

Palette

Names with no faces events out of the blue,
neighborhoods once familiar simply gone
except for occasional mention in these long
explanations for excruciating choices
made with no consequences except
more letters stamped return to sender

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Dead. All dead.
She who danced a pink moth in the moonlight.
He a lynx who paced the ward.
The light gone from their eyes.
What was animate merely carnal.
Then nothing

*

And how so young and O so cocksure
first person singular plural possessive
propositions laced with quotes as if he were
answering essay questions or talking to himself
but love declared on page after page of manic characters
insisting on something and something more

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Long silences
unspoken presumptions
as if intuition
was all we needed to know
we were made for each other

*

I could of course claim I never intended any such thing
and all that nonsense of mytho-freudian significance
was simply a ruse to get you past the point of reference.
Bloody tower be damned. As I recall it was a half-full
ditch hosting various creatures with more or fewer limbs
passing along the only edge that mattered anymore
crumbling into that liquidity every time one of them
or one of us lowered itself head first down the bank
to try to quench the thirst all of us suffered

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Burnt-out tenements of the poetry wars

fought for reasons nobody knows
gap-toothed reminders of old stories
shadowed against remains of another day

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All that piss and vinegar
intellectual ecstasy
verbal flexibility
ex-lovers foregone illusions
ghosts of a chance
to what end?

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A herd of introvert bookworms
calling themselves a community,
trying to get known for being
original in the tense present
obsessed with past and future

*

Crew cuts and ducks' asses
bobby sox and bullet bras

kids ourselves having kids
giving birth to one another

offspring of parents too embarrassed
to tell us what we needed to know

the long labor of bearing ourselves
without the caul of their generation

the PTSD
of their American century

*

How to reconcile what we were feeling
with what we knew of love from Hollywood,
top forty singles and Sunday school

*

Now and then I may have glimpsed the face
behind all your other faces, the one
you wanted me to help you find

*

Right-handed left-brained
eroticism a piquant hue
between altruism and ego.
A fool for a pretty face and a sucker
for sweet talk walk into a Star Wars bar

*

the rug deep enough to drown in
a seascape of gaping mouths
disappearing in whirlpools

that first time we tried it
each off on our own trip
that much in common between us

*

Having sex making love
heads you win tails I lose

Having a sex, becoming a gender
flip sides of a turnstile token

*

Might as well have been utter strangers
for all we could be frank with each other
except in outbursts of raw emotion
about our deepest hopes and fears,
but in our unwritten diaries
we did confess we did in fact know
one another very well
and exactly what we were doing to ourselves
but kept doing it anyway

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How manic-depressive (or is it bipolar)
in between jags of catatonia
in a corner, down on hands and knees
(or was that what you called neurasthenia,
dead or asleep down there
where lips and tongue weren't allowed)
sucking a thumb or sitting on it in bed
alone each morning with the same stranger

*

Forever Growth Forever Young
our all-together-now anthem

nervous systems subliminal
electronic proving grounds

air and water contagious
food and drugs adulterated

carnage a twist in our DNA
peace of mind in a body bag

What can love promise?
What can lovers propose?

In my dream you asked
Where doesn't it hurt?

*

Broken hearts one thing,
bitter something else again
but part of the deal always is
whoever holds on longer
gets to watch the other go

*

Summing up on your way out
how little was left, you said, surprised,
I can do that with anyone

*

The absurdity of it all
The obscenity of the bathos
The self-pity of suffering
The pain we cause one another

*

War babies making love

*

Categorically incompatible
(grounds for divorce in the state we were in)
irreconcilable differences:
erotic attachment on the one hand
compassionate affection on the other

*

A bitches' brew of thumbnails, *trompes l'oeil*,
screenshots from the hip, selfies at arms length,
blacklight moonwalks of byte-size brainchildren
all the colors together as white as death.
Self-respect too a kind of love

*

And the snake we meet on the walk
is not the one we would rather meet
but head square as a fist, eyes
cold as stars under the knuckle

