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On David Habben’s *Peace, Be Still*

“Blood and Milk: Isaiah 49:15-16”
by Julia Campbell Bernards

Life is given
in torturous tenderness.
From pores
pours power,
perfectly suited to the need,
and given
in gentle, supplicating,
Agony.

Love and labor’s strain
awaken God’s gift--
to exude life
to the helpless,
to give myself, selfless,
to rejoice
in the offspring
offered me.
On Bruce H. Smith’s *Jacob and Leah*

“Anymore”
by Simone Johnson Blanchard

Let me take off my glasses and see more clearly.
There you are—
“Are,” staring vacantly in the chair.
The plant between us is the only real thing living here—
Touch it; it’s plastic.
“What?”
You sit up from your slouch miles away, glance at my shoulder.
The only part of each of us that’s here
Is the part determined to show we’re gone.

*Did you hear me?*

“What, did you say?” Now you’re looking away.
A careful reply matches my careful comportment:
“My eyes hurt.”
“You should put your glasses back up; perhaps not wearing them is giving you a headache.”
*No,* my mind says again, *I can see you now, can’t I? Can I?*
But,
“Maybe you’re right,” is what my mouth says.

And his mind is saying something different too,
Than what his lips are pushing through.
My eyes downcast, but I see into his
Clearly, as the split in our wall
—is it “his wall/my wall” now?—

“Don’t sit there. You’re giving me a headache.”

I can feel it, the headache, coming through his stare even though his eyes are just boring into the checkered flooring. He doesn’t look at me anymore.

My eyes bore like yours to the floor, except into the blue ribbon leading to the door—leading you back to me? I can’t decide, but I know that’s not how you think anymore.

My hazels gazing now into the sea, The blue wriggling ribbon proving to me That the smallest thing can become an ocean And the largest thing can become a pointless-pointless little ribbon. Guess I’m holding my own hand now, Continued in this stance Before the support of my own wall falls down.
On Bruce H. Smith’s *Jacob and Leah*

“Jacob and Leah”
by KathArine Bradbury

A Letter to Her Father, a Jacob and Leah Reponse
I know he doesn’t love me. The truth of it sits on my shoulders and it weighs me to the checkered floor until I’m on my knees begging Father, please.

I know he wants it to be her. He hasn’t said, and I think politeness holds him back, but he lifted the veil and recoiled. Father, am I soiled?

I know he’s unhappy. The set of his jaw is hard. His voice is clipped. He doesn’t talk to me except when he has to. Father, what shall I do?

I know I’m not her. I’ve never been Rachel. She is beautiful and my tender heart shows in my eyes Father, I’m no prize.
I know the rules.
But Father, couldn’t you have just broken them once?

I know that I’m stuck here.
There is no alternative.
No more backdoors or trapdoors.
If this is truly the case
And there is honestly nothing else
Give me the strength to last.
I’m on my knees, begging.
Father, please.
On Michael Soelberg’s *A Blessed Curse*

“Gray, Clay-Like Bodies”
by Alixa Brobbey

Our lips meet
in a perpendicular kiss.
A perfect Pythagorean
corner is created.
And I know that
given the chance,
I would swallow
that bitter fruit whole,
feel its chunky mass
slither down my throat again
if only to taste a
cherry cheek on skin cold.

Pink nose placed
persistently against
my own. And I hope
that all the hard rigid
ridges of our freed bodies,
(gray, clay-like bodies;
pale blushes devoid
of divine presence)
can withstand the
bitter brutality of
our new mortality.

My love, as we meet
in this embrace,
your brow bristles gently
against my own.
Your hand clutches
closely clung curls.
Releases them.
Never, in all of Eden
did my skin feel as
frosted as my ice-like eyes.
Never, in all of Eden
did I feel this lovely and light.
On Ron Richmond’s *Nativity* (no. 3)

“Innocence”
by Ashley Chase

If I could see my brother again
Dancing down a dock in Cancun
Head held high under the feathery weight
Of a sombrero dancing gold thread
I would plant him in that moment
Root him to the ground
In billowing white chains.

I would carve him into wooden paneling
Surrounding us, fossilized
As the planks petrified to quartz.

I would strip him of his future and his past
Of the bullies, the job interviews, the ex girlfriends,
The magazines, the late night sodas, the goodbye kisses
The hunched back, the pimply braces
The damp pillowcases
Of the spindly shame that would twist
And curdle the light in his eyes.

I would leave him naked and bare
Under that sombrero
Sunning under the sky
Warm forever on grainy beaches
As the tide washed in and out.
On M. C. Escher’s *Predestination* and *The Horseman*

“Predestination and the Horseman”
by Scott Darrington

A tired mask, a soldier with no spear,
the grid lines’ gray alliances dissolve

**his horse; he tries in vain one hand to steer**
as white fish and black birds below revolve

**away from blue close-horse-stepping neck,**
through kidney bean’s front-phasing smile, a speck,

**his frowning parallel, no hope to peck**
the toothless beak before his hollow neck’s

**dye-hiding hat, the red lock that revolves**
heat becomes a pretzel’s prayer. The toothy sneer

**from horse’s bite, his piercing guilt absolve**
before pure bird attacks and wields his spear.

*Author’s Note: I feel I should preface it with an explanation of the form, since it's integral to reading the poem correctly: it's written as a "double exposure," meaning the bold lines can be read all together, the unbolded lines can be read all together, and then all the lines can be read top to bottom. The bolded lines are based on Escher's "The Horseman" and the unbolded lines are based on "Predestination." My recommended way to read it would be in that order: bolded, unbolded, all together.*
On the Hole Bored into M. C. Escher’s Depth Woodblock

by Logan Davis

Because sardines, red and upside down, packed together like torpedoes don’t look normal, Mr. Escher. If you would just follow art rules we wouldn’t have to take these kinds of precautions, Mr. Escher. It’s so convenient for us, just as much as it is for you. It’s to protect the art. Like copyright. Only originals sell. Frauds abound. Just follow the rules, Mr. Escher.
On J. Kirk Richard’s *Breath of Life*

“Breath of Life”
by Bayley Goldsberry

Are we afraid of Her glory?
Must we hush the mouth
That speaks the Mother’s name?
Is she a sliver of doubt
in our traditional minds?
My body tells me, nay,
She is in you.
The curvatures of Her body
Are manifest in the
Curvatures of mine.
The powers of Her creations
Are lining my hands
And my insides.
I am lit afire
To see Her,
Infinite and eternal,
Bathed in a golden light,
Telling me
“You will one day understand.”
On Tiffany Studio’s *The Reader*

“The Reader”
by Amanda Hall

The red cover drapes over
her fingers, like crimson ribbon

backing, but no words are
visible. Her eyes are not reading,

but looking beyond, past the
pages, the binding, the gold-shine

of her sleeves. Those eyes, like
a sea that has not made up its

mind, are not quite blue and not quite
gray, but they are looking at me.

No, not at me. Through me,
as though my soul needs to be

seen, as an invitation to
join her story, but I want to

watch a moment longer, to let my
own eyes linger on warm light

coming through glass, assigning her
with soft creams and surrounding
her with mottled greens and two pink flowers adorning her chestnut hair.

Maybe I am done noticing now; maybe I am ready to be pulled inside her story.
On Trevor Southey’s *Jesus and Mary: The Moment After*

“RISEN!”
by Cynthia L. Hallen

Hazy dawn brings Mary, reveals two men:
“Why weepest thou?” the messengers console.
“They have taken my Lord,” she wilts for him,
“My Lord, who was promised to make hearts whole.”

Where the petals have been scattered and bruised
To a fallen white wild-flower she bends,
There on the grief-damp earth, beholds a man
In the garden she supposes he tends.

“Woman, why weepest thou? Whom seekest thou?”
He soothes. Her voice quivers as the wind blows
And softly holds her hope of finding Him.
“Mary,” says Jesus, like light to a rose.

“Rabboni,” she tremors, turns to the Son.
“Go, tell my brethren.” She smiles, starts to run.”
On M. C. Escher’s Liberation

"Liberation"
by Catherine Jungheim

Point becomes line, line morphs into new form.
Form wakes up and is a bird, downy warm.
Bird transforms when it learns that it can fly,
and does so. Magnify smallest member
and geometry results. Macrify
Cosmos, you’re a tiny quantum ember.
Time, wild from flowing in one direction
converges paths, diverging in flexion.
Inanimate to alive—to anoint
sacred movement toward Godhood—is the point.
On Norman Rockwell’s *Lift up Thine Eyes*
“What Will They Say?”
by Kathryn Passey

The final stroke on the robe, the last dove in place,
He drops his brush, rubs his long face with a wearied hand,
And steps back to look at his work.

The dully clad New Yorkers,
With shoulders and necks bent and hanging,
Toward the grayest street below them.

The little boy grasping his mother’s hand,
Pulling back against the walking traffic,
Looking longingly into the eyes of the viewer.

The priest and his deacon, standing above the crowd,
Creating for the people a message,
That they wish would be seen and understood.

The church face, standing erect above the street,
With depth and stained glass color and adorned statues,
And a golden-light welcome shining within the door.

Seeing all this he can’t help but wonder, what will they say?
He worries and frets and wrings his hands for a moment,
Wishing to protect his creations from prodding eyes.

Perhaps they will misunderstand the priest,
Under his heavy robes of authority,
And believe he is perfect and upright at all times.
Or perhaps they will condemn him for hypocrisy,
Of teaching the people to look up, to lift their eyes,
When his own eyes cannot reach the heavens, only the message board.

Perhaps they will hate the New Yorkers, for making the mistake,
That they all make in their own lives every day,
Of bustling about, with heads down and busy, and hearts heavy.

Perhaps they will hate them without knowing them,
How the woman in red just wants to be seen by anyone,
How the skinny, briefcase man has just lost his job of twenty years.
Perhaps they will judge the small boy,
And say he is disobedient, rude to pull on his mother,
When he just wants to stop and pull the painful rock from his shoe.

Norman paces before his work, before his creations,
Watching them each in turn with worried gaze,
Trying to come up with a solution to soften their blows.

Abruptly, he picks up his brush, and madly sets to work,
Just one more character, that’s all he needs,
She places her carefully, stroke by stroke, on the church steps.

Then he stops, and squints at her, at his mother,
Clad in her best church dress, the one she wears to funerals,
Staring out at millions of viewers with her best scolding look.

Coming from within the church, where no one else has bothered to be,
She has true authority, to reprimand critics, and her fellow characters,
She alone can stand guard over the painting, so her son need not wonder,

What will they say?
On M. C. Escher’s *La Cathédrale Engloutie*

“The City of Ys”
by Hayley Rawle

It is said the fishermen in Brittany still hear the suffocated chimes of the submarine cathedral. On nights as inky as M.C. Escher’s woodcut, the water and the firmament the same shades of black. They hear in the patterns of Debussy’s rising parallel fifths. The pounded notes of the piano, the silvery circular ripples, a suggestion that the chapel is sinking toward the surface instead of down.

Princess Dahut used to swim naked in that sea around the city. The old gods of air and water spoke as they slipped across her skin while King Gradlon tried to coax her back to church. Dahut took a new lover each night and in the morning sacrificed them to mother sea. But when she finally slept with the devil, the ocean washed down city. Gradlon gave her a fatherly shove off the getaway steed. She drowned. No longer a pagan princess choking her lovers with black satin masks. Now a pagan mermaid who baits Brittany fishermen. She still wants to chokes them. In a quieter, watery way.

And the bells of the steeple begin to submerge again. Debussy soaks his song in a decrescendo. And Escher etches a boat for the approaching fishermen.
On J. Kirk Richard’s *Fishers of Men and Women*

“Fishers of Men and Women”
by Sage Rogers

Heaving, panting, gasping for
Air, for release, for hope
Clambering for firm hands
Outstretched arms, soft skin of
Friends who reach to save.
Nets swung, massive and thick,
A lifeline to God.
Fingers tightly wrapped,
Palms firmly pressed into
Coarse, tawny rope.
Through silky fog they see their
Saviors, not Gods or Kings or
Governors, but -
People whose hands lift creased with
Dust, whose muscles ache with
Compassion, whose weary cheeks clench,
Stained with tears, having before been recipients of
Netted rescue from stormy depths below.
On Brian Kershisnik’s *Descent from the Cross*

“Fifth Angel from the Right at the Descent from the Cross”
by Kate Romney

Under the orange sky burning they hold His body
like the white cloth covering
they will be robed in at sunrise. Above I sing
joy-stricken in the fallen ache. I call
for the man who has given me life.
In their dark robes wailing
they do not yet see my face,
they do not yet see how the color of His skin
fills my body pure and thick.
This moment like remembering
my mother's smooth hands when she held me
safe and warm in the darkness
before the call came, before the
cold ground and the sweet oils and the waiting.
Before I was here, watching my Lord come unto me.
I have left the darkness,
now float in the midst of tears,
smiling.
On M. C. Escher’s *Metamorphosis III*

“Metamorphosis III”
by Devrie Rozsa

This is not what you think it is.
You think you are standing in a nebulous, indefinite space
Until edges become unforgiving, sharp, and grey turns to black.
Each larvae is coiled in the center of its hexagonal hive at the edge of life,
Until it bursts from its fetal form into something greater,
And life spins and whirls.
Out of control, in control.
A state of stillness, of constant motion.
When the birds meet the bees, they make a fish.
And when you meet the center
You become the nexus where chaos and order
Meet at a single point in time.
You become the nexus of chaos and order
When you meet the center
Where the birds meet the bees, and they make a fish.
A state of stillness, of constant motion.
Out of control, in control.
And life spins and whirls
Until it bursts from its fetal form into something greater.
Each player is poised in the center of his square space at the edge of movement
Until edges become forgiving, soft, and black turns to grey.
You think you are standing in a nebulous, indefinite space.
This is not what you think it is.
On M. C. Escher’s *Rind*

“The Rind”
by Kaelin Stanley

The Rind
Is the part we throw away
In the trash, down the drain
The part we scratch and peel
and claw,
till all that’s left is none at all

“We’re made of clouds” I’ve always heard
But the only way I’d ever know
Is if I take away this skin
So I can see my sky
within

This sky is only called my own
within this rind, my fleshy home.
On Jeffrey Hein’s *Convenient Charity*

“Unmasked”
by Heather Talbot

a creamy satin tablecloth,
shimmering and crisply pressed
silver, polished to reflection--
image of perfect charity

below the pageantry
the truth revealed--
boxes and cans of bargain brands
dented and bent
pantry leftovers
must be good enough
I would do more, but--

there are dishes to do, bills to pay, laundry to wash, errands to run,
groceries to buy, dinner to cook,
gymnastics and baseball and art class and track and piano and dance,
homework time, bath time, and bed time—

the call of their needs, muffled by my own--
by my busy-ness, my weariness
the least I can give will have to do
intentions and pretentions meet reality
my convenient charity--
unmasked.
On Robert Indiana’s Love

“Love is Evol Backwards”
by Matthew Wagstaff

Four carved letters of blue and red.
What gives them meaning?
An arbitrary arrangement of symbols,
Each meant to portray a sound.
But sound doesn’t explain a concept.
Neither do colors.
Blue.
Sadness.
The verdant depths of the oceans.
Red.
Affection.
The tides of war.
Neither expresses a feeling
That is not truly a feeling.
When I see the four letters,
I blink.
Because they mean
nothing
and
everything.