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Patterns

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Description

This piece mixes prose, poetry, and a unique form to explore the mindspace of a college student struggling to figure out the next step.

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PATTERNS

KATIE MILLIGAN

*"... neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers,
nor things present nor things to come,
nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation..."*

As I walk down the alley on my way back to my apartment, a V-formation of geese passes over my head in fluid shape, pitch against the murky sky, wings moving so slowly that I wonder how they stay airborne. The flurried, uneven chorus of squawks, layered and uncoordinated, unsettles me.

The way the wobbly arms of the V aren't straight, the way two or three geese straggle disproportionately behind the others, the way the wings don't move in-sync: it all makes me shove my fists into my pockets and draw my coat closer around myself, which furthers the chaos by adding the clanging of my keys against my leg.

Just when I think the awful squawking is fading, the noise crescendos and I crane my neck to spot two more V-formations, just as imperfect as the first. I've been cynical lately; maybe that's why these geese disturb me, make the silence around me feel like it's pressing and contracting and oozing into my ears, shattered only by the screeches. I wonder why nature gets to have set cycles, a repetitive rhythm to its flow, an

instinctual-habitual-unchangeable-perpetual-continual pattern that teaches geese to fly south and caterpillars to weave a chrysalis and tadpoles to sprout legs. Crescent-shaped sand dunes and rings to tell the age of trees and spirals in pineapples and mollusks and sunflower seed-heads. Tessellations in a boxy honeycomb and connect-the-dot constellations in the sky. Symmetry in starfish and snowflakes and Siberian tigers.

Nature is polka dots and stripes and chevron.

I'm monochromatic and blank. I'm post-Eden, feeling the heat of Gabriel's sword of flames. I am apart. I feel like I've deviated from my design, and I don't know how to get back to it.

I feel like Eve after she ate the fruit,
long hair draped over her
shoulders hunched in shame, breath
quickenning and hands shaking as she
realized what she'd done. I feel like Moses
walking out of the Red Sea, hearing the walls of
water crash back into place behind him, only to be
told soon after that he wouldn't make it out of
desert exile, that he'd never see the luscious land
flowing with milk and honey. I feel like Daniel, a
sojourner in a strange land, refusing idol-sacrificed meat
and cheese and wine and wanting more than
anything to go home.

Separation: where it all breaks down.

And maybe it's my cynicism that prompts me to question.
Maybe my lack of direction—my failure to find a pattern all my own
grooved out in the cracked pavement of the alley by some celestial hand—
for me to follow until I end up where
I'm supposed to be—where Whoever and Anyone and Everyone
intend for me to be—maybe that is the source of my cynicism.

The geese's shrieks call to me, taunting me of their superiority. They
might not have a perfect formation, but at least they have an orientation, their
unsteady arrow-head pointing due south.

But even in spite of the dulling acrimony I see these patterns—in the geometric
brick of the apartment building in the alley, in the stems of plants that look like
inside-out umbrellas, in the fissures of leftover snow banks—
and I know that they exist. Just not for me. Not right now.
I want to tell myself to wait, to have patience, to watch the formations and
revel in the clockwork and count skeletal crystals and the meander scars of rivers.

But that's not enough. At least not for now. I emerge from the alleyway
with less clarity than when I entered. I feel the warmth of an unusually pleasant
November sun and the bite of a typical November breeze. I feel the hole
forming in the sole of my boot and a thin stray cat rub against my leg.
I feel an insurmountable disparity between where I am
and where I think I should be. But who am I to say—?

And the geese disappear behind leafless trees, feathered wings like wet paint-brushes leaving trails of ink against the vast abysmal sky, leaving me behind on the ground.

*“...nor anything else in all creation
will ever be able to separate you
from the love of God that is in
Christ Jesus our Lord.*