

## LIKE A FIRE FROM WHICH SPARKS EMITTED DO FLY UPWARDS

Shocked from sleep in the midst of storm I think *antler-candling*. At first there is no image, only the words against the dulled retinas of the mind's ear at waking, words smaller than lightning but only slightly more permanent.

The storm passes to the south. I hear, from the highway, traffic headed that way. A gunning of engines and blaring of horns.

Sixty-four squares on a chessboard, white on black (black on white, if you prefer). When I was a child I imagined the dark squares were deep water, could not understand how the carved tokens floated. I would place the pieces on the board, watch them, remove them. Repeat the process.

To wake with a fragment of language in mind—on the mind's tongue, in the mind's ear—is like trying to remember how a once-favorite pop song went. You ask your friends, but they can't tell you. You try Google. You're aware that nostalgia is an engine of depletion but you keep trying anyway.

Language and image flow through lyric space in parallel streams, like matter and angels from the pedicles of some lesser god. Sleep locks this knowledge into us and swallows the key.

Meanwhile, other songs are being composed, sung. Other poems written. Other storms imagined, experienced, weathered.

I don't know whether antler-candling is about deer or about illness or about exogamy, about folk ritual or petty entrepreneurs. Poetry takes language's idea of ornament and replaces it with a beating heart, not knowing sleep stole the heart from some other dreamer.

Jeffers dreamed of deer because, like images, they were the most fragile creatures he could never possess, domesticate, disciple.

Their panic-numbered souls carom against the thin walls their bodies make.

Sleep walks down the dark street where language left him, whistling, hands in pockets. Maybe he's got a razor. Sleep is the bruiser language's father warned her about.

In the fields south of town the locals are erecting a temple to the storm. Through the pelting of the rain I hear their ecstatic cries, see the arc of the sodium lights. They press language and image into the service of their worship.

Something is always falling from the sky. A man, a stone, an electrical discharge. A satellite, radiation. Rain. Scientists inspect these apparitions for signs of language.

Gravity is just one more indication that deer aren't really getting anywhere. They exist in a proliferating, lateral present. A succession of vivid strobes.

The faster the film runs, the more secure the illusion. Grammar and syntax are to language what Zeno's paradox is to distance, what electromagnetism is to deer. A shortcut, a shorthand. A useful way of approximating for x.

In the dark, punctuated by flashes of lightning, the antlers of the mind's deer glow, kindle, burn. The eyes of these deer are blank. They all stare toward the dreamer, toward the dream's fragmenting locus in the living circle.

Chess is a system in which some men drown. Fewer women. The board hypnotizes the same way a thaumatrope whirls in sunlight, the here and the not-here, the phantom engine. Chess offers a protocol in the absence of deer, of word, of storm.

The chaos of the night sky comes to us in the person of something half-man, half-stag. We adjust the object of the hunt's pursuit to suit our various needs. Whole nations pass, whole kingdoms. The huntsman's blink stabs the retinas.

Language and image, delivered from the clutches of the worshipers, crouch in darkness. They want to set fire to the tabernacle, inside of which the locals continue to beat their tambourines. Sleep has lent them his cigarette lighter, but they can't seem to get it working properly.

In the forest improvised by sleep the deer run ahead of the storm, antlers aflame. Sparks fly from their enormous heads. It is impossible not to follow them, in the same way that it is nearly impossible not to watch a film when it is projected in a darkened room.

Jeffers imprisoned himself in a tower so as to be capable of love. He played chess in his dreams, endless matches. Upon waking he could never remember his opponent's face.

I place the pieces on the board again, watch some number sink slowly out of sight. Sleep records this as yet another failed experiment.

In mythologies as in dreams, stars talk to themselves in the night sky once a storm has passed. They gossip, calculate, plan extravagant vacations. They are too big for sleep to swallow, so he stands just outside their line of sight, on the porch, smoking. Listening.

In a director's cut, cinematography almost always triumphs over narrative. The long tracking shots, the single eye, lidless, pulsing in the arsonist's slick palm.

To fall back into sleep after a storm is to fall back into the blinded souls the deer leave behind, purified and bright, empty of everything save terror and motion. The locals straggle home, their coats and faces blackened.

*Latria vs. dulia*: language vs. image, image vs. word.

The logic of the deposition is the logic of the witness, vertical. To take down, to render. Something is always falling from the sky. Some Bethel is always burning.