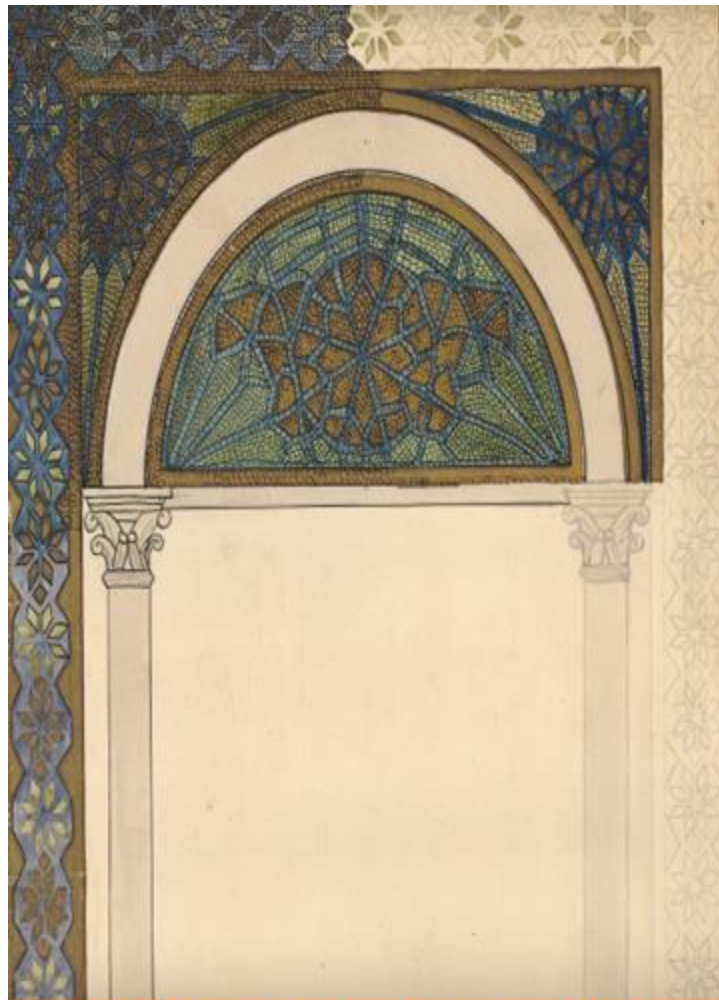


Nancy Cavers Dougherty

TAPE RECORDER *ON*





TAPE RECORDER *ON*
NANCY CAVERS DOUGHERTY

dPress ◀ 2008 ▶ Sebastopol

*For my grandparents
Elsie and Francis D. Weeks
Lelia and David F. Cavers, Sr.*

Cover silkscreen by the author
Title page by Lelia Yeaman Cavers



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OFF SHORE LOSS

You were six
towhead with mischief-making eyes
the Saturday we took you to Welfleet Beach
driving down Rte. 3A
me and a college friend
it was August
mid-day and really hot with a furnace breeze
you had your new beach ball in primary colors
we were going to play catch
something to do
and watch you play
suddenly
there you were at the ocean's edge
skinny back to us
cowlick standing straight up like a weed
looking at something and pointing
we looked too and saw it
the beach ball bouncing away
still near enough to almost swim after
but the offshore wind rolled it out and further out
over the white caps
you were now sobbing but in silent gasps
there was nothing to do but stare
at the small dot on the horizon
and then the horizon

and then at each other
mirrors of helplessness
nose running you kept asking
Where will it go?

VERY HARD TO DESCRIBE

As if she were outside
just on the mind's edge of the forest
perched watching
scrambled code birds twitter

a moment and then fly to bed

nestled in bottlenecks of kisses
a sahara -moonscape wraps around
a turban magnetic sands
ripple across the orb she turns

closer to seeing a thought pulse

TAPE RECORDER *ON*

Hot spring day
dandelions popping
 thirty-seven years ago
 someone's birthday someplace
he hears a milktruck two blocks away

like the horn of a car that is moving
 away from you
 its tone forlorn
 diminishing

playing charades
 she tries to act out a tv
 no one understands
 she picks up a book

thirty-seven years later
the birds still talk

in crow
 cardinal
 housewren

there is no milktruck

an indiscriminate tape recorder has it all
 the milkyway sparkling
he wanted only to capture the sounds
 of birds in the spring

it's her birthday

UNCHARTED

No map of the cayes in Belize
 can be accurate. Hurricane
 to hurricane shifts the sands
 of conch and coral
stretching contours
like silly putty. At Laughing Bird Cayes
 we detect paths
 in the sand winding
like the tracks of a tonka truck
 then see the sideways moving shell
then another.

 Coffee made at any cost
I reflect galley-bound and
 mindlessly scraping
 the creosote off the pot
 markings of the propane stove
while the catamaran
gently rocks. The harbor master counseled
 to chart your course
 knowing of one hundred and
eighty degree shifts in wind
 southerly squalls
 tides of six to twelve inches.

A line of white caps mark the outer reef
the ocean shelf plummets
 forty feet

beyond there is no easy course. Its dim roar
oblivious to my scraping
would take everything
even the gray clouds gathering overhead.

TIME'S OBVLIVION

Her words ring, Sappho is speaking

oval shape of a paddle
plunks in and out
of the aqueous surface

*someone, I tell you, in another time,
will remember us*

head of an idol
nose aquiline

seconds that measure infinity
soft laps of water
to the dip of the paddles

*for you beautiful ones my thought
is not changeable*

ripples that radiate
curves of the Cyclades Islands
echoes of nameless kings

*in a thin voice
you burn us*

you know the cold currents
positions of the moon
smell of ambrosia
feel of gold anklebone cups

BACK TO BED

A morning
that beckons
hidden from answers
the crossword puzzle
doesn't relent
not as bright
dull and who can think
of an answer to
tire
tire as rubber
burn your rubber
on the pavement
or cotton sheets
tire
could be weary
or wear out
like rubber or too weary
to rise from your sheets
of cotton haven or heaven
but it does not match up
with *Forum VIP*
could VIP be of course
red carpet treatment
champagne top of the line
glitter and cameras
what forum
and *Monster star*
could provide a clue
of a missing letter
if it changed the *a*
it could divulge
its answer
the *m* has to be set
for computer crash datum
error mode
some things are set
a lack of ideas
for *rumcakes*
why not a bundt cake
or jam
if not entangle like in sheets
or connect
like in spark

NOT KNOWING

The next question please says the Senator
to Louis Freeh the ex-chief of the F.B.I.
So intone the radio voices of the 9/11 Commission
as my husband drives us to Stanford Hospital
this Tuesday morning. Spring coolness is felt
in the coats and hats of passers-by and splashed
in pastels on the rowhouses of 19th Avenue
pale green blue and their shapes a round window
then a square beneath an arch trimmed in pink
then a round window in a square diagonal
light blue two stories stream by the windshield lens
and lull me into a dream state where his face
suddenly looms before me with one eye
staring like a Medusa in stone. I awake
to the words al Qaeda.

This is no ordinary day.
Rushing to his appointment for surgery
to remove a sarcoma lodged in muscle
beneath his eye. More soporific radio words
register legal impediments not enough money
from Congress and antiquated computers.
We are about there and much later we wait
for the surgeon in a pre-op room. He now wears
a wristband and a worn hospital gown.

His bed is cordoned off by a curtain
with an elderly patient on either side.
There is the clatter of gurneys rolling
down the corridors and the small talk of nurses.

We check anxiety with a Times crossword puzzle
filling in tunafish for sushi staple
burg for small town
algae for plant, type aquatic.
We get stuck on loose horse
and one of the Gorgons
six letters and the clue in my dream
one eye al Qaeda.

FAMILY HEIRLOOMS

The tray
is from Africa
for serving tea
carved from olive wood
(or black wood)
its curved edges
complement
the two dainty chairs
with ornate flowers
and grapes crowning
their mahogany backs
once belonging
to the Weeks
and Watkins once
of Wales

SELECTED HAIKUS

the Faulkner scholar
sits beside me speaks of
The Sound and Fury

snow-blown house warmth
hollow tree groan
mercury shatters

ancestor portraits
sepia tones in ovals
walnut framed unknown

LOVE SPELLED BACKWARDS

Understand
that bummers are lambs
that are runts
and abandoned by their mothers

The bummers
are
learning
milk doesn't come
out
of
fingers the hummers
are
burning ruts and limbs
out of clay out of
hopes surrogate
live your life
backwards
life
is
love
is cov-
enant

THE CINNAMON CLUB

Flagrant in your taking a tiger on
the prowl God of Bombay
boomlay boomlay I heard
your sure footedness pad
over decorum
decency teeth-baring
knife to ear splitting
smiling
in scented cardamom I hungered
for assurance
your each departure fraught
with fear a leap over the ledge
to the next canyon of pretext
evenings aloft in the heady towers
dorms of the MIT wedded

I could not reach
or fathom the hoo-doo hoo-doo
of mathematical parlay
more than just insurance and sales
over the card play
ringed in eights
the moon in spades
you practicing the arts of deceiving
then there were the revolutions
you never spoke of the Punjab Uprising
I should have known
you belonged to the Cinnamon Club
that the bubble was metallic-ringed
the sun was a black son
of a dog
the heat was fierce

DANGER

Bare rock slopes cling
coastal sage and chaparral steep
danger mother danger
she informs you
walking the curbed edge
that separates purple needlegrass
wildflowers and yucca
from the boardwalk
a balancing act
your daughter holds your hand
her hair in ripples
her hand cold
as the waves crest and roll
upon a pebbled beach
sandy brown in Cambria
you keep walking in a row
a family of four
sun piercing
each step de-energating
a lethargy you feel
crushed between the horizon
Caribbean sea and sky blue sky
the weight of certainty
worn like the mantel of lichen

covering the rocks
the wind whips your cheeks
a morning wash of cold water
she keeps tottering
on the elevated curb
she informs you
of a rabid squirrel ahead too tame
of snakes hiding beneath the sagebrush
a nest of hornets there is danger
even the star tulip warns
dressed in tanzanite
the ferns wave and bend
even danger imagined
fails to enervate you
or the seals spread on their beds
listless as the rocks
you take the steps down
to walk the beach its shore
taken by successive waves
at angles
danger mother you hear
its undertow pounds
reverberates
you collect a pebble
in your palm amber and warm
you gather warmth
for real danger
and pass a buttercup

MOUSE TRAP

She says it has two kittens on it
they are in felt with two dollars
inside now the purse is gone
and she whimpers to her mother
where did it go? They stand together
facing me at the information table
and I don't know how to help them
anymore than to remember
just what I was dreaming
in the hours before dawn. So I take them
to the Lost & Found of the fair grounds
past a life-size game of Mouse Trap

people-mice jumping up with glee
a clanging bell marble-bowling ball
buckets cheers and cat-calls the girl
covers her ears. We enter a cinder-block
building and wait to speak
with the woman behind a gray metal desk.
She jots down their phone number
and promises to call
should the purse reappear. My job is over
but there lingers a pulling at my conscience
of wanting to fix a dilemma
to find a way back
to that moment of happy recognition
of yourself in the shape of two kittens
a favorite horse on the merry-go-round
floating down the Amazon a corinthian
column of wisdom counting
stone steps cracks
lost in such musings
something unlocks the pre-dawn dream
I am in a museum carrying a baby
only a few days old
its gentle weight
presses upon my shoulder.

A PITCHER THAT SITS IN A WASH BOWL

I want
to know
just what
you say think know
and how what
you think
is based on
what you think you know
or do you
know
what
you know
then say
this
I know
you say

but I do
not
know if
you think
then say
what
you know
or
if you know
how
do I know

DINOSAUR FOSSILS

Intentions gathering
like saved buttons
today I'll do
everything I meant
to do
but yesterday but
cannot undo
the pitying tone though
she is such a nice person
meaning well
saving stamps and other
rare things that
belong in
the British Museum arti-
fact
wing a bronze Roman coin
Emporer Aurelian's head
under glass today
I'll do
everything but

LAST CLASS

Sounds de *las companas celebrar*
something was different last night
I noticed placing my head *sonidos*

upon the pillow words and word images
y sonar el *anuncio que vimos*
it would not stop as if my mind
were taken over as if my identity
were in serious question *cada para*
su santo and yet I could not
even understand these words
lodging themselves *en mi casa*
without invitation yet el *relampago*
hay *tormenta* it was exciting too
there was no controlling the stream
flowing with *palabras* now I know
estoy en las nubes this last class
she was mesmerizing bewitching
us with questions then cajoling responses
gray heads all in a row electrified
by her stories sprinkled with *la tienda*
segunda y el jefe va de compras only
half understood her *bebe y su hermana*
y nursing and jealousy of one
for the other craning necks to follow
her tumbling words *muy agrado*
agape mouths *deseando se alimentar*
con preguntas que pedemos hablar
nosotros mismos deliciosos dreams

WALKING ON YOUR HANDS

Some hot mid-day hour
if you are walking on your hands
everything is upside down
a smile is a frown
a yawn turns into a yell
into a cavern with poisonous ivy
thick and dark
shuddering
clasping your throat
you fall down
rising there is still no ground
the old tree stands
but on a cloud its branches
reaching heavenward
sweeping

its yellow banded trunk bearing caution
scene of a wreck
lies rumpled
still walking on your hands
the feet of dead men
soft padded
sinking in rice paddies
waving once in fields of hay
dotted with orange poppies and lupine
mountains dry with summer
wet in tears

WORD SEARCH

random
vacancy
roots
dirt
TV sounds
drone

finding
a meaning
in a calm morning
flat and lifeless
as a sand dab
lying on the ocean floor
camouflaged

starfish
dragonflies
listless
illusion
shallow
ripple

SEMANTIC INFILTRATION

media tactic to undermine opponents

*the process whereby we come to adopt the language
of our adversaries*

jellyfish are neighbors beauties adaptors predators
survivors opportunists

turtle soup

A MERIDIAN SONG

The words come out wrong
vodka-strong and cubed

no one said you had to do anything

the rain pours in acrimony
This is the fleecing of America

stories that float around you
polka dots of abstraction

the au pair became delusional
she wore black gloves and sobbed
her mother had to come from South Africa

little fingers tie knots of a scarf
in India so thin so silky
sheer red of sunset blurs into blues
of diamonds and crimson of poppies

bent backs over looms in Pakistan
rust browns and gray of mats
marking squares to eat upon or die

little red shoes for China

plastic-plagued Taiwan

belching Beijing

who said you could go anywhere

feel your breath and drink

in this crossroad-day where
the words come out wrong

elements and forms
broken chords
hang in gray
woven in tight latitudes

MARK WANTS DENTAL INSURANCE

The whites of his eyes are as white
as the frost in his heart as white
as black is night and her hair dyed

we scour the financials
the financial committee

profit and loss of performances classes
camps dog obedience ballet

across from me is Sandra

she tilts her head back her two fingers
stretching one eye to a satellite view
pops in a rubbery lens a jellyfish she feeds
drops flutters and blinks artificial tears

I read the notes
glance at the others

accluster a reflection in a bathroom mirror
driftwood bobs on an empty ocean froth seething
salt in whines and sprays of a blue gray

Maureen holds her chihuahua

his head is so bulbous an onion just pulled
eyes popping out in kernels tracking numbers

he perches on her swollen chest her eyes white
surfing him her long nails caress flash red
as he shivers lean as a minnow silver

SUSPENSION

There is a moment before the birds
begin their dawn-song
before the waves form into a curl
the second before an elevator lurches
or the orchestra rehearses
tuning their strings to the perfect 'a'
a moment before
the inhaled breath for the steps that lead off
the high dive
racing heart beats to heel bones
before walking to a podium
exposed as an egret
in a swamp night's darkness
suspension yearns
for
simplicity, resolution:
bites of peaches sliced
sweet potato fries
ice cream trucks and push of bicycle pedals
soap carvings and taut orbits
of satellites circling every tv
prunes on the table
ravaging distances in countdown from the dunes
of Salmon Creek to starry sky blues

PAULINE'S PARTY

Something was different this year
she thought gazing
through the window panes
resting upon the three koi
immobile in the pond something
but what had she really
heard what she thought
in the midst of goodbyes of how
the hostess had lacerated her thumb
of her left hand while using
a rotary blade to cut multiple squares
for a quilt moving her squared off
red-lacquered thumb this way and that

as she was telling see
vincible once bad jokes followed
mingling like blood on the fabric
the bloody cost of a quilt but no sign
of stitches now or the later
debridement necessary as tissue hardened
in wrong places she doesn't tell
of the triple figure dol levels that jolted
through her body lying there
before any doctor
could administer the local of how the hands
reaching towards her in pale surgical gloves
birlled her body with reckless abandon
how her head spun off
the long rectangular fluorescent
turning into the sun
in her own idiolect

but she thought listening
one more bad joke the white elephant
gift of ergonomic scissors
that prevent any strain or red stains
or thumbs on the floor she left
passing three koi shaped in long ovals
like sculpted fingernails attached
hardened and dried as the turkey bones
more laughter floating into the cold night
left from dinner laughter like frozen stars
falling onto the koi swimming into the depths
of a watery quilt

CHIRPS

Hanging out my window
 screen raised
 twisting the small wooden bird sounder from Audubon
 woody chirps
 swallowing up summer humidity

Never a reply never once
 as I twisted the bird chirper
 twisted it as if it were a red licorice stick
then faster and harder like a wooden spoon

scraping a bread batter into its bread hardness
then softer and wispy
as a feather
that coaxes caterpillars into butterflies
into milk pods

Sometimes I sat in my favorite perch on a limb
of one of the willow trees in our backyard

Hours growing long into afternoon heaven
but not one bird ever arrived
I wanted to draw them in
suck them in with sound
with their sound

Conquering all of their hymns
my fingers moved squeaky long
drawn out
then quick turns to a staccato

They never came

*

Darkness settles as we follow a nettled path
shadows of aspens disappearing into the cool sponginess
the sounds of toads beneath leaves
layers of leaves piled
wet some mossy

Their symphony grows larger than us and even the dogs
green wet chirping in defiance
in wild acclaim
of shadow ownership
no decency of holding sounds low
one after another joining in

We pass the beech trees bending white
bending in wide and grainy whoops
woody and grainy swoops
now in piccolo begging for tag you're it identification
hidden in trees above the toads

like when as a child
hanging out my window

DESIGN REVERSAL

We climb
towards the big house on the hill
 carrying plaster
 wallpaper and scaffolds
through a corridor to the kitchen
where a man with a mop
 says
“Stop where you are. The floor has just been waxed.”

We go back a few steps,
 he asks
“You’re not the wallpaperers, are you? I can’t believe it!
 Women papering the walls!”

 Nina retorts
“Well, man, what are you doing down on your knees
 mopping the floor?”
We laugh and set up our equipment.

NIGHT WRESTLE

In the middle of the night I wake to a door slamming
 then steps cushioned
 in the cold I wrestle with a blanket fallen to the floor
 try to unfold it as I would the ends
 of wet wallpaper
 it slips to the side
 I pull back again
 the bed still undone
 I fall asleep

A WHOLE CAKE

Her eyes brightened up
when the waitress said whole wheat bread

she gets one grabs it
brings it to her mouth
sucks

holds it with both hands

AWKWARD AND COMFORTABLE

Following one another blindly
waking up hungry
where is a map
 where is a direction
multiple points of view cannot be held
by a literal mind

Keep an equilibrium
sharing little flat pancakes of food
scissors to cut the hair
howling wind
nowhere is safe
 nowhere is home
following blindly until sight of a cubicle
structure added on
a refuge

There is no blueprint
 there is no plan
wanting to show up and be counted
the wind howls
like a thousand troops readying for attack
everything is comfortable
 everything is clear
all interactions are awkward and uncomfortable

Buffeting stances
positions for gain and advancement
no one responds
 no one cares
there is no discussion
how can there be discussion

There is only discussion about no
 discussion
missing something

knowing the contours of what it is
is what it is
Who really knows if it feels that way?
being stranded without enough for
nourishment

Perceiving the way
dividing the whole into little triangles
flat pancakes of food
how can there be any discussion
tiles of fish set in a mosaic
intricate and gorgeous
there is the study room
there are the cabinets in pine
the new addition
waking up hungry

THIS IS THE COUNTRY

Planes hum above Sierra water trucks
charging to home deliveries on windy roads

past a sick fawn. It has tumors that dangle
heavy from its neck. Repairmen lashed

atop utility poles sway banner-like
in the wind. At a dentist office a goat

is seen wandering lost among the parked
cars. There is no panic even surprise

as two women in jeans burst from an office
knowing what to do. They corral the goat

into a truck. The fawn keeps wandering
but cannot jump over the embankment

to its forest. On the news the next day
is mention of a cow loose on Highway 12

snarling traffic for hours. The fawn cannot
be caught by fences not holding back.

GIVE IT SOME MILK

She comes
everyday

purring for

or is she
looking for the mother
 run off
 the brother
mauled
by Ruby the neighbor's pitbull
 she glides
 by the door

crying for

sight of
or is it sound of the sister
 gray too
 and long gone

or food

TIME DOES NOT SEEM TO MOVE

Nor do morning chimes ring overhead and echo
in my head, nor do my feet touch upon the cobblestones
of Brussel's streets. Far away, the pigeons hobble

in pairs and part ways for tourists, who gawk
and pour in steady stream, jostled, through
the quaint alleyways. Now home, I try to sleep,

turning and turning in a night that would be day,
walking on to the next monument or square, the next
café or making queries to shopkeepers for the quickest

route to the Manneken Pis, the Grand'Place, or

the Musée d'Art Ancien. Tracing back centuries,
the Congo, Waterloo, portraits and villages of

Brueghel and Bosch. And trying to find a late morning
latté or afternoon cup of tea. Impossible in this beer-
flowing town of Duvall, Stella Artois, the language

barriers breaking down: French, German, Flemish.
Heaps of steamed mussels. Eye-smarting, the scent
of smoke-hazed restaurants and metro stations

faintly linger in my clothes and hair. Fitful and
shuddering, the back of my neck cooled, I pull up
the bed sheets and remember. The stony eyes of

gargoyles high in their guild house perches still follow.

PURSUITS

Slipping the yarn
over the hook
and through a loop
clockwise and back. Then repeat
26 times. Rows white
alternating with red
until squared-off. No fringes
for a potholder.

If you like chai
try making it homemade.
Cinnamon, cloves, cardamon
bring to a boil. Add Darjeeling
milk and sugar. Cover
and steep. 10 minutes.
Remove bloated pods
and leaves
or keep for earthy
fragrance and
soft hushed words.

Choosing one recipe
over the other
compare ratio

of liquids to dry.
Oils to milks. Factor
in eggs and spices
verses parmesan
and dried herbs. Zucchini
for summer gardens.

ZAGREB

You could pretend you understand
their culture because you have sat in cafes
drunk the cappuccinos
walked the cobblestone streets

toured the Museum of Modern Art
admired the statue of Nikola Tesla
crossed streets quickly to avoid trams
& Ladas
gone to bed listening to their screeches
and rumblings like lone sheep

You have inhaled enough second hand smoke
by the end of the week
to make a case for lung cancer
should it claim you

You've grown accustomed
to the mild goat cheeses
the bland pastas
& pizzas everywhere

You have even tried the famed plum brandy
that the generals used to drink before battle

You have mingled in the outdoor markets
tables of cashew apples
plums
& large grapes with seeds

You have jostled with late Saturday night crowds
party-goers laughing
girlfriends strolling with locked arms

their soft 'ssh' and 'zshh' sounds

You have even ventured to talk with several countrymen
Vedran, Tomislav, Bratislav, Ivana, Marcell
about their country
their lives
the war

The more you listen
the less you really grasp or know
this Eastern European world
of grand old apartments divided into smaller ones
facades of peeling stucco
old panes of glass covered with paper towels
showers that run hot one day and cold the next
bath towels so worn they are rags

NATURE'S TAKE-OVER

squirrels
swallows
propeller plane
Darwin fazed
yip-yap
dropped leaves
steps hushed
sky pale with blueness
misty with whiteness
cooler than weightlessness
Hume exhumed
Wittgenstein blind
Saturn Mars
gypsies
falling stars
late grass push
lusher
loser
basket-hording
catching acorns
south-sided moss
pies
squirrel pie
crow in the pie

face
mask

IMAGINE

(hablalo)

strawberries green plants without them
in beds
lying in beds each night
turning
u
r
n
i
n
g over and over the soil

paper mache dragon smiles down
from his perch on the rafter
on you on me on who
she is wearing shorts
we are drinking her water
chairs that hold
upsidedown words that fray
eclipse convolute *fresas*
strawberry fields forever he sang

a garden tour finds
imagine carved on a stone
m
a
g
i
n
e rolling on a bed of dirt

covered with fine netting
imagine peace Tibet
beautiful children
blend rake mold
lemons float in air
around the earth rotates us

everynight glowing
sometimes always at times anytime
you say
a veces tal vez all the time algunas veces
todos totally un jardin

rhododendrons cleave the tree
in the garden the brother-in-law's
AIDS

I
D
S leaving the roots

and groaning to our steps inside
chocolate smelling
orchid by the sink drink water
she waters them once a week we eat
the bread is warm

we play
caliente tibio frio hirviendo
it's the TV
no banana trees she is wearing shorts
and a short-sleeved top
two daughters
a fountain that gurgles
a Mexican that weeds
frogs crickets a raven

BOTTLE CAP MESSAGE

Of complications
they say she died
did you know
frogs
never knew
how could anyone
you cannot foresee
they do not drink
gulp
and
gulp
croak you mean
monsieur

their sound was deafening
a frog chorus by the pond
a summer night after the prom
as they kissed

 his tongue
searching
 for so long

 news travels far
across oceans
 gulfs

her roommate found her
 not breathing
they do not drink
 they do not

CONVERSATION WITH SOMEONE WHO IS ABSENT
to Joanne

Over our rum and cokes in your Cambridge kitchen
we distilled our philosophies
your feet propped on the table top
the crunching and buttered scent of popcorn
salt for more discourse on art and love
 Judy Chicago David Hockney our own future Van Gogh's
 broken hearts strewn behind like clothes that don't fit
our silhouettes illuminated in dark pastels
cast by the moon through a broken window pane
spinning our words and tales
 faster and faster from our seats in rusted iron-clad chairs
they became more dangerous more outrageous more hilarious
 more impossibly seductive and true

The system was but putty in your painterly hands –
 money there to be had
your dark-haired gypsy ways found easy employment
 and every penny the new CETA program had to offer
you got around the requirement of living in a certain town
finding and using a friend's address –
 a little paperwork finagled – and you were there
sitting with your feet propped up that next month

at the Somerville CETA office
listening and counseling the unemployed
How did you do it with such ease I wonder?

I am still listening to you timeless raconteur and gypsy friend
in awe of such aplomb and more than ever at a loss
at how to do things with such confidence and complete ease
like the sun and moon circling in their orbits
like the smell of butter and popcorn
the sweetness of rum and coke
just taking what is to be had as if you were entitled
and I sit here still feeling unentitled somehow

JAZZ TERMS

in memory of my uncle
Charles Bryant Frederick Weeks
1937 – 2004

Nothing but a nonsense phrase
she calls it
the “meen raspberry man”
meen for mean
my daughter’s funny drawing
and first grade words. I keep
it by my desk as a way
to know the impulse
to turn a phrase
imagine new beings to grace the old
and carry anew our truths
past hackneyed
and so I confiscate its use
for jazz
its percussion and beats.

The meen raspberry man
has come again. This time
for him my uncle
the one born
with the drumsticks in his hands
who sang the blues with Ray Charles
and played for nieces and nephews
his group “Weeks Hornblower”
for anyone with ears.

Dizzy Gillespie. All of them
he knew.

Polish born vocalist Grazyna

Pastforward

her CD his last present
to each one of his clan
classicists atheists rockers
all in the same beat
the same roll.

He sighs and turns in the hospital bed
the oxygen swirls and the tube wobbles.

The meen raspberry man
won't leave. This time we have told him
to go and find Louis Armstrong
bring him back
for a full concert. Or let's be current
Wynton Marsalis
or Metallica and the San Francisco symphony
for a zap of electronic music
like the album he once gave to us
forty years ago
one for all style.

Snapping his fingers
strumming a paradiddle
he was there in the vanguard.

This inner beat unfathomable and keen. It lay
in the neat plastic stacks
of his CDs. It hid within file folders
of family history ancient letters
and inventories recordings
Miles Davis
Louis Armstrong
Grazyna the Duke
Benny Goodman Count Basie.
the meen raspberry man.
Listening
I can hear his breath
hear his steps.
It is in their notes
still playing.

WHEN THE COWS LIE DOWN

On the drive west to Bodega
this Sunday
we pass a barn that has collapsed
 upon itself and I think
they do eventually collapse
these barns that you pass
 leaning windward in sharp-angled defiance
 a coastal bluff
my mind wanders more as we drive
the lush greenness still dew wet with morning
dotted with cows
last night's discussion
at book club of a memoir – an odd memoir
I thought
like being hit with pellets of bad childhood memories
 told in clichés one after another
and Carol and Gayle remarked
how the last time we met there were chocolate malt balls
 slick like olives not olives
 remember
 and don't be fooled
On the beach
we pick up driftwood
one stick is bleached
 smooth as an elephant's tusk
a redwood piece as round as the hills
 its age in concentric circles
 Was it my grandmother who said
when the cows lie down it means
it's going to rain?

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