

In the Night Field

Cameron McGill

Augury Books • Brooklyn, New York

In the Night Field

© 2021 Cameron McGill

ISBN-13: 978-1-936767-65-6

Cover design by Adam Bohannon. Edited by Kate Angus.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced by any means existing or to be developed in the future without written consent by the publisher.

Published in the United States of America by:

Augury Books

154 N 9th St #1

Brooklyn, NY 11249

WWW.AUGURYBOOKS.COM

INFO@AUGURYBOOKS.COM

Distributed to the trade by Small Press Distribution / SPD

WWW.SPDBOOKS.ORG

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: McGill, Cameron, author.

Title: In the night field / by Cameron McGill.

Description: First edition. | Brooklyn, NY : Augury Books, [2021] |

Summary: "The debut poetry collection from writer and musician Cameron McGill"-- Provided by publisher.

Identifiers: LCCN 2020057207 (print) | LCCN 2020057208 (ebook)

| ISBN 9781936767656 (paperback) | ISBN 9781936767663 (ebook)

Subjects: LCGFT: Poetry.

Classification: LCC PS3613.C4817 I5 2021 (print) | LCC PS3613.

C4817 (ebook) | DDC 811/.6--dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2020057207>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2020057208>

FIRST EDITION

for my mother, and for my father

*The piano stands there in the dark
like a boy with an orchid.*

-C.D. Wright

44.6336° N, 86.2345° W

Michigan open your dark umbrella
your benzedrined night sky

Give me the mind slipping from my hands
gravel roads beyond county lines & the rain's understanding
Where I am full as a pupil & miniature
in the moonlight I have come home

This house in cloudshadow is language
is I empty my pockets & my life
There are twelve rivers inside my body
I drown in eleven of them One
brings me to you

I keep a small light where the madmen can't
touch it The dogs can't touch it

The dock's thin arm reaching to the lake drops the moon like a yolk
I let go the dark that you would come
take me by the hand to a field
I wait now among a stand of pines
so that anywhere I go will be a clearing

40.1164° N, 88.2434° W

I think of youth as one long summer
incorrectly Mornings the gray of a horse's pink tongue
Farmers calling in the corn from Thomasboro
surrounded by harvests tall as men gaunting doorways
of train stations sunburnt & matchless at Logan & Water

I've grown away
slowly like a fingernail Where is my sister
in her torrential blond Running skinny in the yard
with the neighbor boy who'd later hang himself

How I didn't try to love him
who torpedoed by sadness & psychiatry chased me home
yelling all his mind at the street
The decrepit limousine our lives had been

Here is a promise the length of my body
that you will take me like a silo of smoke leaving
the cigarette in my father's hand

The dreams I had forgive me
When spring's tornadoes came we raced
with paper to the basement
& drew them

MOONFLOWER

I think of you where the forest swallows light,
where crosses on the highway are religion's limits.
The deer carcass calls to the crows.
Tires on wet pavement scatter them
to what lent-purple light is left in the west.
They settle in eaves like vowels from the dead.
This awful forest, home to dark engines—
to those who speak in hoarded consonants,
to *Spring*, which isn't Latin for *things un-die*.
What are you growing in me, God,
where your green apron darkens?
Did I always close to the sun
before there even was one?

44.6336° N, 86.2345° W

This is not a nightmare this is how the world looks
in a forest at night phantasmagoric
in the canopy The sound of sleet ticking
on bark that quakes like tuning forks
in the crowns of pine Crowns like the heads of waves
seen by no one

but my father & me
In the four o'clock dark a fluency of branches
swimming at the window means I wake in blue
The room a vanity with rain on it

Downstairs he rises with his cough
His small lamp hung in the dark Who smokes must be
talking to himself There is a freighter skulking full of ore
pounding sleepknots to Charlevoix

This distant country called me home
Why have I only brought it adjectives

I try to sleep
She is not next to me I cannot put my hand on her back
I have only a stormful of trees in the dark

AFTER WORK

My father split his attention
with an icepick. Crushed four fingers
of a tumbler, lit ten cigarettes
like birthday candles, blew them out.

He offered me the olives—each round
bitter, salt and ethyl on my tongue—a truce
without words. I understood

what was agreed upon
those nights when two
unlikely things were forced together—
I slipped the slick red hearts from their cavities.
I was a kid; I was helping.

44.6336° N, 86.2345° W

Morning expands one rib at a time
speaks through the pinktops of pines On the porch
I write to a friend whose mother has passed
Blue fog is a doe that startles
at my cough I drink black water from its eye

This isn't about halfdreamt things
The veil over the lake about to boil a man
It's too quiet to answer anything but the tonguecolors
of the east fernlight slices from a mandoline

My words are bad acreage
I think of taking my friend's grief holding it
above my head & wading out It is clear I can see the sand
I tell myself this is helping this is what the heart looks like working

Each step the outbreath
There is a boat & a man moving his line
To the still dark he's throwing longer & longer threads

40.1164° N, 88.2434° W

I don't care what you say the moon
was a fishhook catching the lip of an orange slice
I wore over my teeth The stars
porchlights on strange & unnamed mountains
pulled at the stitching of dogwoods or my mouth

which spelled the corduroy of peeling paint
on a First Street balcony I dreamt
large wrecks rising slowly from the Great Lakes
satellites hot & sinking
in the grand marble halls of train stations

I used to think street names took you there—
Colorado Paris Ashley I believed this
as hot air balloons lifted over Champaign as I watched
for the pulling of the chaindownfire & the rise
of lanterns in the dark to Europe
Thomasboro Rantoul Everywhere

a green ocean of backyard My mind
like the spine of a splayed book I was young
the way a glass of water bends a spoon
The way aphids in moonlight are more blue
Any way

COUNTING DOWN THE ERA

The Space Race reached my body
in the *Challenger*. A classroom in Champaign.
America in the sun and ten times headed for the moon
from the Cape. That birthday candle thrusting in blue cake,
pushing earth away for seventy-three seconds.
We had just counted down. We had all counted down.

How it fireworked wrong and came apart like sun-
light daggered through the trees and windows of a house
where months before at our kitchen table
my mother on the phone using a strange voice, and me hearing
only her questions, the answers changing her face,
hung up and said her father had died.

I watched for correction—
my sister running in the yard,
clouds like chandeliers through the trees.
She existed in the garden, in dogwoods, through the sprinkler,
and in sundown on poplars at the incline of the road.
Her hair like house lights coming on over the fence.

My mother and I existed, and the fly on the table
existed in a darkness that cracked and splashed
its wet-blue-life, speckled pink like robins' eggs
dropping from the pines.

The footage of her face kept happening—
surrendering to her sadness made it mine.
Then nothing, except my sister

walking to the house not knowing anything
about dying, and my fear in beginning to understand it,
so that I knew it later in that classroom
when there was nothing again. And nothing fell.

Surely no one had survived but us.
There was a teacher on the mission, they said.
She would have been the first. A long silence—
till mine, with hair on fire and a voice swallowing
all of the Atlantic, told me to turn it off.

41.9740° N, 87.6782° W

I'm less the buildings I used to live in
& more the strangers passing in their windows—
the woman dancing with her baby holding him high
a man carrying laundry to the bedroom with a beer

I return your shadow
to where I found it in me beside chimneys
on Damen Avenue in an alley piling breath into January

I live in too much silence—
there needs to be someone in the car the room the bed The world
in its heartbreak of mastery wants me undone

To come here knowing nothing
should want to speak except the wind & frost on the grass
in shadows of trees on Winnemac This all starts to sound the same—
the city the block
my assurances The deficits they make of memory

Yesterday I met the woman I'd lived with for years
My remembering a bath
her knees islands in the cooling water I'm afraid
describing things ruins them That's not true It was me
who asked what the body wanted & didn't
listen for the answer

DRUNK WITH ZODIAC

for Cyd

Taurus charges in the dark like Oregon,
horns the width of this beer with a moon.

I forget where I live, keep repeating your name.
Its gray dissolve in rain at night is fair.

Paradise Ridge fogged in breath, my bad health
and the pines' ice-lungs. Orion is a butterfly

turned on its wing, pinned against boredom
and black paper. Our bodies cut askew,

shiver up and to the west, ricocheted
and charcoal-burnt as maps. The myth

of beasts unseen, animations on the night:

Fronds of bracken hung like hair
of the subway cellist, legs spread and hugging;

the boxer's head thrown back,
nose bloody gushing stars; the young

woman breastfeeding who's fallen asleep;
gaunt man seated, finger raised, recalls

certain beauty of youth; your birthmark
like a thin fox torn across the sky.

And what of that shooting one—my twin
whose streak shirks blur—the runner

giving chase, whose feet cannot be seen.

46.7324° N, 117.0002° W

It's no use trying not to die in this dream
Streetlights the gold chargers
on my kitchen table My family surrounds me like statues
in East City Park Their eyes pockmarks on the sidewalk
filled with rainlight & the sleepcrawl of branches

A man smokes in his doorway downwind
on Blaine arm swinging like a singlechain thurible
Everything the size of a cathedral His eyes
bedsprings lonely bodies fall onto in dark basements
Face translucent raw as newborn rabbits

I know myself by the things that scare me
Veins humming in my hands are raised
dark roads I have been holding
tight onto everything

The night is numbered
in a forest of sharps & flats
in a register climbing wet mirrors Inside me
a silo fills with rain
I sing into it

About the Author

Cameron McGill is a poet and songwriter from Champaign, Illinois and the author of *Meridians* (Willow Springs Books). His poems have appeared in *The American Poetry Review*, *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *Grist*, *Raleigh Review*, *RHINO*, and *Western Humanities Review*. He has released seven albums, most recently *The Widow Cameron*. He teaches at Washington State University, where he serves as co-director of the Visiting Writers Series. He lives in Moscow, Idaho.