

Amy King

## Nude Descending Staircase & Other Poems

### ↵ NUDE DESCENDING STAIRCASE ↵

History is a recipe down the skeleton of my hand.  
Tattooing the parlor maid, I reach for my crescendo,  
where two plus two become a fourth canvas,  
ask the rabbits from the black holster of repetition.  
Set the top hat up; the Victrola moves much the way paint  
dries: with torpor and purpose.  
(That mockingbird nests in the fabric of chairs  
scientists think upon.) I ride in a small-haired boat,  
cocooned atop Varo wheels. Histories peel.  
She returns the checkerboard embrace of DuChamp  
rising from his hand-swan dive. They embrace  
behind memory's eight ball. Words get blue,  
a nervous-system surgery, and I swing into tiny wings  
again, the hooded woman descending nude stairs.

## ↳ MONA LISA ↵

We finger what dreams an age of textual excess.  
The subject's stain is the font that links wormhole  
nail-biting. As in the disappearing point,  
the painter sidesteps her misquoting canvas.  
She makes distant apples ripple. Paint flakes  
into actionable acoustics. Tone over time.  
Bodies over hands. In winter where skies catch fire  
with white paper blowing from windows, we turn red.  
An image is strictly a relationship. So go on; steady  
at that point of light. We wood & cotton beings  
handshake in places. The elbow keys up and down  
the back playing beneath an arm. Another nunnery  
crinkles into driftwood of sacred tumescent ivory scales.  
And then, from Medusa's womb-shaped smile,  
we heard the daughter of the minotaur playing.

## ↳ DORA MAAR ↵

Her figures function as camera keepers,  
surgeons, magicians and alchemists.  
Her people tend towards the wolfen side of things.  
Tiny fingers tell motion by machines like bones  
of fish in poultry harbor recipes under  
her watchful eye behind them.  
They cook red stews with fleshy instruments.  
She places breathless doors in walls with lungs  
that tremble the puppets who thread  
an embroidered earth's curry. When you lay  
your head gently on the hickory table,  
the stream trickles up, over your ear sockets,  
rocks across calm heads, into a mountain's maw.

Teeth you pass between greet you  
with a sheen that reality isn't. Floor tiles buckle  
by spring's gossamer weeds we seeded with sleep  
in the room's pocking light. A nature will have its out.  
Her mockingbird nests in chairs' paisley spoonfuls  
our scientists sit to distill in, embraced by  
decomposing walls into hair spiraling around them.

### ↪ WET LIGHT ↪

I hear the birds.  
I hear the laziness in my voice.  
I hear luxuriousness scatter.  
I hear chirps bereft of sails.

My shadow hurts dress hems.  
Philosophy's painting: a dark horse  
incomplete. Utopia dies and dies.  
Like the snow that has no birds is not snow.  
Not snow makes the dark come out.  
In all things, an echo and glowing dark.  
The dark also rises.

These are the heels a soul follows close on.  
You have your ways in matrimony's seas  
& I am eclipsed by suns half high,  
captions imposed like laws  
on humans that are. I hear the whale  
and stop, letting go of sight.  
Night is a load of wet light.

## ↵ LIFE AS LION ↵

I'm tired of things.

This is a confessory.

I was built by a white river  
based in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

I'm the most modern no one.

Fermented with you,

I took your language  
and returned it foreign.

We refused the truth  
out of sheer luck.

A lack of reading  
comprehension was the only  
resistance we sensed  
on the shanks of spring,  
headed towards us in thick winter.

Ours was a mythological time  
full of friendships  
with monkeys  
and beavers,  
even as the bees outside had no more  
flower access and the permafrost  
breathed lakes into fire.

We know of earth's cancer  
but go on, stapled down.  
What else is there  
but to carry this cross  
as we undress  
heavy with the milk of solace  
spilling from us?

A lap dance is not the same home  
as a lapless jungle.

The beautiful tree struggled on,  
and I roared, nearly sighing.

### ↳ HYENA CONGRESS ↳

Her skin is upholstery,  
a second sign  
that we adverbs of conceptual wars  
are archivists who  
have passed within a hair's proverb  
of being the one.  
I have known her kind.

The table of greenery bent low  
holds lush limbs  
to the fungus of anthems  
we bi-pedals consume  
in our lung flora.  
Breathless, we walk slowly with sound.  
We mobile seed-creatures,  
spreading not a whit of the natives  
who laid down with syphilis.

How the grapes are no longer  
a melatonin,  
just seeds dappling vines  
with wine that tastes of ancient times.  
Ten thousand surgery suns  
could not reflect how  
we might commune with the past.

If the adverb is true,  
the last to ask is when. But there is  
no angle from which we escape.  
The bitch retreats and sees  
from woods with charts  
what we think we decide alone.  
We are the hunted,  
our swords splitting clouds  
and healing outer space.  
Drink deeply to tiny names;  
we might still hold precious  
her blank children, our glass frames.

### ✧ DIFFICULT HONEY ✧

Let us nestle in the handshake.  
Marigold of marigold, tell me an answer,  
whichever one clouds us down our yellows.  
For example, bring music, masquerades and petals.  
Move us from messes into bas-reliefs.  
We're full frontal cameras, chairs and sofas in rows.  
The clock is a shelled thing, in eons,  
feathers stuck in a difficult honey  
under handkerchiefs for  
the world as embryonic,  
an evolution felling together as sound.  
F-sharp notes as seagulls land between us.  
Swelling caws on swollen waters ask  
for grace and cull. Our minds as savage as  
the past drift the island between us;  
one will cancel the other, and so on  
down the two-faced dominoes.  
One beach will hide another.  
Process and vinegar salt us out. Definition

is hair framing faces, how we see and are seen  
in the next mirror over. Now help me turn  
this sofa into square-pegged eggs of walking,  
singing wide your whistle-blown maestro, and  
envy her paints that read the future,  
life cut through amber angles,  
sweetly breathing in the lonesome past.

### ↪ WIND OF TRENDS ↪

I'm beginning to grow ugly:  
needle point extra.  
Stitch me up,  
crude doll serving a patchwork fancy.  
To die young is to die again,  
with either option.  
There is still love  
among the witch trials,  
and the center of the universe velvets  
bourbon and raspberries as Age  
becomes an indulgent fuck.  
Time to dilute empty minutes  
where Nostalgia isn't what it was.  
That is, what has never been but.  
What was, what never is again.  
She's a temperamental shell,  
silencing her own soul when she closes  
up. So string me up,  
light the cord, wrench my robes  
and hook nose far too long  
has it been since I sat  
beside your city's twin, worried  
you that more than one game's afoot.  
Fans flank New York City

upon fleeing L.A.'s scroll to fashion.

Cruel trade: I saved this Sunday

for grotesque thinking &

a fist that will one day land.

## Author Bio

Amy King was born in Baltimore, Maryland & currently lives in New York. She founded and curated the renowned Stain of Poetry Reading Series in Brooklyn. Of her most recent book from Litmus Press, *I Want to Make You Safe*, John Ashbery described Amy King's poems as bringing “abstractions to brilliant, jagged life, emerging into rather than out of the busyness of living.” *Safe* was one of the Boston Globe's Best Poetry Books of 2011. *The Missing Museum* is forthcoming in 2014 from Kore Press. King also teaches English & Creative Writing at [SUNY Nassau Community College](#), co-edits Poets for Living Waters, and works with [VIDA: Women in Literary Arts](#).

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