginning	8
Campus Elegy	9
Landscape, with Red Boots and a Branch of Dead Cherry	10
Boy	11
Why Appropriation Is Not Necessarily the Same as Mastery	12
Certified	13
With Feeling	14
Persistent Triolet	15
What You Don't Always See	16
Appetite	17
Letter to Myself, Reading a Letter	18
Intercession	19
Closer	20
Wake	21

II

Mundo Inteirinho	25
Anniversary	26
A Single Falling Note Above	27
Grenadilla	28
Saturday Afternoon at the Y	29
On the Nature of Things	30
Unbelievable Ends	32
In a Hotel Lobby, Near Midnight	34
Landscape, with Cardinal and Earring	35
Empty Ghazal	36
Letter to Providence	37
Letter to Arrhythmia	38
Letter to Levity	39

Interior, with Roman Shades and Lovers	40
Recursive	41
Taxonomies	42
Lover to Lover, Air	43
Imperfect Ode	44
Villanelle of the Red Maple	45
Love Poem with Skull and Candy Valentines	46
Landscape, with Remnants of a Tale	48
Landscape, with Darkness and Hare	49
Not Yet There	50

III

Hum	53
Dumbwaiter	54
Spangled	55
Ghazal: Chimerae	56
I Write Letters to Some Other Sea	57
Improvisations	58
Fata Morgana	60
Aubade	61
Letter to Love	62
Landscape, with Mockingbird and Ripe Figs	63
Mobius	64
What Cannot Eat	65
Landscape, with Sudden Rain, Wet Blooms, and a Van Eyck Painting	66
Ode to the Heart Smaller than a Pencil Eraser	67
Unending Lyric	68
Ghazal of the Transcendental	69
Night Heron, Ascending	70
The Wren in the Lilac Cycles through Its Songs at Breakneck Speed	71
Reprieve	72
Hallucinatorio	73
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	75
<i>About the Author</i>	76
<i>The May Swenson Poetry Award</i>	77

FOREWORD

Luisa A. Igloria frames the first poem in this lush, unexpected book with a quote from Epictetus: “. . . *as soon as a thing has been seen, it is carried away, / and another comes in its place.*” The Stoic philosopher may offer this principle as a cause for detachment, but Igloria, I’d hazard, sees things differently: transience, if not exactly cause for celebration, is for her an occasion for the new to present itself. Her poems are drunk with the world’s bounty; they fill themselves with life: birds and flowers, Dürer’s engravings, tattooed mothers swimming at the Y, fruits whose flavors could hardly be more delicious than their names: carambola, grenadilla, maracuya. The solid ground on which her poems rest is love for the world in all its pungent variety. A goodly part of what I mean by *love* is close attention, a profound interest in and regard for what’s out there. Igloria’s poetry is a kind of tally, an accounting, a guide to the spectacle of the given, the strangeness and complexity of what surrounds us. *Here*, she seems to say to her readers, I’d like you to look here and here.

But a poem’s evocation of reality—that is, a description—must be informed by both feeling and thinking. Human consciousness is a flow of perception, emotion, and ideas about what we think and feel, and a poem often serves as a kind of model of consciousness, inviting us into a version of the poet’s subjectivity. This is why poetry is perhaps the most intimate of the arts; it presents the possibility, albeit brief and to some degree illusory, of entering into another person’s skin.

Any poem in this accomplished book might serve to illustrate this three-way marriage of perception, emotion and reflection. I’ll choose a lovely, characteristically Igloria poem, “Landscape with Sudden Rain, Wet Blooms, and a Van Eyck Painting.” The poem is structured by couplets—perhaps to mimic the couple in the Van Eyck, and to underscore the speaker’s profound longing to be coupled, herself? The opening lines sketch a painterly landscape:

Cream and magenta on asphalt, the blooms that ripened
early on the dogwood now loosened by sudden rain—

The scene immediately provokes a reflection, and not at all one we’d expect:

Do you know why that couple touch hands in the Van Eyck
painting?

These dashed blossoms have led, through subterranean associations that won't become clear for a while, to Van Eyck's famous painting, in which a newly married couple pose in their room, between them a convex mirror throwing their image-in-reverse back toward us. The speaker has an answer to her own question:

Their decorum holds the house pillars up,
plumps the cushions, velvets the drapes for commerce,
theirs and the world's. See how the mirror repeats
and reflects them back to each other, though crowned
by a rondel of suffering. In her green robe with its
multitude of gathers, she casts a faint shadow on the bed.

Suffering and shadow: the couple's formal stance, their air of distance and dignity, are read here as a means of containing pain, all that's wrong between them. Then comes a new sentence, one that begins as further description of the painting, but that quickly slides to something else:

And the fruit on the window sill might be peach,
might be pear, might be apple—something with glimmering
skin, like the lover and the scar he wore like a badge
to the side of his throat.

The poem has moved elegantly, effortlessly toward its occasion, the disappointment in love that is fueling this examination of both art and landscape. And it is to the landscape of the opening couplet that the poem now turns:

Fickle nature, cold and grainy
as the day that spills its seed above the fields, indiscriminate,
so things grow despite themselves. And there was the one
who said never, but turned from you to rinse his hands.

Spilled seed, what grows despite itself, the one who said never—there's an oblique but nonetheless complete narration of a love affair here, one ending without fruition. And a sly shift has occurred. I read that first "you," back in the poet's question about the Van Eyck portrait, as posed to the reader, or to the world: do *you* know why? But the "you" in that last sentence is clearly the one who's lost in love, a double for the speaker; now we understand that she posed that question to herself, in a moment of discovery, understanding that the painting represented a way of composing oneself in the face of misery. And thus Igloria moves to her sure conclusion:

Who else loves his own decorum as I do? The names
of trees are lovely in Latinate. I can't recite those,
can only name their changing colors: flush
and canary, stripped and rose; or moan like the voice
of a cello in the leaves, imitating human speech.

That artful bit of landscape description we encountered in the first couplet? Now we can understand that was an act of avoidance, of self-distraction. I can name the colors, the speaker tells us, or I can merely moan. Naming "the changing colors" becomes a means both of revealing pain and containing it, just as these decorous couplets provide a kind of orderly structure in which to organize this poem's song of lament. There is the lovely paradox: the poem *is* a moan, but it is a song too. Music is not an outcry, or not only one; it is a made thing that testifies to our persistence, and to a faith in the power and necessity of art. Which sometimes does nothing but make an outcry bearable—but that gesture, in itself, can be quite enough.

Mark Doty