

Two Poems

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A Grammar for War

After a day when reports of casualties
crackle out of the car radio,

pursuing me as I enter the house at dusk,
eyes wide with seeing,

ears fitted with knowledge
I know neither how to hold nor let drop,

I lay keys on the kitchen table
and scan the air wishing

again I could invent
a lexicon for grief.

If language could recover losses,
words might offer solace

the way a flock of geese follows
a preset trajectory of flight,

the way dawn's arrival restores the ginkgo's
mottled shades of green,

the way the mockingbird sings its song,
conjugating the squandered night.

Penelope

Long ago I was the vision you needed,
image soldered in the mind's furnace:

girl awaiting your arrival,
watching first light lacerate the sky.

You fancied the sea
a playground for your dreams,

but storms have entered you
like sound enters the skin of a drum,

changing its course.
After years adrift, you return

wanting to know how I exist
apart from you and your myths.

Husband, I learned to bear rupture
by staring down dawn,

to weave as daybreak
split open my rib cage.

Tomorrow when you leave our bed,
the sea's call already filling your ears,

you will find fishermen
hauling in nets, shimmering fistfuls

of fish with bloodied gills. Listen to me:
raise one flopping creature from the rest

to inspect the arc of its dying;
see how struggle inscribes itself on air.

Then say a prayer. Offer a blessing.
Acknowledge your power

to deliver from your palm
whatever life pulses there.

Both poems appeared in *This Strange Land* (Alice James Books, 2011).