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 one another

❧

Burnt-out tenements of the poetry wars
fought for reasons nobody knows
digging through the rubble of Babel
iin hopes o finding a living form
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,
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,
the one-eyed snake who would be king
deposed in a land where people can see,
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*

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

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

the hidden costs of free love
liberated but far from equal

❧

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,
both with plenty to say about world affairs
but tongue-tied when it came to plain talk
about our own animality,

blind faith that 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 from records and TV,

a numinous something or other believed in
because of what we felt when we were together
that made us think twice before signing off with it
even on cards and thank yous to grandparents,
made us flinch hearing Brits call someone Luv,
wince when commercials said we'd love their commodity

❧

Kids ourselves having kids

giving birth to each other

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,
the single separate individual
by compassionate shared humanity,
me myself and I and our family
with 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*.

❧

Taking for granted that getting it
together — our lives ourselves our shit
(our doo-doo bunched, in the quip of the day)

that coming together communally
politically sexually

required loving one another

that being by nature free and equal
would nullify the loneliness
inherent in being human

it seemed perfectly clear to us
that 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 just friends with benefits
comrades in arms or business partners
exchanging goods in a ledgered transaction

Not needing dictionaries to tell us
love and *freedom* have the same root
to be free and *to love* the same verb

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

but finding one another to be
an other we want to be with
for the rest of our lives

to share the intimacy of loving
the mystery of erotic romance
the consummation of a lifetime together

3

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

Where did we go when we went?
Did we ever come back?
Why do you think they call it hope?

❧

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

telling ourselves we wanted only truth
between us, no secrets,
then finding that honesty sometimes
isn't the best policy

never dreaming our empathy
our loving conscientiousness
our caring so much about one another
could kneecap the excitement of our desire

unable to share our nagging doubts
except in outbursts of raw feeling
when good manners and Giaconda 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 one another
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 your reading called neurasthenia,
dead or asleep lips never to be kissed),
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 jubilations,
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 spitting image 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

Masters and Johnson Kinsey and Hite
ECT and MK Ultra

consciousness raising encounter groups

sit-ins to navel gazing

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

Love a morbid codependence
Kicking ourselves instead of the habit

The self-serving self-pity
The pain we cause each other

What could love promise?
What could lovers propose?

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

❧

Taking for granted that if it was real
it could go without saying, not need
constant upkeep or tending to,
that if it was real it would all work out
and if it wasn't, or was but came not to be,
naturally we, friends as well as lovers,

would be adult about it, let it go
with heartache but no blame-games,
It is what it is stuck on repeat in our heads,

a mantra for going through the rite of passage motions
reifying the ancient paradox
of fatal distraction as natural outcome of attraction

❧
Summing it up on your way out you said
I can do that with anyone

❧
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 no-fault accident insurance.
Irreconcilable differences:
compassionate affection on the one hand —
partnership of sovereign individuals,
happy campers having fun, coming home
to warm arms; on the other —
symbiogenetic fusion
erotic desire and passion satisfied
sacred paradox living mandala
mystic alchemical wedding union
coincidentia oppsitorum

❧
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
killing love in order to save it

❧
One comes of two as I became

the one I am in loving you —
denial anger self-loathing
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 the emptiness

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

❧

Coming late to accept that love is not
to fill each other's emptiness with our own
but knowing such fulfillment is impossible,
to embrace one another's incompleteness,
share one another's despair of knowing oneself,
cherish each other as the mere mortals we are,
live together a passionate positive life
for who we can, not who we can't be

❧

Myself come back to myself in a shoebox
business-size typed on one side
when not scribbled in green ink with a nib
when he 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