



THE PAPIER-MÂCHÉ TAJ MAHAL

C.E. PUTNAM

P.I.S.O.R. PUBLICATIONS

The Papier-Mâché Taj Mahal
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This is the first book in a set of six.

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This is my first book and it is dedicated to Maureen.

What a strange, demented feeling it gives me when I realize I have spent whole days before this inkstone, with nothing better to do, jotting down at random whatever nonsensical thoughts have entered my head.

from the *Tsurezurengusa* of Yoshida Kenko

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To the Reader

You are large and beautiful in my hands. Last night, at my back catalog pre-publication party (six books will be published this year), I drank too much wine mixed with Tang. This morning, the hangover of an astronaut after splash down. Look up, but don't let go of the book! Can't you see the sun is a Chinese lantern and the sky is scrambled eggs, only spinning? Today, instead of organizing my music and listening to every song I ever loved since junior high school, I am writing to you. It's even sunny outside. No matter, poems are the sound that I was after all along.

Last year I saw a banner in the sky that read: "THERE WILL BE NO MORE REINCARNATION FOR PEOPLE." I usually have the faith of a monkey that bananas will appear, but every night for a month I searched for answers under the covers with a flashlight, listening to the vibrations of a circle until I'd grow humid with sleep and foreign alphabets. It was the only way I could find to move forward.

I won't stay here long looking into the sea, writing to you, rather than returning to my work. You see there are inexperienced fathers at the barbeque next door all-drunk and bungling the chicken. They need my help, and you need to start reading this book, my first, which you should have been doing from the very beginning.

C.E. Putnam

Singapore, Singapore

February 2012

I

YOUNG CAEDMON

What I am learning about today
is how fish in the sea don't sleep
in silt beds anymore. But I knew that
before in grammar school
though maybe not at all
because back then I could still draw
dogs driving police cars
and those fish as sea cigars with fins.
My letters and pencils were big.
At times now, there is a face
or a pair of fists
or the sound of a boot.
Will you take some time
to inquire? How this, this
goes beyond the desire to sing
into a funnel, or a well
so that the sound can settle

back into the earth.

I can hear the phone

in the next room.

It is my voice

and it's singing back to me.

OREGON

I pulled the pajama top up around
your neck. The waistband of my pants,
a string of bubbles. “I’m out of practice,”
you said. “My underwear isn’t lacy.
It’s gray cotton, rough.” “And I am not a real
cowboy,” I said. “These furry pantaloons,
synthetic.” And together we tossed
the room, our eyes messing up
each other’s clothes. For three days,
the rain kept the windows from
the sunrise quarter, the shade
flopping against itself. And knowing
that the water would survive us,
we stood in front of the window,
and fingered the wetness. Waves made
streams this way, that way, the rain,
the water, running over our bodies
running through our clothes.

WHAT I DID ON THE FIRST DAY OF SPRING

Woke up late, peeled off my citrus skin, and deodorized myself, ate a mango and some leftover popcorn. Then spoons became kneecaps, lemon bubbles rose out of the sink, and I watched the green ebb and flow of the carpet. Went outside, uncurled the sweet grass, pinched my arm in a deck lounge, ate a dry sandwich, explored an abandoned house, roasted a boar, found an old monopoly game board and a tricycle wheel. Sat on a nail, thought about roofs and thought about cement mixers. Sharpened chalk sticks, looked at a World Atlas, touched a squirrel's tail. Became very irritated. Tried to read a magazine, took in a drive-in movie, fell in love with Jayne Mansfield. Went home. Scrambled some eggs.

AMERICAN DREAM

I was raised in the labor movement.
My father underwent the Donald Duck
Treatment for his beliefs. My mother
stayed in a cage. Costs were eating us
alive. So, at 17, I went out West,
found myself surrounded by muscle heads,
leopard skin carpeting, and open-throated
Hawaiian shirts. My dreams then
were made of neoprene and spun rayon fibers.
I cultivated a few swimming pools
acting like a Superintendent of Filtered Waters,
fooled some people, took their money.
Became involved with a Self-Threading
Series 6500 sewing machine
operator. I was infatuated with her body
crossing the sun. She was only doing
shoulder exercises, she said. I beat up her boyfriend,
showed her the papier-mâché Taj Mahal
at the HYWAY HOTEL.
The electric bulbs in the red velvet room
made me feel outdoorsy and attractive.
We had a fifteen minute swim and washed
her silk chartreuse French briefs
in the sink. By then I'd had enough
and moved back East, back in with my folks.
For a while there, I tell everyone, I was making

three movies a week, lived on blonde women
and cheeseburgers, even did some surfing.
The real talk, though, is about Walt Disney.
I like the way my father says his name.

SIMULTANEITY

As if the clouds could profit from our skin
I offer you a silver salamander & kiss you.
I have become unaware of breath
among the fountains where our jackets hang
themselves to enjoy the sashay of camisoles.
(At last! an afternoon free of government lines).

*

A storm of fruit, figs were shaken down & outside,
dogs with polio, yelping. Unable to move you tasted good
but felt odd, your nakedness full of chocolate creams
and sweet orange pulp. I tried to stop your hands
from dancing. Three fingers into the mouth
as our tasting continued. Perhaps you remember?

ACTIVITY 18 (y,z): CAUSING AN ECLIPSE

We know the moon
moves because we can see
the shadow of the earth
on its surface. We can
also see the moon itself
and can gather its light
against our sun. Our eclipses can
occur in newspapers and almanacs:

A LIST OF FAMOUS MOONS

greasy moon

balsa moon

powder moon

When you live on the planet Earth
an eclipse will eventually occur
in your area. Whenever I visit Alaska
I usually tell the Eskimos to really look
at Winter and imagine 94 million
miles away, the disappearance of the sun.
It's true! Permanent damage may occur,
because we all know that a Universe
placed over the eyes is not entirely safe.

BEHAVIOR AND MISBEHAVIOR: *A GUIDE TO ACTION*

Humans cannot exist together if people are permitted to lie. During our pioneer period, before the world had hydrogen bombs, a father's hand could give its children something to remember. Now, look at your hand. Teaching today is not the same as training animals: a dog, a horse, or a rat. "Adults are nice. You should want to be like them." Activity brings out the best in children. At no age are children happy as sitting ducks or mummies. They are not at their best when dealing with abstractions. Set up detours. This technique is not a new one that you have to learn from scratch. Have you ever used the fireplaces in our public parks? Have you noticed how Northern Communities rope off certain hilly avenues in winter? Have you seen ears of corn with little windows cut in one side? The Grocery Man knows you want to see the kernels, but he cannot let you husk every ear. He gives you a little peephole instead. Channeling is everywhere. On the other hand, youngsters are not petunias. Vinegar is used to marinate meat. What softens children, loosens them, makes them susceptible to your words and ideas? Remember, you are working to help

them understand that if ever a world had to be good,
we are that world. A blow must be carefully
pounded in. Given new warmth, your words
will send down tender roots of their own.

SIMPLE ENTOMOLOGY

Outside of our room, the bugs sound like spaceships.

I am in a room in Piste, Mexico with my brother. It is night and hot, and we have covered ourselves with bug ointment. Malaria season.

Roaches climb into our empty beer cans. They can't get out. Their legs and wings scrape tin.

We are remembering one afternoon when we were kids. We were watching STAR WARS in the rec-room. The Millennium Falcon had just escaped from the Death Star, when Mom started screaming. Dad had set his arm out on a TV tray, cut it off with a hack saw. She tied it off with a dish towel, made us all come and kiss his stump.

Nobody says anything for weeks.

Then suddenly, it is summer. The whole family is out back throwing the green nerf football around while dad stands by the grill pressing meat into patties. My brother drops the football and walks up to Dad and says, "How are you doing Dad? Need some help?"

Dad starts crying and says, “How do you think I feel, huh? I only have one fucking arm!” One by one, my father puts the hamburger circles onto the grill.

Even the dog is quiet as we sit around the picnic table. We watch dad eat his hamburger with one hand, ketchup spilling down his arm. “Keep eating,” I whisper to my brother, “just keep eating.”

The roaches have stopped struggling. The power shuts off for the night. It is so dark I can see everything.

Across the room, my brother calls out, “Help me. I’m afraid of space people.”

Outside, the bugs get louder and louder.

DIAGNOSIS

A dozen red ducks arrived
in time for the spring moon festival.

Dangling by cords in the LO FUN window,
they perspire sweet and sour.

Last time, a fortune read:
Call to the wind. You are inside us.

I am an unbeliever living among
long noodles, or dropped into

turtled snow peas, I am lost
with flounders in plum sauce.

Sometimes fish heads will say
you will get whatever you want in 5 minutes.

I cannot make Peking Duck
on my own. I have less than 48

hours to live.

DAD IS TWO HEROES

i)

a sun platform

& astronaut-god watches the hydrogen mix

a long afternoon for mothers

mothers in hats, in purses, in furry collars

during liftoff, shadows twist shadows

ii)

you are hemmed back to muscles,

my father, a twilight fullback

drifting (ambulances come in colors)

and as if dreaming

 you and Charles Atlas

 wool socks, dangling

 wild

WHAT EVER HAPPENED TO UNCLE WAYNE?

Don't my underpants make a good hand puppet?
What is lost on you can easily be put
into my spacecraft. The stair closet
feels like an apple pie, cooling off.
Exactly 22 years ago in St. Louis,
Doc Ellis threw a perfect game
while on LSD. Boy, he could sure
put it away. Fried chicken knocked him off
the starting rotation. Actually, my underpants
make a terrible puppet but when I wear them
I do feel like a big-league ball player
constantly pulling at something.
Grandpa could never get the covers right.
If only he could sing the Star Spangled Banner.
His soliloquy of American History
fell like mosquitoes drunk with kid blood
but he sure knew where to get the best ribs
and waffles. Someday, one of you will learn
how to make Grandma Piper's good tasting
sweet rolls. I only brought out my underpants
to encourage the children at the dinner table.
Look how I can make them say,
"Keep eating, just keep eating."

WANTED

L,

are you really
dead? I don't

believe anyone ever
really dies. I will

wait in the Goose
Prairie by the river late

Wednesday (31st) night. Try
to contact me. I will

have a red coffee thermos
(loaded) & a lamp.

LANDSCAPE, SELF-PORTRAIT

You,
you are not

there. A pink ape
sits tiny against

the background of a lake.
This ape paints himself into the canvas.

But is it the painting you are
looking at?

Or, are you in the petting
zoo, dreaming of the lake,

of a summer vacation once
spent behind bars?

Amid an aeroplane buzz,
this ape continues to paint the world.

Bodies asleep on red towels

Water-skiers waving to canoes.

Buildings in the lake.

But what you see in his picture
is your own eye,

as if looking through a keyhole
you might spot yourself changing clothes,

or a mirror in which
you could leave your face,

a message for another to find.

II

THE LITTLE KINGDOM

You may call on
El Dorado.

Be a traveler to:
Fez and Sus,

Agra, Oxus, Congo,
and Bizance.

Their mountains and rivers
may await us.

Say goodbye
to them.

We are going down
to the sea.

Come, let's do it
on the boat.

GREEK FRAGMENT # 8

The loveliest of what I leave behind are hands
purple with sea dye, cucumbers that are ripe,
and from high Sardis the graceful necks of sailors
heading down to their boats, heading down to the sea.

THE ILLUMINATED BOOK

who now will inhabit the Hellenic cities, the site of Pharos at
Alexandria, the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus, who
will live there among the beasts, the gray dogs and
tourists

who will discover the stowaways and the laceless shoes of lost
sailors

I come home with feathers in my hair, with fistfuls of yellow
wine having re-named the beaches “Cinnamon” and
“Anchor” for the olive trees

I am a snake, as a snake is an envelope for another snake

what are the meanings of these dreams: to dream of picking
up olives, to find hidden nuts, to dream of lilies out
of season, to fall into a great ditch, to be given a glass
of water in sleep, to see mulberries

who will kiss Eunostus upon his return from Tangra, who will
dare to set foot in his sacred grove, who will add
blue to the distance, who will sulk in my doorway all
day refusing to knock, who will teach the anatomy of
human skulls to the younger generations of book
makers

come now, as the rockets entice us, and we cast out the old
lanterns, holding onto crimes like white plums to
suck, holding onto maps marked with the last known
location of the ancient bee eaters

when touching a thing, one touches more than a reflection, as
with a cloud, for inside there, there is rain and coiled
ribbons of flame

ULYSSES

entire I stood

my legs could not see

the sirens' throng

and the drunken island

and the hero there

and the flesh made me blind and mad

whoever you are, bring me

a grapefruit and a boxer

SELECTED MEDITERRANEAN DIARIES FROM
A DAY IN JULY

July 8, 1865

In a shipboard romance, an hour without love sours even a good mug of sea-grog. Ahead, the rock of Gibraltar! My thoughts dwell on a certain exotic dancer. O! my thoughts have become a symphony, disturbed only by the occasional clanging of nautical irons.

July 8, 1887

A man shines his golden buttons, explains how he was blamed
for a massacre, offers me red seeds that make the mouth spin.

July 8, 1900

Vices take root in the prosperous locations on the body.
Sprout yourself in a pantry, profit from a quartet of full-body
sneezes. “Drink me,” sings the Mediterranean, “drink me!”

July 8, 1912

By mid-afternoon, too many paper umbrellas. A packet of Turkish figs. A length of melon.

July 8, 1922

Am I the only one who realizes the seduction possibilities of portholes? Bedroom slippers hit me in the face.

July 8, 1929

The sea-like rhythm of legs
crossing and uncrossing,
the crossing and uncrossing of legs.

July 8, 1949

At last a day on land! The highway rivets itself to the earth.
We visit a beach house inhabited by a British Archaeologist,
uncover a plot to alter the world's climate, exterminate
animals driven mad by atomic radiation.

July 8, 1952

I doubt not the intoxication of the captain. Slurring commands. Ordering sextants when he wants medallions of veal in brown sauce. I understand everything and translate. I am as mixed up as the next person, only more alert, more eager to please.

July 8, 1963

Content with body, but alone at happy hour, I develop a crush on actress Brigitte Bardot. In my cabin, an hour just to make my hair look perfect.

July 8, 1969

Someone shows me their collection of male specimens so far:
a bird eating spider, a crab that walks forwards, a man
mistaken for a flame.

July 8, 1974

I love the whales for they only have the sea
to live in.

July 8, 1981

Last night, partially blinded by a champagne cork, I engaged in escapist pleasure. In Barcelona, I knew bits of stage business, had a longing to smoke, met actors with a vacant expression. Today, the blue water reminds me of a piece of stone, a sign, perhaps, of a permanent condition.

PLEASURE BRIDGE

We cavort in a way
not quite human. We survive

on hot yams and arch over
each other like gargoyles.

Was all this to belong to us?

The moon ushered
its silk, and the river rose

an inch, and what we thought
was death was nothing

like death. It was an angle of light.
It was what we wanted to see around us.

ROMAN HOLIDAY

We looked up, and the door was a tray
of empty glasses. Chest ornaments lay
all around us. “Roma, I love you.”
Our shoes became a traffic jam, legs had fallen
across the roads. We rolled hips in the humidity,
made engine sounds with lips and skin,
even drove the Chihuahua to the coast to visit
a few nudist colonies. Whatever we could reach,
we tried to cover with fur. Chandeliers caught fire,
plaster fell down in chunks. “Didn’t I just say
I loved you. Go on, say ‘Tomato’ again
like a chicken.” Those people over there
are very intoxicated. Nothing is sexier than a man’s shirt,
or punching Romeo and Juliet in the stomach.

WAITING FOR DINNER TO ARRIVE

Our fingers pluck olives
from a saucer. We eat
our briny hands. Mountains
are in the walls, and so are cities
and rivers and maps, and gondoliers wail
amid accordions, propelling their boats
with breadsticks and song. Rows of mouths
chew their words, while ceiling lanterns
wrap straps around our arms and legs,
and in our longing we become wet
like egg yolks and slide off chairs.
Suddenly, an explosion of Roman Values.
Everyone is unclothed. We shed our shadow
straps and damp underpants and find ourselves
swimming again in streams of cool grapes.
On the river banks, domestic life burlesques itself,
neck ties and lingerie budding among gray boughs.
Shirts drift by with trays bearing messages
from the Hills, and in glasses,
in platters, in the round of spoons,
we watch everything dry out, all the while holding on
to the peculiar plumpness of our forms.

TRAVEL NARRATIVE #31

My penmanship weakened my chances
for a good reception among the Quiet People.

I was hoping to find refuge
from nocturnal birds.

I was hoping to sleep again.
At first they had me keep time

with coconut shells and hubcaps,
but as my “S’s” began to straighten

and the loops fell out of my “R’s,”
they had me make lassoes to round up

their missing children. By chance, I fell
in love with the Doctor who taught me

how to sleep soundlessly on paper
bed sheets, and soon I too began to teach

the suffering how to go everywhere
to help spread the pain around.

Yet, without even knowing it,
we caused a typhoon.

ALL OF THE TARTARKAS ARE DEVOUT

Our Gods have six wings.
Theirs have up to eighteen

in winter, so by the second summer
they had strung up high voltage wires,

imported dust devils, filled barrels
with green fog. Gas masks were issued

to half of the population, so that tawny robes
now hang where people once stood.

The Capes first appeared in motor cars.
Their orders were puffs of steam.

We collected the jasmine on schedule.
It was difficult to tell the people

from the lampreys attached to their sides.
There are tales of how out of nowhere

a cauldron of spicy okra stew could become
a cloud, could become pleasure itself.

As the desert cools, the red sirens begin.
Sap hardens in amber knots on our palms.

BEWITCHED

My father told me about it. It is called the budah-babow tree. Plenty of it grows by the sea. Wanting to try it out, my father and I drew the blue sap from it. I took a coconut, drank from it, squeezed the sap into the remainder of the milk, shook it three times and closed up the shell. Next day, I gave it to the child saying, "I have drunk of it, you may drink." He fell ill at midday. By midnight he died. On Saturday, my father poisoned his mother with the budah-babow in the fish stew. I poisoned his orphaned sister later that month with a banana. Soon, our bodies grew strong again.

IT IS THE YUM YUM

The cabanas looked
away from the purple sea-suck

The open cove, the brief swimwear
crawling from holes

In this heart of thatch
a light bulb on a string, some netting

The chaise lounge hobbled
and stacked with smuggled
copies of Henry Miller

a terry cloth shirt, cotton panties
(both powder blue)

Then, a hand silently
over the mouth

The sea, the sun, the bathers, come in
go out

III

THE COMING

So they greeted the seventh petal
of the seventh flower, and trying
not to fall in love with it again,
(as what happened the last time
had caused much suffering)
they just said to themselves:
*Good beans. These are really
good beans.*

PHILOSOPHY OF A WORLD AT WAR

You are on a beach.

You pick up a pebble, carry it for a mile
shaking it inside your fist.

Then you stop, look into a wave and arc the pebble
into the sea without a break
in the continuity of your thoughts.

What the hell do you think
you are doing?

AN UNKNOWN HAPPENING IN YUGOSLAVIA,
1914

The Baron put a whole plum in his mouth
and made the choking sound of a violin.
Wire was used to try to stab the fruit
to get some purchase on it. We discovered
geese in his trachea, and could hear the honking
through the skin. A war began. We fumbled
and cries came down from the stairwell, spilling
green light. We called for more milk
to loosen the plum, for it was still stuck,
and milk had worked once before on a window
painted shut. Without the aid of a surgeon
we had to comfort the Baron, saying: “The war
will soon be over, everything will be all right.”

LOST VERANDAS: WINTER

Our family's progress has been slowed
by the abnormal relative.

Maxford came home from the front with a rubber
hand and foot.

Doctor, he kept saying pointing around the family
room, carry him out and her and him.

I volunteered to substitute my eye for the front
door, already so full of holes.

Still determined that the termites hadn't suffered enough,
Max remembered his promise to revisit his boyhood
love of animals.

I once had a dog that could climb trees.

What a filthy noon, he recalled, walking to the dynamite
plant, the ashen snow in 1939.

The truck is waiting.

Don't try to recover from this
most beautiful morning. About a mile further, nasty things

and sure, some summer weather had brothers
and in all its unlovely depression, the glycerin

jars came to us all with gifts.

This may sound ridiculous to you not
having suffered yet any large, forbidden thing.

Monday is our last Christmas:

our last cup and spoon.

THE BIG CAR

The moon became a gray sedan. I got inside and rode around my neighborhood, crushing pylons. I heard the voice of a popular comedian. I couldn't stop smiling. Honk. Honk. I wanted all of the people I passed to climb inside. Everyone had square mouths and tried to grin, saying that they *really* wanted to go for a ride, but they had too many places to go, to the market or home, somewhere. Too many places. I don't know what they were afraid of. I suppose that this is what they mean by the problem with society today.

NOEL

The Santa Clauses are bringing presents
to the orphans. They are handing out
Bavarian cigarettes, bean poles and scissors.
The children are half-crying and half-choking,
but are soothed by a story about a lost elephant
and a bag of magic nuts. These Santas are thumbs
with mouths. Snow falls from their caps.
“Come home with me, and sing
with my children,” they want to say
but won’t. I welcome them and open
the dozen jars of peaches canned the day a man
brought in a head and a basket of ribs.
Not knowing what to do, I tried to put up his gifts
with string. Oh, the Directrice, she is pottery
in the same pattern as their little coverlets. I was tales,
she used to say. Tales. That day instead of cooking
the flowers she stuck them into cow horns. A Santa
brings me a tiny skull and a red mitten. But wait,
those Santas are not Santas. They are French
Soldiers. And the children are not children at all.

BUTTERSCOTCH

One day I will be King and will have your head chopped off.
Give me your candy. Give it to me now.

BOMBSHELL

In just a number of hours,
Steak dinners were ordered.
Funny thing to be so lightheaded
our teeth chipping at each other's boot mugs,
and Jayne, still afraid from the night
before, not touching her food.
Later, we went up to the STARLIGHT ROOM
to dance to George Liberace's wonderful music.
In fact, we danced until the desert was purple again,
until the sky was almost to the lake's edge
until we had mastered the study of clouds
and could give weight to each
could recognize them as hidden causes
of trouble or inconvenience

Stratus: waggish

Cirrus:

pure fizz

and we went down to the coffee shop
and announced that the celebration would continue
at four that afternoon, at the test site.
When the waiter spoke her name again
we pushed the placemats aside

moving the straws and salt and water glasses
that marked the places we'd been,
classifying the wet spots, the stains,
as accidents. She went on ahead to Tucson
by bus. The waiter returned, his open hand
facing me like a laugh.

2000 LOVE 2000

I went half-loose around her and began to roll
my R's in an exaggerated way.

"We've got flame throwers," I said.

She took off her silver shoes and socks
of purple leather. Her arms were very occupied,
her wits were even busier. Flowing through these hollow
caverns, blood. "Let the water stretch," she said. And I
did, and it did and we compared lightbulbs to eggs
just as some people might romanticize the entire process
of getting to "where we are today." In the steam room
we sat round other fleshpots. There were seventy of them
and then if you add 72 transformations each
that gives you a lot of eight-armed monkeys
to keep track of without the aid
of leashes or cages. As long as there is panic
somewhere, we will not come out of the river
until the thousand years are over.

MILTON HAS BEEN TOTALLY BLIND SINCE
1652

I love you
heart

your visions appear
etched in plates

a recurring dream to rob
the Pharaohs of all their packed-up

their donkeys and sceptres and oval breads

for to transfer objects by spirit
might unfold me, you, and my wheeling pursuers

all loosed among the night skies
these half-moons and wings.

LOVE'S ALCHEMY

Possessed mummy,
you are sweetness
and at your best inside your sticky cave
shooting off ropes for the eager.
Unlike smoke, water does not sphere
around the minstrel-like
it makes of me, a horse's rude day.
Like this morning, when angelic monkeys
helped me to mine un-married bodies,
I ended up ashore with a yellow dog,
ended up writing on the earth with a sea branch,
drawing portraits of dead sailors.
Can I be happy with these love ends,
can I pay off these shadows, bubble vain
in my bridegroom's suit?
My love, it is our day, our ease, our night,
our end, we do not create.
We agree to spread our bodies underneath the sky of the sky
one a glass frame, the other
its reflection. You are looking at the broken
ground now that summer seems winter
and I am looking at the area of soft white muscle
under your arms

that delights me long and rich.
O, that I should find myself old,
having mixed all the elements together.
Yes, come my little mummy, taste,
come closer, here, have some.

I LIVE IN A HOTEL AND FREQUENTLY HAVE
MY MEALS SENT UP

Sugarman was angry.
He just couldn't grasp why God
was willing to help a puppy
and not him. Looking back,
it really hadn't been all that bad.
Abercrombie was almost
recovered from that lion mauling
though there were still scars
on his neck and face. And Sylvia
could zip around with blue wheels attached
to her crisscrossed stumps. But I will never
forget how Sugarman turned
from the yellow city, and raising his hand
to my lips, said, "Everyone likes little kids
and dogs. And sometimes kids think a dog
is dead and it really isn't. So, they call it
a miracle. Could it be then, that after all this,
my brother is still alive?"

PUSHED FORWARD, NOT NEBRASKA

The world is a skull cap
copied from a fist.

You are not
attached to me.

I am half human and
half bread.

For today only, arms
will be stronger than rope,

and the cross-legged bachelor
will make himself available to you

and your lantern mind of a tooth
swinging dim in a green mouth.

This occasion, like any handfasting,
separates the tongue

from the science model,
air from the iron diving suit,

makes you once, and only once,
a real presence, as the greased lips

of an armless creature turn
the pages of the doomsday book.

If you think what you make here
is your own, you are an idiot.

The recipe has since been sold
and the production can now be done

in factories. This is not a mistake.

Look at your old alphabet books, you should

know by now that words are not proof, but vision.

CALLING IN SICK

Oh, hello my Satanic Majesty! My holy Napoleon!
My bohemian Beelzebubber! Today, I am
Burns Bannion tangling with sex and Karate
in bloody Tokyo. Today, I am Al Wheeler
the horny Police Lieutenant with the sniffles.
Today, I am Leo Sterne, the unemployed dentist,
prowling THE TOOTH CLINIC, looking for another fix.
My love, today, you are Bay-bee the night club girl
who dons a blonde wig, when consumed by passion,
which you always are, and you are Asley Radio
the beautiful nude model who likes to play “Willy Wonka”
with blueberries, and you are Modela a famous Matador
with incredible upper body strength. What we are and are
and are not these only but more and more and khaki pantaloons,
collapsible shovels, sacks of clothes, expired pizza coupons,
constellations of mosquitoes, unicorn mugs stained with wine.
Oh, the struggle for the best pillow—your black hair curls
around me like smoke, our figgy nipples smooth out
for a while and my cigarette chest is wheezing and lips
are peeling and our styrofoam tongues are sleepy and
the ocean is there, the ocean is still there and so
are the acrobats and the birth of a million spider
babies and your crocodile back, your amazing spine,
numbered from 1 to 500. We are kissing the corpse now
and mummifying cats and look! a strange light and more light
now and cars and horns and signs: LIQUOR, LIVE GIRLS

& PAWN SHOP. This is our city and our little room
and this is our bed and this is our eviction notice
and this is not the regional supervisor, not sand dunes
of documents, not sparky customer service lingo, not
crumbs and not complaints and today this is ours and ours
and not, “Waist size 36, we’re out.” For we know what we
know, and we know that for today we are worth more
than the wages we are not due.

HOLD ME, I'M NAKED

Elements of a circus tore the clothes
from my brain.

Smoking, a hand moved from my hand
to my face and turned away rather than silhouette

itself upon a white surface, bed sheets,
typing paper, skin.

The suite was steamy. On the blue bed
a fish flat on a pile of packaged laundry

and a message: *No other boats
are leaving until Monday.*

In the bathroom mirror, a mouth
opened in a quiet laugh,

and I could see the even edges of its teeth.
And legs thought a light switch

and the green negligee and the Crazy Titan hair
and the rattled blood, the molted nylon,

and milk evaporated from the bedside glass,
a chalky circle of moon. And all these objects

held me fixed, naked under the sun lamp
as the shining bulb that stroked me

tried to approach the same color,
the same wet sparkle as that point inside me,

I was trying most to conceal from you.

I AM WHY YOU SAY I AM NOT A PAINTER

This painting is about mountains with fire,
with ribbons, with wheels. Those that paint
the devil as a literal devil, give him dimples,
the face of Tony Curtis dreaming God's feelings.
That was the worst mistake of all: diluted alizarin crimson.
Atmosphere is a sense of illumination, and foliage over
foliage is but one wash. Reflected lights blotted out.
Twentieth Century Man in the Western World
by adding raw sienna. Some of the early watercolors
will breeze up again when Disneyland and Vermont
merge into one country, not an exact place
but shapes, balance, and color. Relations in even
an almost monochromatic work wait for something
to happen. Even if the roofs are red, a velvet rich
foreground and a cinnamon back illuminates
Alexander the Great and salamanders. Knee high
on a bed of weeds, red values (accurately and thereby)
smash the head of a doll imagined to be
a medicine chest. Chisel experience: the Incas.
The trees are a place. Sheep-cropped grass
barely covers this graying pigment. Aging 2,000 years
over lunch. Lampshades and vinegar: these things I love.
Oh yeah, a pair of tigers, toothless and brainless.

REMEMBERED, THE INCIDENT

I am from wooing
all worn out.

I entomb crazy glass,
put up signs:

for perverts only

and finally the digging ceased.

I could be a carefree archivist
over blooming ink.

I could be sloe gin fizz.

I could fall out of bed
onto a pontoon

or could name the oak cask in which we whirl.

“Where do you live?”

In the green purse, I return

and in the air, champagne
flew out of our noses.

Please, I say,

harken to my song

for what a lovely picture this is:

a poem that must describe
something that really happened.

ADVENTURES OF MY IDEAS

In just a few months, I had become quite popular by masquerading at parties as an important sociologist. I forecasted doom and could explain, sociologically speaking, why Jean's salary always had to include something strange. At the time, Social Darwinism was all the rage. The revelers, as if responding to my theories as much as to my overacting, would jump up and down, go mad with their dresses and coattails over their heads, eventually soiling the punch bowl with a ficus plant. The rest sat on, in easy chairs, in silence and pink martinis, creaking.

When the boys wet their lips, I felt it too as the wasp in leather brought out a pouting feeling between my legs. I could feel again the dull patch in the center of myself. I left for the kitchen, and soon I was trying to open a drawer with my voice. Something else was there, a face that began to speak with the accent of a cinematographer: "So there is this scene in the woman's prison where Jean and the other inmates attended a service in the prison chapel, and sang 'Onward Christian Soldiers' in such a way that spontaneous and unsolicited comic elements appeared

in a scene of sentimental, but sincere redemption.
With this in mind, what do you think Freud meant
by the words: *Fear of Punishment?*” As I turned
from this question to the party, the guests encircled me
pointing at me as if they had never looked upon anything
so unsightly in their lives. Maybe the drawer
was meant to be opened, I said to myself,
but then again, perhaps it is not supposed to.

A LAST MESSAGE

Will you take time to answer
this call over the sea
sent by throwing a stone
and hoping that a splash
will carry my words to you
past the nets, the reefs, the tankers,
past the lost water-skier, the sea birds
and a happy tugboat captain?

Will it carry my words to you
to the opposite shore where you
run back and forth, waving?

Your voiced fragments tossed back to me.

A cry or an echo is not a word.

My cry, your cry is not an etching,
a scrawl, or even a color.

Though I can say *blue-green*,
the stone can still drop

to the bottom, or be washed into a cave
where an amateur explorer might find it
and know that its meaning
could not possibly have traveled
that far, there, under the sea.

Now You Can Read Them All!



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