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## AN ODE TO VISION

Summon the mechanic  
to ratchet eye-lids up like a drawbridge  
across the skull's dry sockets,

the glazier to fire the frit  
into smooth discs suspended  
by calipers, slip a moonstone  
into the vault of each iris. The eyes

tether us to the names we've learned  
to call heaven and earth, oak and fire.

Here is vision's garden:

the bee, the Bob-O-Link  
and Hop Hornbeam,  
the Lammergeyer,

that magisterial bird coasting the edge  
of your perimeter. Let nothing blind

the millimeter pinholes of your pupils,  
as you peer into the gloaming  
of a day drawn down to rest;  
a rowboat bobbing at dusk,  
the shining lemons of owls' eyes  
blazing in the forest. Invite the astronomer

to marry light to your eyes,  
to meet midway behind the ivory globes  
on a bridge of lilies, and there  
to explode in a flowering of sparks;  
an ark that drifts upstream  
into the river's soft folds  
where the oarsman off-loads  
its cargo into your seams. Take heart

in the night hunter's blindness  
healed by Hyperion who hurls lumens  
across the meadows, unveiling  
dawn, a trestle of swallows.

Sight comes with the brush  
of pale fingers on feathered lash,  
life's first and last epiphany poured  
through the waterfall of the eyes.

## REMEMBERING KINGS COUNTY HOSPITAL

The compassionate gaze  
on Sir William Osler's face  
follows me from the cupola of his library.  
In these sprawling wards, on beds  
sheathed in coarse linen,  
I learned to interrogate the heart,  
to know the opening and closing  
valves, hold an ear to the lungs  
for rales and rhonchi, the signature  
sounds of a drowning chest, to palpate  
with my fingertip, a knobby liver  
beneath the ribs, hard as a hickory gall.  
To spelunk the body's caves  
by headlamp and touch, to see beyond  
the eye's pinhole, serpentine rivers running  
and the ivory cable carrying the world  
into the brain's rutted ridges.  
On that journey I became a warrior  
armed with Asclepias' staff, bound  
by Hippocrate's oath, the serpent growing  
new skin entwined around my feet.  
I took with me to New York:  
the prying ear of a stethoscope,  
a white jacket and name tag, the child  
inside me who died on the fever's  
battlefield. I carried my ashes in an urn,  
and joined one-hundred and ten interns  
in the contagious corridors of the old  
Kings County Hospital that stands  
in Brooklyn's blazing desert. Graffiti crawls  
its walls like kelp, and the wagons arrive  
screaming with their cargo of wounded men.  
Once, my feet scuffed these wards,  
my hands measured blood pressure  
and pulse, compressed the flailing chests  
until the flat-lines sang no more.  
On Flatbush Avenue the sick pile up  
on steel gurneys stacked like boxcars  
in a stockyard. *We are cattle,*  
they cry. *Help us to die.* And I press  
against the nursery glass,  
drinking in the puckered, red faces  
inhaling life, the bubbles on tiny lips.  
A lifetime ago, I drove through Brownsville,

a graveyard of fractured walls,  
pitted asphalt and shattered windows.  
I ran red lights, averted my gaze  
from dark figures warming their hands  
over can fires. Their faces vibrate  
before my eyes, black as coal miners  
pulled from a pit. Misery gathers  
this world's dead weight on their backs.  
Each night, more babies with cigarette  
burns, the elderly, gaunt and cold.  
The Lindens' leaves on the boulevard  
have turned from gold to red.  
My mother arrived in a hard snow  
to scour my room in the dentist's office  
where I lived, and brought freshly  
laundered clothes. In this wasteland  
she shone like a beacon, left a spotless  
windowsill, this tidied room,  
the orchestral bedsprings, anatomy books,  
a goose necked lamp and vitamin pills.  
No sleek, black monument honors the dead  
on Flatbush Avenue where the old men  
in the park are fed by the pigeons.  
You forget you work in a place  
where human life has no meaning,  
the hopes of the hopeless are launched  
and cast adrift. Lowell said,  
*the elected who promise to care,  
come here bright as dimes,  
and die disheveled and soft.*  
In the autumn I wander Kings County's  
corridors again, searching for Miss Sardi,  
the Sicilian nurse who tested my mettle,  
blocked my exit from intensive care,  
with mellifluous voice demanding the name  
and dose of a drug for Pedro Martinez,  
a dying man assigned to me on my first day.  
I relive a chorus of respirators sucking air, red  
diaphragms rising and falling in glass cylinders.  
*The usual,* I blurted out, bolting through the door.  
An orderly informs me that she passed away.  
From the deck of the Staten Island ferry,  
my life leans toward a kinder season,  
Ellis Island fading in the mist.

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## Reflections for April

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