

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

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

*

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

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
the facts of love we needed to know

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

the post-war puritanism
the white suburban exceptionalism

the PTSD
of their American century

*

How to square what we were feeling
with what we knew of love from Hollywood,
top forty singles and Sunday school,
a word seldom heard at home except on vinyl and TV
that made us think twice even to sign 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
existentialist 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 politic as well as erotic persons,
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
still trying to find ourselves
in each other
a fool for a pretty face
and a sucker for sweet talk
walk into a Star Wars bar . . .

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The rug deep enough to drown in
a seascape of gaping mouths
pulled down into whirlpool eyes

*

The grass, you said, doesn't mind
being stepped on: that's its thing.

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Might as well have been tattletales
for all we would be frank with each other
except in outbursts of raw feeling
when good manners and Gioconda
smiles weren't enough to hold it in,
but we did confess hopes and fears
to our secret unwritten diaries
and that we did in fact know
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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Having sex making love
heads you win tails I lose

*

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

But part of the deal always is
the one who holds on longer
gets to watch the other go

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

To let one another know our love
before we go, the depth of love
we feel when one or the other leaves

*

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?

*

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

*

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

*

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

*

War babies making love

*

Categorically incompatible,
grounds for divorce in the state we were in
a kind of no-fault accident insurance.

Irreconcilable differences:
compassionate affection on the one hand
happy campers having fun together;
on the other, erotic longing and desire
mystic alchemical wedding union

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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

*

No longer as innocent
but still ignorant
unhip vulnerable
still half-believing
pretty girls goddesses

*

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

*

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