

## 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

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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

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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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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

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

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Crew cuts and ducks' asses  
bobby sox and bullet bras

turtlenecks to tie-dyes  
black tights 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

our 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 and TV  
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 persons,  
entrusting ourselves to one another's love

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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

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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

\*

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 suffer when a loved one goes

\*

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

\*

Nothing kills desire like not being wanted  
but I never stopped wanting you

\*

Where did we go when we let ourselves  
get carried away? Did we come back?

\*

*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?*

\*

Between the two say Quakers  
is where love is

Between *yin* and *yang* is *ch'i*  
says the *I Ching*

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

\*

War babies making love

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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.

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No longer as innocent  
but still ignorant  
unhip vulnerable

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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 prescient memories  
to quicken the step in this here and now

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Self-respect too a kind of love

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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