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Poem by Ayla Goktan



Water in Chicago

I chose this city because of what the lake taught me
the first time I saw it: happiness
is saturation

Part of me believes this, but part of me condemns:
I am too beholden to aesthetics;
I upset myself

Every “I,” every eye, is political—
Mine as I stand on the edge of the sand

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The eye of the lake, regarding sky

The eye of the camera that captured the earliest surviving photograph

(For though I thought it would choose a person, it, too, found worth in a view)

And the eye of the temple in Wilmette, reminding me that even beautiful things we think are free go unseen by the poorest among us

(Matthew Desmond writes of a woman native to Milwaukee who's never seen the lake)

So how can I enjoy what lies before me? And yet, I do—

Dusk comes; it changes things,

rippling pinks across the powder blue of lake and sky

Variation gives meaning to distance, and I imagine I can

almost glimpse all the evenings I'm meant to spend here

spread before me; pocket evenings I could hold

in my palm, somehow extending

to the rim of the world

The lake strikes up my hunger, then tames it;

limits the city's searching lights

Years from here, I will know what I don't know now:

Every time until the last time I flew

out of Chicago at night, I looked beyond

the airplane's thumbprint window,

and onto every darkness,

I projected water

Publishing Information

- [“The First Photograph”](#) [4] (circa 1826), Henry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin.
- *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City* by Matthew Desmond (Crown, 2016).

Art Information

- [“Pastel City”](#) [5] © Eric Allix Rogers; Creative Commons license.

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Follow her on Twitter [@ayla_goktan](https://twitter.com/ayla_goktan) [6].

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