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The First Job on a Morning to be Played by Ear
The Terrible Spaces: A Note to Pascal
Walking Home
The Hazards of Hearing an Explosion in Broad Daylight Sung

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FIVE POEMS by Emmanuel Torres*The First Job as a Morning
To Be Played by Ear*

Whistling down the stairs toward your first job,
you fill your head with tunes
that shine like buckles and medallions
to be rubbed with your thumb for luck.

You may not reason with a door whose knob
does not explain what steps to take
toward the raw deal by noon. The hand
that hesitates before the knob

darkens suddenly, appears not to be
your own, as if it would discover
a secret passage to the sea.
But what the door actually opens to

is only the sun in your frontyard, as
your eyes ache with too much brightness
and the dew upon the bud tightens
like sweat under your collar. The snail,

antlered, probes the bare
light before its path. Light
in the windy trees maintains its balance
with each shifting of a leaf.

The flight of birds in windshaken air
has the simple gesture of guesswork.
Already the corner of the block you live in
sharpenes for the daily accident.

But at the eight o'clock siren that shrills
through your skin and under your shadow,
people move forward in the thickening town,
with the breath of innocence upon

their forehead, soft ash upon
their sleeves. You begin to pull toward you,
formal as time ticking on your wrist,
the hazards of the morning like a loosely fitted coat.

The Terrible Spaces: A Note to Pascal

No, not the wide still
Spaces between the eternal stars
Move me. The near chill
Spaces, between houses graying dust —
Between unimportant lovers
Divided by lust —
Between the widowed old
Who stop outside windows
Of homes unspeakably cold
And colder than stone —
Between ashfallen newspapers
Like loose leaves blown
About and the thoroughfare
Afraid of addresses — such spaces
Whelm me, make me most aware
Of this world, my solitude,
Nobody's remorse. In the midst
Of here and now have long stood
Tables of separation
That prove my narrow thesis
On the terrible spaces, on
The distances between brother
And brother, friend and
Friend, paling to each other
Like ghosts, between face
And face growing dim and dimmer
As speech losing salt. Even at Mass
This Sunday, despite
The rose window's crushed-jewel
Splendor of light,
An apartness widens the air

Between the sermon and those
 Whose minds are somewhere
Else. The table of the holy sacrifice
 Might as well be bare.
To nobody's surprise
 The superb host, raised high,
Is a sun, alone. Like Newton.
 In a numbing nothingness, the sky.

Walking Home

At midnight I and a stranger drowse
toward separate homes.
The crunch of small stones underfoot
remind us how far we are

from each other, although our shadows
would include each other more
than once, streaming forward
from the streetlight behind us

brightening the loneliness
of the steps toward sleep.
At the fork of the road, we part
ways, deepening into night.

How we are closer now
brothered by night's darkness and beasts
of solitude on all fours.
Each bush is thick with shadowbrows

of thieves and the unloved wind
wantons my hair to let me in
on its curious passion
for prodigals. As from trees stones

harden away and from stones my heels,
I think of what I have done,
or not done, of what I am supposed
to repent to the night that has

small power to absolve. Frogs
croak across my wayfaring,
persisting upon my will to walk
not past the life whose sakes

could be mine to share piecemeal out
to others. Stars are in their places,
naturally, and have nothing to give,
only beauty, although I have

wronged lives and my own least name
walking more than miles
away from those I would love
and strangers to whom I have given

false directions. Yet I take
courage from one lightbulb
left burning at the backdoor
of a house no batwing black

can foul, cancelling all thought
of stars, their strange violence
and stranger absences.

It will not blur in my storm:

one light godfathering
tracks back to worn thresholds,
not furthering the cause of darkness
in, but my makeshift life,

another only try
to brighten the four corners
of what I have and set straight
my room's several wayward lines.

The Hazards of Hearing an Explosion in Broad Daylight

A loud thunder comes from far
 Away. Frames of windows frailly shake.
 It is a sound much heard before, and the fear
 That overtakes the quiet mind
 Reading philosophy or preparing to compose a letter
 Is hardly new.

The fear dissipates. Other sounds
 Steady the quivering filaments of the stunned
 Room. In the streets citizens walk free,
 Pretending not to have heard . . . it is the sound
 Of builders blasting for a new homesite, not
 The cannon's cold appeal.

It is not so much Asia's lush jungles
 Gray with gunmetal nor the swarm
 Of hungry mouths, Asia's children's, chill
 The bone, as something striped in its long
 Spell of captivity trying to break into
 A sudden air.

What the gunshaken air says is dark:
 The delicate scaffolds of persuasion
 Must in the end come down. My dear, must light
 Be clenched into a fist until
 It is clay? Must the lock that will not give in be
 Forced ruthlessly?

Nothing is more terrible to recall
 Than a doorknob rattling as it is turned
 Again, again. Waiting alone in a room
 Full of books, locked up in one's own sweat
 For a letter to write itself out could make the mind
 Crumple its quietness.

The least sound of rain splashing
 Upon the trees could cause the lyric
Cry to happen. From all the unread books
 Of the world ideas of order, joy,
And consummated love would give off a blinding
 Summary blaze.

Words in a letter likely to draw no
 Answer would rain down in lines of light.
Tearing down a row of condemned houses
 Is not as loud as the angels' impatience
And the emptiness of an idealist's swivel chair
 Turning in the wind.

Sung

The greenglaze
Of a Sung bowl held out in the light
Repeats a sea
On which the haze
Sloping from hills hangs
Like still breath. The shape
Glowing round within the hollow
Of two hands
Is an overflow
Of a silence that is bare and whole.
O it is
A bright achieved silence that sustains
The morning's
Amaze of light live
Upon all wet and dark.
It holds
An air's
Poise-upon-the-edges-of-things.
A flawless
Silence it is can catch so roundly
A gaze
From the thick of crowds
And survive
Clamors of the wilderness and the loud
Vanity
Of open wounds.