

Palette: Red Green Blue Gray

1

Names with no faces, half-remembered events,
neighborhoods once familiar simply gone
except for occasional mention in these long
unlined flush-left ragged right
sophomoric explications of the world —
in-jokes, allusions and inept
explanations for excruciating choices
made with no consequence except more
missives signed with a dead metaphor

*

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

*

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

*

Burnt-out tenements of the poetry wars
fought for reasons nobody knows
gap-toothed reminders of old stories
shadowed against remains of another day

*

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 in manic characters page after page
insisting on something and something more

*

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

*

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

*

Foxholes full of bodily fluids
rancid humors from warring sexes
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

2

Crew cuts and ducks' asses
to dreadlocks and pony tails

pleated plaids and bobby sox
to black tights and miniskirts

button down and button up
to bullet bras and plunging necklines

turtlenecks to tie-dyes
tomboy tees to pirate shirts

beatnik hip to hippie mellow
cusp of the sexual revolution

Cell Block Number Nine

to *Something's Happening Here*

Moonglow and Theme from Picnic
to *Sweet Judy Blue Eyes*

The Pill routine for millions of women
the Big O just rumor for millions more

*

You too shy to look at let alone talk about
body parts touching each other below the waist,
me too near-sighted to see something was missing,
blind faith our monads were a dyad,
both of us thinking what was going on between us
what we were feeling, must be love, that word
we knew from Hollywood, the Hit Parade,
top-forty singles and Sunday School,
machine learning at home on records and TV,
a numinous something or other believed in
because we felt it for one another,
that made us think twice about signing off with it
even on cards and thank you notes to grandparents,
to flinch a little hearing Brits call someone Luv,
wince when commercials said we'd love their commodity

*

Kids ourselves having kids
giving birth to one another

our parents too embarrassed to tell us
the facts of love we needed to know —

unrealistic expectations for
domestic tranquillity

having a life and making a living
the shelf life of love potions

maintenance and forbearance
the long labor of bearing ourselves

by at home delivery born
without the caul of their generation

the post-war puritanism

the white suburban exceptionalism

the PTSD
of their American century

*

Irony and objectivity
displaced by empathy and sincerity,
compassionate shared humanity,
pagan communal morality —
you weren't thinking in terms of metaphor,
hippies in the land of Cockayne or nickel bags,
but plain English lawn order prohibitions
when you concluded *The grass doesn't mind
being stepped on, that's its thing.*

*

It was obvious to us
Eliade got it right:
an act can become a sacrament

that despite all evidence
to the contrary, the act of union
is defacto matrimony

each lover a husband or wife,
each divorce an abomination,
an unfinished suicide.

*

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

*

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
inside our cool public personalities,

to be lovers of our lovers' whole being,
our politic as well as erotic persons,
entrusting ourselves to one another's love

*

Not gazing at each other
said Saint-Exupéry
but looking outward in the same direction

Not friends with benefits,
comrades in arms or partners
in a business transaction

Not asking the impossible
of one another — to prove our love
by proving it immortal —

but knowing our pleasure is
in helping one another to find
happiness growth and freedom

3

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

Where did we go when we went?
Did we ever come back?

*

Right-handed left-brained
eroticism a piquant hue
between altruism and ego
trying to find themselves in each other
afraid tripping the light fantastic
into blind faith love might be
a oneway ticket to lunacy,
a fool for a pretty face
and a sucker for sweet talk
walk into a Star Wars bar

*

Having sex making love

heads you win tails I lose
every word double-edged
two-faced in a two-way mirror

unable to share our nagging doubts
except in outbursts of raw feeling
when good manners and Gioconda smiles
weren't enough to hold it in

but we did confess to our unwritten
diaries that we did in fact know
exactly what we were doing to each other
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 read called neurasthenia,
dead or asleep lips never to be kissed),
sucking a thumb or sitting on it in bed
alone each morning with the same stranger
loving one another in cold blood

*

Wanting a love not only like salvation,
enlightenment, redemption by flying saucer,
telepathic heart surgery
but a love that solves the riddle of two become one
actually as well as in poetry
in real time in this here and now

our moment together in history — the social,
intellectual, moral world that gave us birth,
nurture and sustenance, a living world —
nature, existence and time, past-present
past-future future-perfect as immediate
as the ache of bodies to hold and be held

animals like any animal
with drives and dreams, regrets and jublations,
knowing not one whit about what or who we are
or life is, but alive to and for
and because of one another, our loves
whose histories and destinies we are

*

Up a tree two Cheshire Cat grins
in a catbird seat talking to ourselves
(*maybe you said our favorite topic*),
tasting truisms in the air at the time
an almost pre-romantic pre-erotic
brother-sister love we could fall back on —

born, weaned, come of age as we were
in the fetid atmosphere of righteousness,
straight-laced freedom-loving racism
mid- to lower-rung consumerism
paying lip service with a wink and nod
to God mother country heaven and hell

fooling ourselves, priding ourselves we'd somehow
ditched all that or at least the worst of it
by resisting existence within the state we were in
as if we weren't the very stuff of it,
one with our man-handled environment,
its off-gases slipping through the placental barrier

*

Forever Growth Forever Young
our pledge of allegiance marching song

the Kinsey report and Masters and Johnson
ECT and MK Ultra

air and water contagious
food and drugs adulterated

brain washing and oil spills
silent springs and Agent Orange

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

nervous systems bionic
electronic proving grounds

democracy and Wall St
two sides of a flipped coin

The absurdity of it all

The obscenity

The self-serving self-pity
The pain we cause one another

What could love promise?
What could lovers propose?

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

*

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

4

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, warm arms
to come home to; on the other —
symbiogenetic fusion
erotic desire and passion satisfied
mystic alchemical wedding union

*

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

*

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

*

One comes of two as I became
the one I am in loving you —
denial anger self-loathing
from passion to bathos by way of pathetic.
Self-respect too a kind of love

*

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

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

To turn self abuse for our ignorance
into a festival, giving thanks
for what we shared despite everything

In bittersweet memories
to find a joy to quicken the step
in this ephemeral here and now

*

Myself come back to myself in a shoebox
business-size typed on one side
when not scribbled in green ink with a nib
when I was trying to learn to be someone else
all of them signed with capital *L* Love

Rereading them, wondering if you did too
before sending them back, reminded me
how we would follow Country Joe's flatbed
through Berkeley streets on Sunday afternoons
singing a song about boys sent home in a box

*

War babies making 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