

AUNT CHLOE

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3 poems

by Zain Murdock

airport rubbernecking

in Charlotte-Douglas, a man
(three bags to check,
the third—one hundred
fifty dollars)
bargains, Ah caan gnaw buhlive it,
but baggage handlers budge not,
instead snigger,
then—up he gets, triumphant
on silver scale lands two bags
the first—persimmon, potbellied,
three pounds overweight,
his laugh heaves,
bleats he, check it a-gay-in, check
it a-gay-n, check it a-gain and again and-again—

then—on floor, speckled gray, a
tossed medical school
for dummies book, collared shirt,
a pair of plaid shorts,
stained, mud-caked—
maybe voyeur-ish, this is
to commemorate
the insides of his suitcase,
to witness
the tangible guts of his existence
him—scrambling to cram all of
America in two suitcases,
clothes strewn across floor, speckled gray,
a baby's cry, six feet away,
as if it's sorry

moses words

“What kinds of things?”

My therapist, who is not really
my therapist, but feels more like
my therapist than
my therapist, crosses her legs
underneath her quilt-skirt and

looks at me not looking
at her and smiles—I know because
over the rim of my glasses
the blurriness of her mouth
parts like a magenta sea and I can see
the white tunnel of her teeth—
me, I’m ripping up wet tissue
into shreds—to avoid picking
myself apart—
I’m staring into the white tissue
until the words materialize into
the snot like a teleprompter,
I’m whispering them into the carpet,
into my shoes,
into my white cotton socks,
“Failure.”

“Loveless.”

“Lonely.”

But she watches a couple stragglers
hang on to the laces of my
white shell-toed sneakers, says,
“What else does he say?” and,
as I’m ripping up wet tissue

into shreds (making one into many,
many out of one), "***Bitch,***" slides down
to my sole, totters over to the floor-
skimming fringe of her skirt;
my fingers twitch, embarrassed,
she smiles again, and this time
the sea holds together,
"You can be honest with me. I know
he says some nasty things—
you can tell me what they are,"
and I feel the word squirm its way
down the bumpy slope of my knees;
they shudder, like ice, slip down
the knotted trunks of my legs;
my face perverts, melts—I am
the Persistence of Memory,
but the word knows it is going to
be said, blasé, the time
on my skin reads, It's not too late
to escape, she scoots forward,
my mouth twists, cheeks full of
air, water vapor, or maybe ants,
parts like a chapped river, so that

she can see the ark on its surface,
empty, fixed to be drowned,
and yet, somehow,
the word catches its breath,
gurgles, breathes out,
I feel its mucky head slouch
through the birth canal of my throat;
I cannot tell whether the beast
itself knells or I yell—

“Faggot...”

My therapist, who is not really
my therapist, but feels more like
my therapist than
my therapist, uncrosses her legs
underneath her quilt-skirt and
looks at me not looking
at her and frowns—I know
because the time on my face
and the time on the clock
on the wall behind it both read:

Is your time

up?

after shrink

today i watched a black Ant's crawl
among crumbs of earth and asphalt
and looked, at how small
he was—how unfazed
by my power—and wondered
if i, too, could be so acquainted
with the ground—a second glance:
he has camouflaged,
a black Ant on blacker asphalt—
i, too, am black and small,
apt to vanishing acts—yet, i, unlike
the Ant, am out and visible
against this concrete walk, too dark
against this early summer night
and—were i to be enraged
or have my fill of jealousy,

the Ant could have been smashed
against the unwashed concrete
by the blue toe of my shoe,
and—were the Ant
interested, we could strike up a
pact: each other smashed

by our own insecure steps
of mortality—yes, sometimes i wait
for the Ant, on the round-faced
balls of my feet, swaying
in and out of the sun, until
there is no more sun
in which to sway, anymore—still,
i dream for an Ant
to hold up his end
of the bargain.

Zain Murdock strongly believes in James Baldwin, New York pizza, em-dashes, BTS, her succulent Alex, and—most importantly—love. She also believes literature acts as both a mirror and a window into the human condition. Murdock is a student at Columbia University studying Creative Writing. In regard to her poetry, she says, “Whether it’s a more personal commentary on my own mental health and how easily it falters, or an observation of the world around me and how it moves, there’s something freeing that comes with writing about a lack of sureness I think we all sometimes feel pressured to prove—to each other, and to ourselves.”