

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 signed with a dead metaphor
stamped return to sender in blue ink

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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

*

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

*

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

*

Crew cuts and ducks' asses
bobby sox and bullet bras

turtlenecks to tie-dyes
black leotards to mini skirts

Cell Block Number Nine
to Something's Happening Here

Moonglow and Theme from Picnic
to Sweet Judy Blue Eyes

beatnik hip to hippie mellow
cusp of the sexual revolution

kids ourselves having kids
giving birth to one another

parents at a loss for words to tell us
the facts of love we needed to know

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

the PTSD
of their American century

*

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

a word heard at home only on vinyl
that made us think twice even when signing off
on thank you notes to distant relatives

How to form a more perfect union,
individual selves yet a couple
each and one another two yet one

the American dream home double bind
falling apart from imperial ambitions
capitalist hunger and old age

How to touch with healing the ugly, angry,
frightened, uptight war-ration selves we kept
deep inside our cool public facades

to be lovers of our lovers' whole being,
our unerotic as well as libidinous aspects,
entrusting ourselves to one another's love

*

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 whirlpool eyes

that first time for each of us
off on our own trip, that
too 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 looselipped gossips
for all we could be frank with each other
except in outbursts of raw emotion,
but in our secret unwritten diaries
we did confess our hopes and fears
and that 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)
backed into corners, down on hands and knees
in between spells of catatonia
(or was that what you called neurasthenia,
dead or asleep where lips were never kissed),
sucking a thumb or sitting on it in bed
alone each morning with the same stranger

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

*

Broken hearts one thing
wounds that leave scars as they heal,
bitter something else again

To love enough to let one another be
who and as we need to be,
to let go when and where we need

But part of the deal always is

the one who holds on longer
gets to watch the other go

To let one another know our love
before we go, the depth of love
we'll suffer when the one we love goes

*

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

*

Forever Growth Forever Young
our pledge of allegiance marching song

nervous systems bionic
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 could love promise?
What could lovers propose?

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

*

Categorically incompatible
(grounds for divorce in the state we were in)
irreconcilable differences:
compassionate affection on the one hand
erotic longing and desire on the other,
happy campers having fun together
mystic alchemical wedding union

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War babies making love

*

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.

*

How to turn self abuse for losing
one another into a festival
of what we are today thanks to
the love we shared despite everything,
to find a joy in those memories
to quicken the step in this here and now

*

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