

Cloud Studies

a sonnet sequence

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Contents

1. Cumulonimbus
2. Cirrus
3. Cirrostratus
4. Tail Clouds
5. Orphan Anvils
6. Crepuscular Rays
7. Iridescence
8. Noctilucent Clouds
9. Nimbostratus
10. Altostratus
11. Lenticularis
12. Tornado

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Cumulonimbus

The walls are no retreat. The atmosphere
is spawning supercells, yet I'm afraid
of lightning, angels laughing, insincere
voices on the wind. I masquerade
like everybody else, pretend that here
god's spirits will pass over, serenade
my door with rain or snow and nothing more,
but certainty is foolish: I smear the wood
with blood and watch it dry until the sun
is dead. Perhaps I have misunderstood.
At times the silence overwhelms. Undone,
I stand half-in, half-out the open door
and search for anvils in the darkened sky,
praying thunderstorms will pass us by.

Cirrus

I fly away. The airplane seems too cold
despite the blanket, perhaps the chilly air
outside is seeping in. I just can't hold
my body still because your last affair
broke something loose inside. Uncontrolled
desire lacerates like ice when hair
that's not my own, some other body's gold-
en strands are wound around your wrist. I swear
I'm done with this, our togetherness unfolded,
a shabby sock thrown out. Peace. I repair
myself. I stare into the rainless sky
for something: maybe god, or hope, goodbye
to all that crap, but nothing sharp appears,
just cirrus clouding all that blue with tears.

Cirrostratus

Last night I saw ten angels die. I dreamed
their halos slipped into the sun and grief
disarmed their wings. The devastation seemed
expected: seven of them smiled, relief
embroidered on their faces, strangely pure.
I cried but couldn't wake in time to keep
a single feather safe. What was the lure
of this descent into the void? What deep
awareness of futility could spur
them into hell, aware but not dismayed?
This morning ached like sorrow: saboteur
extraordinaire. Ten angels fell. Decayed.
Cirrostratus camouflaged the sun
like fragile wings too easily undone.

Tail Clouds

She walked too fast. Beside the wall of stones
the trail grew dim and then the rain appeared
as though from nowhere. Hail fell like bones
then decomposed into the mud. I feared
the distance thrown between us, feared the lost
footsteps, the broken words we cast against
the ground. Above me clouds turned dark, the cost
of desolation manifest, condensed
into a fundamental violence. She flees,
I follow. This is how the story goes—
the useless drugs, the obstinate disease
that wins again, again, until it blows
us both apart. And yet, I follow, still
sanguine despite the wet, the wretched chill.

Orphan Anvils

The lightning hit so close I could not see
for sure the devastation. I waited, needing
the storm to go away. I feared debris
had trashed the yard again. Instead, receding
thunder marked the end. No guarantee
of safety. This is how we part, misreading
love for refuge. Really all we had
was pleasure, little moments here and there.
Tomorrow you will go and I'll be glad—
or maybe not. We won't look back or swear
to write. For now, the sky's blue is clad
in dissipating anvils, disappear-
ing storms. Outside you pick up broken sticks.
Inside, I mourn the bond I could not fix.

Crepuscular Rays

When twilight spins her glow upon the sky
the carp begin to dream, as though their fins
were wings, their pond a universe. *Goodbye,*
goodbye, the largest sings then flips and spins
across the dark horizon. Soon the rest
are skimming too, like seraphs on the rays
of paradise. Inside you get undressed,
turn down the bed, thinking of the day's
distractions: bills, the news, a broken light
and all the while your angels spread their wings
four feet away. The water, smooth as night,
lies quiet in the ground: no coiling rings
reveal the secret of the dreaming koi,
no ripple dissipates their hidden joy.

Iridescence

You are not to blame. We separate.
We jump in the river, flailing, sink along
the slippery shore. Angels come too late.
Iridescence decorates the wrong
sky. I close my eyes against the sting
of antiseptic. Plastic tubing smells
forever. We pretend that everything
will be all right. His brother gathers shells
as though the sound of water matters. I
cry when no one knows. My darling son,
can you see the rainbows in the sky?
Perhaps. I know the morphine has not run
its course. The river beckons. I will keep
your dreams safe, my little boy. Just sleep.

Noctilucent Clouds

Just as you take my hand, the sun descends
and darkness hides your face. Behind our trees
the evening star walks into place, transcends
this ordinary space, like Japanese
haiku: the simple hides the complicated.
We've stood like this a thousand times, and yet
you pause, then touch me with such understated
grace I cannot speak. I'll not forget
this joy, your swift embrace, the way you kiss —
like loss is just a minute's stroll below
the dusk. I close my eyes, remember bliss
is volatile, while high above our slow
meander, noctilucent clouds slip by
like fragile origami in the sky.

Nimbostratus

Today you said, *sometimes it snows in April*,
and I remembered listening to that song,
the sadness I could not forget, the spill
of grief I didn't understand so long
ago. Twenty-three years later snow
has decorated every bloom outside.
Beneath the nimbostratus, flowers show
their strength: they bend but do not break. Inside
I contemplate the view and think, *the best
clichés survive because they're true*. But still,
I know that sorrow lingers, often dressed
in subterfuge, fooling all until
one day the snowflakes bury everything
in anguish like a funeral in spring.

Altostratus

In this mad world the drizzle doesn't reach
the ground. I close my eyes and murmur psalms
of love, but prayers are never easy, speech
so often fractured as I fold my palms
like scripture: smooth the wrinkles, tuck the thumbs
together. Cupped inside, stigmata close
their lips, refuse to speak despite the drums,
the passion in the garden where the rose
is counting thorns like silver coins. The rain,
in limbo, contemplates delay. *Forgive,*
forgive, she cried as she lay dying. Pain
dismantles sanity, the will to live,
but I remember how she loved to sing
and light a candle for her every spring.

Lenticularis

As the wind rolls down the wooded bluff,
lenticularis form like UFOs
clinging to the roof of Earth. Enough
of us believe it's possible—suppose
that aliens had come, that we are here
because a thousand years ago a race
of beings left behind a seed, a mere
spark of efflorescence. Now our place
of genesis is touched again with god,
how bizarre to think that's just a cloud
atop a mountain, water forming odd
shapes with air. If only we could crowd
inside and fly away. Become the strange.
Visit other worlds to kindle change.

Tornado

I never really thought a storm could break
apart our home, but after years of cracked
doorways, shifting floors, there's no mistake:
that one disastrous wind swept in, compact
and pissed. It smashed our phony life to bits.
I wanted more than rainy days and long
walks into the fog. Your bitter fits
got worse. Empty bottles aren't a strong
foundation. Too much sand, the mortar rots.
Then the storm's rotation spawned a wind
we could not face together. All my knots
unraveled all at once. I cried, you grinned,
the devil slammed your truck upon the deck.
A pity roses bloom beneath the wreck.

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About the author

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About the editor/publisher

Nic Sebastian is the founder-editor of *Whale Sound*, an online audio poetry journal that features her readings of the work of web-active contemporary poets. *Whale Sound Audio Chapbooks* was established in November 2010 and, in addition to *Cloud Studies* by Christine Klocek-Lim (<http://wschap3.wordpress.com>), has published:

- *Handmade Boats* by H.K. Hummel (<http://wschap1.wordpress.com>)
- *Studies in Monogamy* by Nicelle Davis (<http://wschap2.wordpress.com>)