

Shapes of Constant Contradiction

by Mackenzie Carignan



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* a dust/e-chap
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DUSIE

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*For my beautiful children, Eliot, Celeste,
and Oriana, who inspire me to see the
world from many different perspectives
and who challenge me to find myself
among the wreckage.*

QUADRILATERAL

Grey skies pushing down. On my scar. The thunder is you, a purple echo almost punching through to sleep. The dark enclave and even darker lightning. You would like it here now, I can't help but think as I look at where you are not. You would have cried with me already. The twinkling leaves a source of constant conversation. Lightning again. My time without you unfolds as if it shouldn't be happening. I dream about a little house where we have to scoot around the rooms on our bellies just to move. There is a record playing—a song about magpies—and suddenly the room is full of black birds, and it's clear to me why I left you behind. It's clear why you left in such a hurry. And I hope you make it home before the storm.

QUADRAFOIL

Dusk. Surveillance. Intoxicating mist. Something that looks like a bonnet has come over us. We sit inside of this humming, this canopy of integrated light. You are far from me in this particular structure. The windows we would have made together are irrelevant now. You didn't even take a stab at it. Distress. The littlest child chokes on her own saliva while she drifts between shadows. I can't see far enough to call it evening. Construction paper, bag full of broken crayons that smell like wet cardboard. She reminds me, "You left lightning there" and points to the vaporous sky.

The wailing. Then awaken. When I was young, they taught me how to fear the purple sunset. Now twilight and violet. I am hysterical on the inside. Some of this carries the smallest rendering of glee. What is this? Perpendicular flowering. Darkest helix reappears. If I had to describe you, I would start with your ability to move away from the light.

SPHERE

I haven't said *I* in weeks
tripping over *you* and *he* and *she*.

We carve out the careful curve.
Estrellita. Logos. Pinholes of light by
which to see.

They cancel me. I love too hardily.
Too heavily, you say.

Or maybe you didn't say that.
It could have been a dream.

You let go of patterns long ago,
but I couldn't take the wheel.

It would be only temporary. Ellipsis.
Pronouns. Transitive verbs.

They spar in the open room
avoiding the mirror.

I sing to the baby in patterns.
You are a beautiful, beautiful baby.

It's not a worse-case scenario.
I can't see myself in the mirror

from this angle. She acts as if she is hiding.
Boo. When did you come in
and turn off the light?

ELLIPSE

The one I lost
still speaks to me
sometimes, mostly whispers.
Reminding me
of her presence
in my blood.
How she dissolved
and expelled,
a puff of red smoke.
Where there was once a hole
there is now a river.
And sometimes just a hole.
Brush away
the leaf that landed
on me.
It couldn't have been a gift.
Intended for me.
Unintended trajectory.
Stream and wind
and clouds of color.
It's OK that more have landed
there, in the place
where she briefly lay.

CONE

In the moment, we pass the time with
riddles.

Every three answers: shadow.

Holes: sponge. Universal: tree.

Seasonal: fire.

Days later, we forget
until we see another family
hunched over the same riddles
quizzically. Shadows, they say,
horse shoes and seasons.

The answer is always "blanket,"
the youngest one says
as he counts backwards to himself
from 500.

PETAL

Summer is for long days,
she explains, as a ladybug lands
on her shoulder. It is picturesque.
Iconoclastic.

When she hears music, she points to her
ear—this time.
Tambourine. Silk. Kettle drum.
Peanut butter tongue.
The irresistible beam of his gaze
reflecting in the window pane.

GEOID

so many birds. we all think about the eagle.
she says, bring in your wings, bring in
your arms.
we do not know how to comply.

that is the sky. that is the black hole
he has been questioning. building from.
how.
and I say why. she says, let them drop

to the floor. we talk for hours about the
particle of dust
that was once our planet. until it collided
with others. clumps on top of clumps.

somehow I have fallen below
the floor. the grammar. it seems like
disassembly
but it is finally alignment. straight.

how, he asks, can the world really be
round?
but he knows it is. this is what makes him
move.
he moves forward. he jags like a swallow,

ignoring the ground. the earth.
he dives and swoops. he does not bring in
his arms. like a perfect teardrop, she says.

I have opened all the way. I am too busy
watching him fly. rise and fall.
wind. away again.

TRIANGLE

You ask me about the homes
made of cardboard
that we saw on vacation—
that the tour bus drove past
that Sunday afternoon
when all I could focus on
was the green slope of the hillside that
rolled like an inferno
past the shantytowns
and into the distance, into the heart
of the island. The green throbbed and
swayed with the wind
and seemed to be saying, “Stop. There is
not enough time.”
Trees. Birds. Awkward rocks dotting the
horizon.
Half dream, half memory.

But you draw my attention in, closer, to
the shacks
assembled from plywood and scrap metal,
to the naked families bathing and
swimming in the Carribean,
holding on to each other in the current,
bobbing in the green water,
to the narrowness of the road
and how we have to stop every time
another car drives by.
You ask me, months and now years later,
about the houses without roofs

that had only walls. Houses
that we could peer into
from the hillside above,
in the bright whitewash of day
that made June feel more like a person
than a time.

Even now you recall how that made you
feel,
how you wish you could lay with those
children
at night in their homes because
a house without a roof is open to the
stars.

HELIX

i.

She is learning about legends, tells a story about a boy who stands next to an active volcano and gets covered in ash and becomes a volcano himself. Transitive property of volcano, he says, as he describes that lava is really magma that comes from a crack in the earth. Unique stories. Names. Building layers on me until I erupt.

ii.

She is a difficult sort,
her body so small and slippery.
Runs warm, always shedding her sweater.
Bare arms open to the snow. She cries
when she is dropped in the powder,
cushion catches her with a “swoosh”.
It’s hard to take her seriously as she
screams,
the moment so buoyant, thin, surface.

iii.

How can I know if you are really hurt?

*You will never, ever know, she screams,
thrashing and deeper and quicksand.*

iv.

On the radio, they talk of explosions.
Music, she says, once we have surfaced.
We are both relieved and sad and covered
in dust.

v.

It is true, they have amended me, altered the logical path each word/phrase/event/report now takes. Are volcanoes born as mountains, or do they evolve into mounds, hills, mountains as each eruption compounds upon itself? Layers of ash, rock, sediment. On TV, we see a picture of a bulge on the side of the volcano. Retrospective. Taken by a tourist on a hike: they didn't see it at the time. They didn't know it was about to snow fire.

About the Author:

Mackenzie Carignan is a poet, editor, teacher, wife, and mother who lives in Broomfield, Colorado. She has a Ph.D. in Creative Writing from University of Illinois at Chicago. Her poetry has been published in *Sugar Mule*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *Fourteen Hills*, *Dusie*, and dozens of other publications. She has been part of the Dusie Kolektiv since 2004. Her first poetry collection, *A House Without a Roof Is Open to the Stars*, is forthcoming from Black Radish Books.

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