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I LIKE TO DANCE...

I like to dance, on the sidewalks, in shopping centers.

Spin a young woman on my hand

As she leans up on her toes

To be closer to the light,

Or to kiss my cheek.

I like my consciousness of her shoulders.

Fingers like grass growing up through cracks,

Rolling down hillsides in California autumn

To find love in hollows

And itchy arms.

I like to drink red wine, as warm roses.

The strong perfume of her blushing skin

As she pins me down

To touch her palm to my chest,

Or take what she needs.

I like the way her eyes look through her glasses.

Head tilted, resting her cheek against her arm.

As she stirs her coffee,

She sees other moments

In my heart, crazy stories,

Phone numbers written on memo pads.

The photographs we took and kept

Because we were afraid that we'd forget

And that things never last.

*I like when she sees these things, but doesn't speak.
Stays with me at night
Under stars, sheets and skin.*

WHEN LOVE IS ADVERTISEMENT

*You are my targeted advertisement
Lien-withheld, rain-check special offer
No deposit, no return
Open container law of golden proportion*

*You are the press release coverage
Tabloid-photo, sensational journalism
Focus group, group mind
Sterling shared unconsciousness of me*

*Overdrawn and torn in ten pieces
On no account will I put my money down
But wait, there's more
To be had in this economy of scales*

*You are my product endorsement
Low-cut, exhibitionist youthful vigor
White tooth, trophy wife
Awarded top honors by agency and man.*

LAS MANOS

*If my hands are shaking
Or soft
Instruments of separation;
Signals in my pocket
Of lines that project -
Cigarette ash,
Bottles.*

*If my hands are exposed
Or wet
Instruments of control;
With which it can be
Denied, the way that
Things are left,
Untouched.*

*Shares of privacy,
Fear that contact
Is its own sickness
And hands exchanged.*

*Motion Activated
Dispenser*

*Imposed and isolating.
Paper towels,
Restrooms,
Haste.*

LAS MANOS II

*When I meet a friend
Or a stranger
Or a smiling cashier
Girls with cigarettes or books
Pointy shoes
Bachelor's degree
Cautious eyelashes —*

*First with eye
Then hand*

*In the public restroom
Lift the seat
Hum softly to myself
Read the name of the company
Remember perfume
Bad jokes —*

*Marriage proposal
Sudden stop*

*After washing my hands with liquid soap
The motion activated towel dispenser
Is aware of my neighbors' late-night
Eavesdropping
When it imposes on my stillness
And exposes my hands only to air.*

YOUNG GIRLS SMOKE PARLIAMENT LIGHTS

Young girls smoke Parliament Lights.

Their hair is their denial,

Talk black, talk white.

Every man they meet

Is a threat

To celebrity,

Intuition, the fallen fruit

Of palm trees.

They have sticky fingers

From holding onto the cracks.

Their breath the first defense

When silence descends.

They used to have houses

With fathers,

Now sit zen

With cigarettes and playing cards.

I don't own any summer clothes,

So I watch television,

Live magazines,

Wait for the opportunity of photos...

To call you back

Or write long letters.

MY TOES ARE BETRAYED

*My toes are betrayed
Eight and two.
Swallowing the ocean
With four arms in circles
Eyes opened to blue.
I can't swim.
Place my cheek
Against the cool concrete,
Stand above me
The path of the sun*

*Green towers and ladders
Until I've come slow
Rustling.
Do dragonflies nestle
In among the ice
In the cooler
Or on the thin rippled
Surface like your skin?*

*But down. But under.
But deep.*

*I've will to press my lips
As lips to escape,
Pale the soft hair of your back
To part an afternoon.*

HOUSE 1031

Outside of house 1031

I burn my heart down to the filter.

Our enemies in mind

Fluttering the signal, angels and agents

With access to umbilical wires.

The phoneline's tapped.

Across the street,

The evening star above neighbor's palm

Has no hands and makes no apology.

It offers only distance, obscures.

This mirror, half-full

Will with tiny lilac and white blooms

Follow the walkway and bound the dirt.

This mirror, this world

Will predict the folly

Of a backward stand.

I offer the sidewalk and a quiet hello —

A woman, after a mechanic in coveralls.

The rest, filter really, I stub out on small brown rocks,

Place in a wax and paper cup on the

Floor of my car,

Before I enter and speak nothing.

WHEN DO WE SETTLE

*when do we settle and become dust,
will we run aground and cease to tumble?
we sail these oceans of tar and rock
through lands
we're all foreigners here*

*our bones creak and we rock in chairs
on porches and in bonus rooms*

*there is a flag painted on the brick wall
whose bright stripes and white stars
are telephone wires, television consoles
the grocery clerk has forgotten to smile*

*trucks and engines are dirt hill fortresses
where lights are left on if not for strangers
children watch the windows
and peripherally, cautiously we make plans*

*I could take two weeks in May
or possibly next November
I was named after my grandfather
the dogs won't gnaw at his heels*

MINING FOR PRECIOUS METAPHORS ON THE SURFACE OF AN UNNAMED MOON OF VENUS

Everything that you said was true, but I could only hear the sound that your S makes when it hits your lips. So, your points (they were numbered, weren't they?) disintegrated in the atmosphere not too far beyond planet Mouth.

A tragic and illustrative event. I honestly expect it to be covered on the local news tonight. Or perhaps I can read about it in the paper, on page E14, buried in the opinion section, right above an advertisement for teeth whitening or laser eye surgery.

I've been waiting for First Contact for a while now, thinking it was probably inevitable. Daytime TV broadcasts, public radio programs — I'd seen and heard your cultural language for years; I confess, my grasp of its intricacies is fairly weak. I am, however, prepared to press on. If it is silence that we need to avoid a collision, I'm prepared for that, too. A technological solution would be preferable, but not if it means further assimilation.

So, again, there we are sharing the same space and telling the same jokes to the same friends. I put an accent on the second syllable of your name, where it doesn't belong; you spit out three letter words that end in H and contain at least one but possibly two vowels, nothing more. Jeff Mangum talks about your secret places, alcoholic mothers, rings of flowers. In the middle of the afternoon, I wonder whether New York is really as bad as I fear.

I try to make my daydreams realistic. Ice cream on your smooth belly. Following closely behind you in the supermarket and collecting bags, boxes, cartons and shakers of spice. Breasts underneath the folds of your father's baseball jersey.

Every time I think about us, I'm so conscious of the spaces in between that I could only express my devotion in terms of subatomic particles. And I forget which forces are weak and which ones are strong. It's all colluding together as perfume and the scent of heat would, but without coherence I might as well try to connect the dots without any numbers.

I AM NOT A DOG AT YOUR FOXHOLE

*I am not a dog at your foxhole,
You've run to ground.
Nor are we masters —
We've set ourselves to ford brave rivers
With no protection of fallen leaves
Or climbing branches.*

*I will not go or make of you a separate ghost,
This cowering ground is marked with bruised shade,
The rabbit that runs to moon
Through empty wood,
Will take no further
And step aside the silence of maintain.*

*You will take what is yours,
What is tied,
Where there is no stain.*

DRIVE-THRU

*Up past bedtime, away from TV.
Jumping hopscotch in the Drive-Thru,
She demands attention from the speakerbox
In a ragged fur coat
And bright pink exercise pants.
Like two retarded children in their helmets,
They dismounted from a shiny motorbike —
The training wheels a memory.
They are both uncomfortable
With their bodies. He staggers,
Wears a bristled crown upon which he orders.*

I'D RATHER YOUR HEEL

*i'd rather your heel
that roughened pommel
or even white fallow
so break those pointed shoes,
their beaks threaten.
we tread in our ashes
where faces divided
forgotten, close my throat
to swallow the root of me.*

MONUMENT TO BUILD, TO OUTSIDE

*from keyholes scattered eye
grounded, anchor
windly walk upon prayer margin
and turn right
to cling toe edge
wooden catch
soft unlatch*

*sex like rocking chair
comfort, mother
this sparse bedding clouded
lay me sleep
and climb hill
to glint window
line my with dark earth*

TONEARM

*Tick tick
You organ
Grinder
Walkway and town car
I've got songs to sing tick tick fah la
Open air
I've got skin stitching
Tonearms*

TWO, THREE OF YOU WITH ONE NAME

*I have never been to your river
But I have been your heart —
When its cheek was ragged, pink fleshy apples
And its hand rested in another's firm way.
If you were I here
Hounds tongues and lambs,
paper sheets,
What swell of saltings
will carry the mountain,
If you were I here?
And this if my prayer,
My silence
Will allow
What binds is knotted
held to approbation
Kept close, when ices
Blanket in turn
Fellow of my breath.*

SONNET I (FOR RACHEL)

*We cannot by falling, let,
no sign against which to view,
and so I am, with sonnet set
irresolute, or part, to you.*

*As a measure to a step;
in summer, to come ere spring,
a bloom to burn as it is kept,
we lean, we learn, stir and string.*

*Will the tower, to prepare
drink with bright and wanton gold
your vined and fruitful hair,
in which our hands enfold?*

*There your harbor meet, set to drift,
send secrets cured with heat and shrift.*

ALL THIEVES

*All thieves, thieves of joy
Wrapped in blankets
Sorrow without gleam
Gods with no sons
That do not follow, or confess*

TONE POEM IN LIKENESS

*Tone poem in likeness
In soft necks and forelocks
In breathless in cigarettes
He follows behind
And we know him not to be.*

*So empty this cup and
Chew pieces of nighttime
With flowing flawed moment
Upon lips and in mazing movement
And we know it not to be.*

*The specter is hollow
Formed on cheeks and eyelash
The ice, the point, in water
Stillness unbound
And we will not to be.*

*Round the glass
And vision burnt with spirit
To mark my eye as straining
Moving upward or inward
Or toward what breaks me.*

SONNET II (FOR RACHEL)

*If pleasing it could be, please be well served,
By attention paid and clearest seeing,
Let motion and emotion be reserved,
To open our selves to health and being.*

*If in hope and trust were we two to meet,
In each sweet breath, still our need is for air,
And no choice in this, so forced to retreat,
In hope and trust, our intent should be care.*

*And so again, two are strangers as willed,
I in a tree and you under the wave,
In between our wires are crossed and are filled
With static of blood's promise and heart's knave.*

*It must remain unfinished, for an end
To end, must to meet we two, at a bend.*

TRUE DREAMS

I want to make it real, in this night informed by numbers made of lines and tiny indicator lights.

These are my true dreams; those that ache and toss and propel me. They fold themselves into my blankets and tuck their tails under the pillowcase. They have no time for sleep or for the fragile.

In July, I tried to hide in a closet, to find some stillness perhaps left in an old shoebox or underneath a pile of never-washed clothes.

PLANTS, ANTS, ANGER AND MACHINES

*One afternoon, I went into the small private room
To find an office plant bathing in the sink
And colonies of carpenter ants
Working to rehabilitate our discarded paper towels;
Scouting new territory on the toilet seat.*

*I cannot stand it when the cleaning service man
Quietly knocks.
I know that I am angry
Because the heart of his roaring
Vacuum machine
Can push all thought into
The confined space between my closed eyes.*

IN WHOM

*She in whom the diamond's risen
And I a black bear in red forest
Child, he toddles ankles and elbows
And his reach relies on corners
Where there seem to be none*

UNTITLED VIGNETTE, OCTOBER 13, 2003

I've wallpapered the edges of my mind with photographs — there are three that I've taken and the one that was given, unexpectedly. She wore lace and seven white stitches.

In between the notes of this particular refrain (the one I still cannot forgive), I've written down every coded message that was sent marching across my eye.

Flower petals on the sidewalk, a hairclip in the bathroom drawer, a package of 100 cotton balls opened with teeth while fingernails were still drying. Chocolate truffles in a gold paper box, wrapped in sparkling ribbon. A tube of vanilla lip balm against the cold Canadian air. Her son's medallion through which I could see a world of birthday cakes, puppy dogs and snowball fights that I'd nearly forgotten.

I think I'll follow the blacktop into the hills and try to breathe us back into life. It'll be cold and the lights in 10,000 living rooms won't do anything but pretend to be precious, but it's all that I have left tonight.

THE STASIS OF HEARTS AND TIME

*Freckle-Faced Joy is behind the counter
Marking time like drawing pictures
In child's pink crayon.
The men with their suits
Over their suits
Drink in compositions
Mix one part image
Two parts erect cowardice.
An icebin hums quietly,
Counterpoint to the stasis
Of hearts and time.*

*Let this word separate
Or hold between our fingers.
Spin the levers,
Touch the keys
To register another sale.
The line of her forehead
Sweetly interrupted
By the chewing of her lip
And waiting for late October.*

*If we could all be four again,
Touch the tips of our toes,
Criticize the height of monkey bars.
Forget our mistrust,
Grow up to be families,
Friends.
Play in the open sun,
Write to the newspapermen*

*To demand that they believe.
We cannot count, cut out shapes
Or make this frailty resound.*

SUFFERING IS THE LOVE

*Suffering is the love which cuts away;
I am tracing my scars,
Chasing words.
The pink meat of my heart
Set in relief against ideals,
All I have left before healing.*

*Compassion is the love which echoes;
Not only in my mind,
But in silence.
In harmonious relation
Sets the skin as it wills,
Through which all revealing.*

*Please be
And peace be
In tathagata
Will divine.*

HOW LONG IT LASTS

*Notes in the fog
That drop from your pockets
And fall on one edge.
Careful folds like Christmas paper
And fields of snow,
Which conceal expression,
Wind scarves around your neck
To catch a muttered call
And trap our breath in time.*

*The price of my secrets is weight
And I'm carrying on,
While the trains whistle
And the wheels advance.*

*The paper wings
Which would remind of eyebrows
Fall upon their edges,
Rest against the ground
Where can be found
These ashes, and carpet.
Our feet forming letters
That sell our secrets at open doors.*

*I can tie my shoes,
Button my coat, check my keys
With the same hand —
You always fail at noticing
An echoing shake of, the sound of,
The mirror of, I swallow twice.*

*And then it's quick goodbyes,
Hungover, heart-choked.
Tricking light, and crystal shape,
Collected in fog on the windows.
The water that's held in my eyes
Brighter now for having visited.*

DEVIL DON'T CARE

friday was a blur with many lenses. a low-contrast black and white view of sitting at work and slogging through the last day before my replacement arrives (i'm changing jobs soon and i've given notice); a time-lapse photograph of the process of deciding how to spend the evening when one person is full of wanderlust and a desire to hide from communication with the outside world and his own inner monologue and the other is adding up minutes and hours and trying to know where everything fits in and whether it's even worth it anymore to try to keep a handle on the whole process; dimly lit interior shot from the back seat into the front — the lights of the gauges shine up in my face — there is a stretch of silence or radio noise and the strobe of passing headlights and occasional gas station falls on the passenger's face; the nuclear landscape of Los Angeles ash winter recedes through the back window.

six hours to sacramento and chocolate labrador retriever dances with wiggling behind; calliope music and handheld camera that fulfills the joyous expectation of my best friend as he greets his best friend, ducker; the return journey is accomplished in three shots: two road signs juxtaposed, a river of orange and red lights on the Interstate 5 south and an odometer turning from 99,999 to 100,000.

i went to a party saturday night; i was dressed all in red with a pair of fake horns on a headband. i think the devil made me do it.

HERE

Here is a door, and you open it.

Here is a life, and you open it.

Here is my heart, and you open it.

Here is your hand, and you open it.

What are these fingers that trace an arch?

What is this step that measures the ground?

How is it that we will fall,

When the presence of hopeful grace is determined?

Here is a stand of birch, and you rise in the branches.

Here is a knot in the mind, and you are not tied.

Here is the place of our rest, and you lay me down.

Here is my softest hunger, and you open.

Where do these folds envelope green pasture,

Where apartment delicious pours full down?

Will and repair to a vision unbetrayer,

When thread and cloud steal into vivid color.