

Water color

by

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To my father

"The truth is ...

engines are the engineers now"

as a polished and sootless

automatic coal stoker

on its Annual Fan Trip

pulls snack bar, Rocky Mountain observation car,

air conditioned recliners;

puffs past; pretends for 48 hours, 400 miles,

and 50 bucks a seat

to be a century of iron horse runs.

A green engineer stops

a clean steam whistle

short of long and low.

yet the sound is long enough

for your longing,

low enough to recall how one steam summer

you fell across some lady's lawn her

husband found you overall grey

and the sweat not coming. You lay

there, until a sip from a cup

freed a weeping and a sleep. "Up?"

impossible until your woman came, could ease

you from your sleepsight:

black coal-choking train spits

smokestack grit in water-stop shadows,  
wheels its last night ride.

Now, past the time of that passing steam engine  
you can salute its crew, thumbs up,  
and glide white-in-the-sun steel pumping oil  
4 runs a day on Vanderbilt's eastern line;  
scorn the diesel Minds:  
"the engineers now."

We watched a bleeding egg

We watched a bleeding egg.

What does it mean in the morning  
to watch a bleeding egg?

We ate a blooded egg  
that gave us that day  
dark food for mourning.

Should we have asked forgiveness?  
Surely, we were grave. But  
it was in the beginning  
is now and ever shall be dead  
before the consummation--

blood comes back  
in dreams and days  
to smear a glass  
brown a cloth  
soak the snow,  
burn the groin as it falls--

all such gifts received  
with the taking of an egg.

If I could find  
a clouded silver shell  
that holds the rind  
of three oranges, smell  
them as I wind  
a new year's clock on some mantel  
here, I would never go home.

Prime dancer to understudy

Sit on the floor of the upper studio  
with your back leaning against a flat  
and your head cocked to catch me casually  
in diagonals across the floor below.  
Hips are in line and open enough that  
you are annoyed, yes? Continue to study  
nonchalance that frees me to pose and point,  
hold and prance in the mirrors I refuse  
to see. But you may watch my images  
as I dance, for you are permitted joint  
parts of enemy and envy.

I choose  
contractions and extensions and visages  
you scorn now, will mime in agonies  
alone, yet never create with this release.

To first year students

it is twenty-nine petals curling,  
no one red in its folds,  
blown, and nodding  
over four brown thorns.

## Displaced

I don't know just one river;  
I don't know only roan mares  
only the creases in Grandfather Mountain's face  
or all of Paterson's falls.

If I must have a place it's trains  
so no need reminding me  
of the ticket between me and a town.

But I'll trade you the post road  
I found in the Hudson Valley  
for a shrimp boat here in Beaufort, or the rum  
run by your great uncle Sandoi  
dead before you were born.

## STUDIES

1.

Sun Mary's hair  
down peacock blue shoulders;  
tips drip liquid  
from a waxed paper cup.

2.

I came home  
with a handful of Kleensweep cleaner's pencils  
two torn negatives and a broken toenail  
hoping to find at least thanks to last a millenium  
but all you said was  
you know we don't have a sharpener.

3.

I guess I'll have kids  
if I can call them  
Jeffrie Bean  
Frederick Vinegar  
Money and Pneumonia.

Rainsong for an untitled city

street stutters:

"stone gutters."

Post-mortem

Did I leave,  
crated, paperbacks packed  
in a 1957 black hearse-house  
(better than hitching  
and at least a friend's)  
to find  
classified in yesterday's Village Voice  
your epitaph:

"neophyte sculptor  
crushed by unfinished  
female form (walnut)  
falling from Jeep Scout  
tailgate."?

#2

I walked into a much metal building,  
touched my hands to much metal windows;  
outside milk-wine lilies grew.

And downing a much metal turning stairwell  
was a much metal sound;  
outside milk-wine lilies grew.

It downed me in a much metal room,  
and I died last night in that much metal tomb;  
outside milk-wine lilies grew.

In Search of a Flute Man

There's a man who blows  
/Flute Man play me  
a song/  
music on a pipe  
music from his mouth  
into shapes in the air  
for me  
/Flute Man where can  
you be?/  
music in his hands  
along a blue tone  
that molds me, makes me play  
like his pipe  
swings me in the air  
around, around and down,  
and blows me out  
a rounded glass note soul  
that he can see  
that I can be to please him.

Street

Cried a kid:

"There's a bleeding lady  
on the corner of 95th and Broadway."

Unheard.

Coincidentally said a stranger  
guided down the 'way:

"In my country  
when someone lies in the street  
all the people all they come."

Did his guide  
to prove we are not an unfriendly people  
grab a glass  
through "Eat Maven's" open doorway  
to catch the blood:

"It's like Mateus."

Blue green blues

I see your blue green eyes,

I see your blue green eyes,

Don't you see me too, blue green eyes...

you do.

I hear your blue green eyes,

I hear your blue green eyes,

Don't they say what talkings never do...

they do.

I feel your blue green eyes,

I feel your blue green eyes,

Don't they burn me turning away...

they do.

## CANCION DE JINETE

Federico García Lorca

Córdoba.

Lejana y sola.

Jaca negra, luna grande,  
y aceitunas en mi alforja.  
Aunque sepa los caminos  
yo nunca llegaré a Córdoba.

Por el llano, por el viento,  
jaca negra, luna roja.  
La muerte me está mirando  
desde las torres de Córdoba.

¡Ay que camino tan largo!  
¡Ay mi jaca valerosa!  
Ay, que la muerte me espera,  
antes de llegar a Córdoba.

Córdoba.

Lejana y sola.

## SONG OF THE HORSEMAN

Federico García Lorca

Córdoba.

Distant and alone.

Black pony, large moon  
and olives in my saddle bag.  
Although I know the road  
I will never arrive at Córdoba.

Over the plain, through the wind,  
black pony red moon.  
Death is watching me  
from the towers of Córdoba.

O the road is so long!  
O my valorous pony!  
And death is waiting for me  
before my arrival at Córdoba.

Córdoba.

Distant and alone.

## Water color

From this waiting room chair  
 black autumn profiles and the river's curve  
 are geometrics on a wall to a Wednesday morning brain.  
 Gap streaks of sky soak into the porous paper,  
 leave water marks zigzagging into the ground line.  
 The river laps in brush strokes,  
 refuses to shimmer beneath a water paint sun.  
 My gaze sinking, penetrates the diluted pigment surface,  
 and I see, not reflection, but sketch lines.

Yet

there was such a day  
 brown framed and grey matted  
 conjured by camel hair brushes and water pots.

\*\*\*\*

We woke to light patterns  
 slotted through barn wood.  
 "Kitchen" was the side in the sun  
 (coffee cup warmth would be a while coming).  
 Across a rotted slat in the doorway  
 someone had slung a snakeskin bleached and blowing.  
 And out: a field, matted cornstalks, picture-still.

"...to the water"

but I followed slow.

Sidesteps, slips; wild grasps and thorns;

flash mica chips along the bank.

You would not wait for me to cross

(did you know I would not cross?)

And my eyes followed the shifts in the trees along  
your path.

To wait for you, a molded sleep along

a trunk gating the river.

Balanced wakings blurred the water that would not  
yield your face.

Water laps, broken, refused to shimmer beneath the sun.

My gaze sinking, penetrated the surface

and I saw twigs, black and crossing like

\*\*\*\*

sketch lines.

Did I know then,

cupping the water so colorless in my hands

the wait as wide then as now?

After the mid-century

I find I am drawn  
to small inked lines  
not full stroked  
but lines enough  
to point the eye  
to "stone".

## Pilgrimage

Each spring we come down the coast way, A1A,  
count license plates, Coke bottles, Burma Shave signs.  
until we are  
stopped by his sea,  
stunned by our father's sea  
we, even staring under planes of hand shade,  
cannot see.

(That first time:  
mother's serene cream skin  
a screen in the shade for mango leaf patterns  
while we, brown and knowing  
beachcombers would take us for year-rounders,  
circled out and back to her "falda",  
folds of skirt, and father's word for that nest).

We weigh and wait  
the courtesies, the owner's little lies,  
and each year father's final "sí".  
As we cross the palm leafed patio,  
cracked tile crumbling in faded citrus green,  
up a stucco outside stair,  
brush blackened wicker chairs stacked seat to seat  
on the balcony walk,  
his words are slipping Spanish waves

that surround and drown us:

"Children, such was Las Conchas.

La casa de mi padre...

but then at this hour,

the hour,

la hora,

esta hora,

could we sit (dulces y café)

at his knee--at my father's knee--

the sea before us, and at the left

el sol, setting."

And we three, not with him,

search the sea for his island,

catch the sun setting on the right sides of our bodies.

He returns: turns to take us

into the rooms through a warped double door

shutting out the sea with wood jalousie slats:

"They are wide, those 90 miles

between this house, y ésta...

more wide,

mas y mas,

than all those we travel here to Florida:

Florida. Flores. Pascua florida.

A place named for the flowers, flores;

the feast of the flowers--  
the spring--the Easter feast."

And each year we fill the room with his flowers,  
failing not filling, like memory's  
"...flores...y Las Conchas"  
murmur.

Bathing,  
the water--glass and noon blue from the Gulf--  
we listen:

"Your mother, niñas,  
she has not seen Las  
Conchas. Not even was  
she your age, cariñas,  
when I was fleeing."

And sifting through us softly  
almost soundless  
if we did not sigh too his words inside us,  
his

"ai, mi Cuba, mi casa..."

"But tell them, Ruth,  
what its name means for you know."

And blond, from Boise Idaho, bending,  
her hand crabs the sand  
until for each of us she has

"a shell. Las Conchas: The Shells."

Week's end we turn our backs to the sea,  
return unwilling to northern spring  
grey and not yet begun.

He turns from the life of the sun,  
returns more than willing for the cold and another year.

I would a

I would a-waiting go  
beneath your window so  
to hear the laughter oh  
I know the sound.

I would a-wanting walk  
behind your walkings hawk  
to feed on leanest talk  
I know the sound.

I would a-weeping wing  
around your lover's ring  
to hear you kiss the thing  
I know the sound.

For laura

All the dark faces  
ringed with dark circles  
all the sad young girls  
sing thinly like their loins  
like thin flesh under their eyes:  
"A penny for a dildoe  
Now my man is gone."

And casts a spell

When my horn brush brushes my hair  
it charms: "do not see parting strands,  
do not listen to the bristle  
you hear when other hair untangles."

I follow yellow stained handle  
and bent straining fingers  
so long stroking close to my face  
I begin to pull out hairs.

If I were a furious weaver  
I would card the hairs from my brush,  
I would string them on a loom,  
I would weave them for a shroud.

Backwards

Break my bones

take them out of my body. I

wake without them

see them in the corner:

knee loose, left knee cap,

free vertebraes, and also fractured phalanges. In

prone position, sticking parts, I consider

bone: calcified continuity well

known for property of support. You

can't put them back in my skin, or,

slant the bed and I'll slide out, or,

plant perrennial rye and leave.

## Wooden Questions

Planks extend above our shoulders  
and under our feet until we are stopped  
by a crooked door jamb.  
Up the grainy steps I can already ask  
why is the cat I cannot see  
between my legs  
as I wait behind you on the landing  
for a light to show me her there.  
Your answer  
is better than a word  
and a face appears behind the metal screen.  
The cat pours like black paint  
between the plaster pieces scattered on  
the unvarnished floor, hisses us down beside her.  
We wait for tea and rice in brass bowls  
and your friend to paint his mind  
in India ink "for mother."  
Who am I for you sitting  
dance legged, sucking green tea,  
counting the leaves that escape?  
--Watch me watch the cat watch me--  
I tell you she can never,  
humping her back against our hands,  
break us. You know, and so  
to your friend:

the "Blue Room"? Or is it just a room  
papered and peeling.

I rock against the rhythm  
of the shutters and do not ask  
will we make love to the sound of wood.

Its fall

I looked at the down lit wool  
on my covered breast  
and I found a bent black hair.

The taking of it in my hands  
was enough to break it at the end.

It hardly snapped  
and let me remember  
the name of another lover.

Dream down will dream

There is a salt sweet  
ocean drowning dream  
in the tasting, tongue touching  
of the air.

There is your body breath  
before the end of my dream.

After your face, there is  
a want wet pressed, a waking  
to the where of you gone.

Bussing into Port Authority Terminal I saw

7 pigeons on a roof,  
backs to me and past them  
casement frames box tenement people  
in silent simultaneous operas.

Will Mordecai Jacob's navel freeze  
as he contemplates boats and trains on his faded drawers  
hanging out his open window?

6 pigeons on a roof:  
will anyone wed Mrs. Schlockmeister's daughter  
if she is found ecstatically massaging  
the folds of her underarm?

Will little Lonnie Schlockmeister,  
the sling shot maven,  
knock off another pigeon?

Should widow Kenny retrieving  
her pink 42 C  
from her husband's sister's washload  
leave daughter Kathleen defenseless?

Will Rose Link's fifth failure  
making bread

be grounds for separation?

Will Irving Jacobs make it with the pants  
before Kathleen's mother returns?

6 pigeons on a roof:

make a bet Lonnie leaves

before the birds do.

...in Rutherford

7:59

O Williams Carlos Williams

what did you do

in your park bench college town

when after June 20

the library had no Saturday hours

and the borough hall didn't open til 9

and the post office didn't have one;

and the campus

probably no sessions for the summer and

too far to walk for the condition you were in,

the condition you were in

being dire need of a bathroom?

11:26

Behind the town a street runs

along a railroad, same names.

Looking in a shed there, a shop there:

jagged glass, flawed glass, stained glass leaded,

hung in dirty panes. Looking out--

a church there--prisms in a prayer of colors.

iron  
willow  
man.