

the repetitive call of what if

a poem for salvaging in seven parts

i

What does it mean to want to call
and not want to call
and to want to not-call
and to want to be called for a change
in order to be called changed
and to resent not being
called to change
and yet, also,
to feel uncalled-for
by the call to change?

Or, under the covers, to clutch at Signal
half-asleep, uncovered, unrecovered,
press the screen to my cheek,
choke up eagerly, only to find out
the call was coming
from inside the house?

How is a call to change named shame,
named penance, named chastisement?
How does one say

“what if”

without reproach? The root of

chastise is to make pure.

The impossibility of that—is that
what repels and not
the call for change?

When the chase was
always-already unchaste,
why bother to chasten?
Why hasten to listen
when there's no face to save?
What's to rappel down absent a stony face?

when one's gut is this historied out. Gut it; hollow this history out.

iii

I could build a container to carry this being,

(a container I will refer to
insufferably as a vessel
before this missive's severed)

a container to hold all, though we were never
about completeness; we were never to be whole. Were never to be "we" for that matter.
Whole only as wasps' nests are whole,
Whole only as a figful of wasp and a mouthful
of fig and the hard stonefruit pit of a date against enamel
creates a mouthfeel (resist discussing JAV sapphic spit-swap)
stung numb by the sweetness of it
crunching insectile limbs and carapace
like skittering little agua fresca ice cubes drained of sweet fizz and drool,
dazzling like the little jewel glued to your smile

I stand in your considered thoughts

also broken, also medicated, also burst-spurting with
untourniqueted life, with buspar as my sparring partner,
torn, détourned, also unknown, extending
one sentence—here, I am here.
As I've known you, as I'll never know you,

I am here. Whatever is
being expressed . . . what if
I perforate my prose poetry
with abstraction to quiz you on stylistics,
test your community-college studiousness, what if
I encode my caesuras with Nietzschean gambits
—Nimzowitsch, Slav Defense, Four-Knights Game—enjamb bits
of myself undressed, ugly, slumped on the picnic bench, sunburnt through pineshade, sweaty:
I am here awaiting, waiting for you to outsmart me again,
to make the move I didn't see coming
I am here waiting, waiting for you
in the what if, in the questions,
in the conditionals, in the low-rise denim and baby blue g-string,

turned back toward me, eyes glittering with warm disgust, eyes impairing me, imploring me in the imperatives—what if.

iv

What if over slow earl gray fortified with powders and powdered instant coffee,
what if in the benthic depth of your laugh, which occurs at inappropriate times,
what if in between foraged sun-warmed berries and sold sex,
between cocaine clientele bookings, dog shock collars and ass-ruining bumps of birthday molly,
what if inside a stolen hollowed-out poem, between hotwired lines of prose, what if on our
walks,
what if behind the glass showcase on the gold-plated butterfly knife and sharpened antlers,
what if on the tidy patio under smog-filtered sunlight with a glassful of ice-cold Berkey, what if
in the long yawn of Emeryville, what if in the unanimous night or the abdominal mid-day
or the nape of the wait, what if in the passage between smut to a fistful of chest,
in the protracted patience named endurance, what if in choice suffering, what if
in the “what if” that carries us each day between equinoxes and into cybernetic hybernation,
what if in a rib-shattering turning side kick
driven through the hips and correctly positioned dug-in heels,
such that it makes your curly ponytail bounce on impact,
what if in the sewage of renewed resilience, what if in the gruesome fantasy of endlessness,
what if in your practical predictable little BDSM heaven,
what if in a lifetime of disorganization and disposability, what if
in the fetish of disorder and compulsive orthosexuality,
frenzied preoccupation with alignment, what if:
not-susceptible to therapeutic interventions,
what if in the cavity of psychoanalysis, what if
in laconic languor, autochthonic anger, what if
in the clarity of of absence, what if in the abscess
of consciousness, what if nothing changes?

v

What if you are responsible to hardening more than to changing?
What if some of trauma’s excess energies cannot be

revivified

or else vivisected via the operation of traumatophilia?
Which hurts are intelligible? Which are ineligible to be chrysalis-
compressed toward transformation? Which violences are encysted
And which are encrusted and for which am I insisting

To be the one to whom they are entrusted?
What difference does it make who's got a handful
of your soft belly, a mouthful of your piercings?
What difference does it make whose pockets provide
you or me with a handful of cash or a handful of keys
for our soft finger pads to push and produce poetry?
What difference does it make who pulls you inside out, exposing your darkness?

What if you're the destruction coursing beneath
poured concrete? What if you're the corroding thread,
the fabric of your enemies' lives shot through with it?
What do I make of unraveling, of stray threads, of fray?
Take a lighter to it, watch it curl away
In brief strands of smoke. What do I do with a throatful of Thanatos?
Where Eros errs and bolts an eerie silence onto the slabs of air
in your chest, where does that leave instinct?
Who holds you after the bully scene goes awry?
How many overeager overtures must you endure?
How many more stanzas can you stand?

Paraflorally wistful for bygone florid delusion,
you say, if fascist sadist H had not . . . not that he could have . . .
or if it seemed like not enough . . . you would have . . .
but you didn't . . . couldn't have . . . I couldn't either . . .
not that I could have . . . can't be truly jealous of someone truly unknown . . .

What if—the repetitive call of “what if”—is only considered repetitive
when what if leaves my lips, when what if is uttered
undeterred, by the unheard, and what if
what if is the cement of insistence
when you insist what if this is.

vi

What if the following was an acceptable question:
What is it we want to keep conscious, to stay known, even as we
say, each in our own way, I so love I know no love I know
I shrink I'm asked I'm masked I mask my mass
I'm also I react I smell I feel I keen I keel I think I've been told I remember I
see I didn't I thought I felt I failed I fold I suspect I was doing I'm sure

I read I needed I wouldn't I was I should've I felt I could have I
never I'm sure I'm sore I'm sour I ask I apologize I crave a second chance I collect I
pile on I am desperate to repair to amend to add to fix I
press pneumatic fixative and fixate ratchet-strap tight and bathe you
in my earned-secure silence, long liquid latex sheets of stretchy
wet-look silence, glittering braided cords of high-dollar fiber-optic silence . . .

You say and I say but what
is it we are telling, what is it

we are wanting to know about here?

That gets/stays unknown now
because there is no telling . . .
there is no we
no coregulation or cocreation,
only the blessed freedom and security
that can come from
corruscating corrosion
sacred safety in severance.

vii

What if what I want from you is new, newly made
a new sentence in response to all my unanswerable questions,

a swerve in our "relation" and the words that carry us
a new root-bundle of nerves to canal
and worlds we carry and the caries, the cavities,
the care that carries. I am here, without the shrug,
gopnik squatted just in case it could make you grin,
attempting to understand how what I want
and what I want from you run parallel
or parallax or paralyzed or imperiled,
I sit still. Silent and shivering at the outdoor rave.

"What if" is what I know won't be answered,
And I press you still and so I still sit still. Show you I care
About you more than I care about
Getting care from you or being seen by you

Or hearing from you again. What if.

How does one say

what if

without reproach? The root

of jouissance is to take pleasure.

The impossibility of that, now—is that
what repels, delays, belays, repulses, and not

the call for change?

I will not receive a call
and I will not call,
for a change.

When the change was
always-already unchanged,
when the decision was readymade
you still bother to lift your front wheel up
embrace the ground, impress the asphalt
and let your palms brightly abrade.
Why fasten bandages to glistening wounds?
Why bother with signal-salve
when there's no Us to salvage?
Trust that the two was never truly of Us
nor that we're kin of kink, nor clay-compressed,
no trust-knots to be trussed.
But please, let our vessels communicate
One last time, not lost in lust
But in the less precious and more daring
“what-if” of the unconcussed.
Let the “what-if” spill out —oceanic, glacial, melted, glacial, oceanic—
of the unlimited container,
excess unbound tidal energy, excitatory
risk potential calmed and cooled
kinetically and pooled to become common
excretion, excretory poetry.