

## *Planet Nine*

**Joel Toledo**

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### **How to turn a leaf over**

The elaborate gesture  
of pointing, rushing into the mind  
like sudden recognition.

We stare closely at the first photo  
of the black hole, thinking  
its back may be seen from the front.

One way to check for spiders:  
test the tautness of the web  
and follow the line to its source.

To the riverbend where  
the shadows grow longer,  
where the water is still.

Whorls of trees, cicadas waiting  
for their music to betray them.  
The grip needed to hold.

The tenderness needed  
to truly hold. All about poise,  
after all. And grace.

The science that traces  
edges, smudges them.  
Snapped twigs underfoot.

A centipede, dead grass  
where the shade once was,  
the leaf now in your hand.

Until each act becomes  
a way into the interior. Until  
even the soul is overturned.



“Black hole - Messier 87” by Event Horizon Telescope is licensed under CC BY 4.0

## Sea Level

Where are those giants  
 they claim live under the sea?  
 All that have been found  
 are fixed points. The wreck  
 of the *Titanic*, Mariana trench  
 in the Philippine Deep,  
 the afterglow in seaweeds  
 before the canopy of boats  
 in what the Chinese call  
 Nánshā Qúndǎo,  
 the Spratly Islands. This translation  
 is inside parentheses  
 when Googled, as though  
 a show of primacy over  
 the other countries  
 laying claim to the territory.  
 It's called Kapuluan ng Kalayaan  
 in Filipino, though nobody  
 really calls it that here.  
 But I remember seeing  
 a photo of my father there.  
 He was wearing the white banner  
 of his shirt on the shore.  
 His hand on his hip, you'd think  
 he was some Spanish conquistador.  
 But the old world has gone  
 with its alchemies and sepias.  
 Someone tweets about the labor  
 of farming clams or fresh pavements  
 and radar systems. But we could be  
 happier—count the hearts

of an octopus, hide inside the mouths  
of whales. Where are they, these titans?  
If nothing but seabed and rusted anchors  
in the end, we could just continue  
holding on to water, claiming it.

### **Maria by the Window**

No harm in looking at Gayle, slumped  
beautifully in a corner, considering  
someone's foot or the train floor.  
The window settles the dark outside,  
and sharp shadows define the painting's  
geometries. It's all about the framing,  
you might say. The good light on her legs,  
the fine pastels of chairs and her dress.  
It is a kimono, if you insist, and this  
is a train in Japan after the rush hour.  
Maria, too, sits by the window,  
dark hair bathed in smudges of orange,  
and Gayle is all over the place:  
staining the canvas's sharp edges,  
in the center, standing next to you  
and smiling. Because not everything  
needs to be coated in grief.  
Even the doomed come back,  
their small, ignited movements  
dispelling the streaks of rust.  
And you must stagger a little  
as you reach your stop, hold tight  
those curved handrails in the back.

After Edward Hopper's *Gayle on the F Train*

**Planet Nine**

“In 2016, a pair of astronomers made an exciting announcement: There might be a hidden planet about ten times the size of Earth lurking somewhere in the most distant part of our solar system, waiting to be discovered. They dubbed this hypothetical world ‘Planet Nine’ and have been looking for it ever since.”  
—*Popular Mechanics*, 2019

do we hear it or not  
when a tree falls  
in a forest with  
no one to notice it  
did it really fall  
was it even a tree  
an insect flapping  
its wings some bloom

beetles upon beetles  
in a Rorschach test  
in the Mandelbrot set  
randomize all you want  
perhaps we can't see into  
what things mean  
the math behind  
the self's insistence

on replicating itself  
in the arteries dunes  
clouds the howling  
inside a conch shell  
doesn't matter collapsing  
into a black hole  
the pull of an orbit  
if we can't locate it

order chaos  
the loop  
like dreaming of your mother  
years dead  
straight nights  
for no good reason  
other than it's complex  
other than it's simple

**The Town**

Not all that curls up  
is afraid. A sleeping spider  
behind the leaf, the man  
who hasn't eaten for days,  
another suspect supposed  
to have a gun. Meanwhile,

we tarry too long  
in our allegiances.  
We could do with a visit  
to the river to cleanse ourselves,  
hands raised not in surrender  
nor supplication but

clutching broken shells, sand.  
No matter how much slips through,  
we'll still end up with a fist.  
Bring it back, the polish  
and finesse of stones,  
where we see ourselves

mirrored in the narrative  
of what hovers: dark clouds,  
arrows in mid-flight. In a dream,  
the water rose and swallowed  
the town. In another, nothing more  
than murmurs and night noises.



## Transistor

We have little to work with, sonnet.  
Chipped carousel horses, reel music  
whose tin-can reach is so poor.  
A fountain would be nice, but we can't  
get to it. The headlines insist on staying put,  
on managing the disarray on our own.  
Meanwhile, we keep dialing into static.  
Into *dirges in the dark* (but dirges, too,  
in daytime). In the dream, our pockets  
are brimming with token and every tree  
has verses draped on the branches.  
*14 joys and a need to merry.*  
We are still spinning, little song. And  
we can keep such an awesome orbit.

*For Johanna*

**Wrong Songhits Lyrics**

*There were voices down the corridor*

*I heard the horses say ...*

—“Hotel California,” The Eagles

I’ve once read that  
to sleep better, you’ve to try  
listening to white noise.

It’s all about what the line  
doesn’t need: ornamentals,  
heartbreak, perfect recounting

of some summer. Try not  
to round off the edges  
nor dig too deep into

the chipped stones.  
You can crush all flowers;  
The Earth will not cease

from rotating. Consider instead  
the trees: the random sway,  
innumerable leaves, and that secret

you carved on one bark  
in your youth. Evenings  
you can always go back

to the things that hurt you.  
The humming doesn’t have  
to persist, said an apple tree

in an old garden. We try  
carpentry and just mess stuff  
up; our hands are too shaky

for scissors. Some instead listen  
to static and jot down  
the syllables. There never is

any error here: The idea is  
to mishear and smash unembarrassed  
onto clear glass doors. And not mix

the metaphors.