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Christopher Bernard

Three Poems

Fireworks at Midnight

A throw of lights  
like a burning stole across a black sky  
dropped behind it like velvet  
and thunder pops

(the crowd swoons)

ignited spiders  
instantaneous umbrellas  
swooning butterflies  
a stampede of Clydesdales off the dark barges  
with manes aflame

(sweaty paradiddle on humongous drums!)  
ghosts of ice and flaring cherry blossoms  
soaring in freefall cloudwards

but there are no clouds!

(the crowd raves)

opening like a crowd of babies' fists  
over astonished water  
boom boom crack crack BOOM  
mauve yellow royal blue crimson  
crayon green  
smeared on fog  
then gone

no wait!

enticements of geese gagging by in hundreds  
cackling like all artillery  
tossed decks of dazzling cards  
telling a future nobody knows  
locomotive choochoo dashes after  
what widening ring!  
soars

hey there!  
what a hugemandious moth!

hop!  
BOOM  
a rabbit! no a tiger! no a teapot! no a swan! no  
a hairnet of stars disintegrating like cigarette ashes  
flicked nonchalantly from the sparkling lips  
of the cars  
crack BOOM

sugar in my tea dissolving thusly wow look at *that* one!  
zipping mice  
spilled spelled spoiled spooled spulled spalled aw!

whooshed

to a little

quiet

(the crowd

stills)

then

(MIGHTY) lightning crash boom crack thunder

(MIGHTY) riot roaring dancing (MIGHTY)

mob singing beacons yelling shouting dancing (MIGHTY)

MIGHTY clashing of every parade in the universe parading!

BOOM CRACK CRASH BOOM BOOM CRACK BOOM

CRACK BOOM BOOM CRACK BOOM CRASH BOOM BOOM

BOO BOOM

oh the silence and darkness after that

oh the silence and the darkness after that

how you dragonfly

across the bees

across the flickering

across the stars

of the tide

## The Seagull

Its head twisted painfully back, as though

trying to avoid a blow, the beak

tucked near a wing, curled up

in a shocked white loop, its eyes

pressed shut in a kind of

wild disbelief, the gull

lay near the city curb

in the winter afternoon. Crowds passed it by,  
ignored it, dashed across traffic, waited,  
impatient, for the light, waved down cab and Lyft,  
bickered, stared, hastened, as the afternoon  
waned to evening and the neon danced and the bars  
sang like sirens and the girls pretended  
to laugh at the boys' jokes and smartphones glowed like fire  
in the ancient caves, and the walls of Thebes  
and burning Troy, and Rome, and burning  
Constantinople, Mycenae's tombs,  
Tikal and Quetzalcoatl's courts,  
Knossos' labyrinth, Minos' throne,  
Palmyra's temples, the towers of Qom,  
flickered in the seagull's eye  
as it closed in a wild disbelief,  
and the gathering shadows under the seagull's wings  
as it flew down the road,  
screaming in anger as the road rose like a hand  
and pulled it to its cold hard face  
of oil and tar and cement and space.

"Why is it sleeping in the street?" a child  
standing on the curb asked its mother,  
but she didn't answer, the light turned, she took the child's hand,  
and mother and child raced across the street.

## The Uncertain Hour

Fog, sunless  
resonant from the towers

the ships close like a fan  
my dreaming sons and daughters  
the streets hide in the alleys  
quietly teasing each other

honey on a slice of bread  
her face leaning into the night

where will I find you? in the clouds  
how will I know you? from the hour  
what will be your sign?

a scattering of footsteps as the children run

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Christopher Bernard is a founder and co-editor of *Caveat Lector*. His new novel, *Meditations on Love and Catastrophe at The Liars' Café*, was published in January 2020.