

LYN HEJINIAN

from *The Book of a Thousand Eyes*

Musical and efficient the sun
on Don Quixote's kids—several boys, several girls—mother
to scandalize mildly, though she was tired
of passing through the gloomy frame of history.

Leaves, like things, drop from a narrative, you, isolated
words, whistles, charm and console us
without ornament, illusion, conciliation, message, success
to jam the messages, to parody the songs.

If the sea gives any grounds for optimism
we won't yet come to the abrupt end of the tale
able to draw a better duck the following day, a sharper star
with more shapely congruent arms.

Strangled by ten-fingered weeds or green with yellow rings
tin is the only thing that doesn't give in
and popcorn growing stale in the pale glow of the wisteria,
the jacket of an army uniform slung carelessly over a chair.

O popularity, you are great in short-term memory
of memory easily fatigued. You are profligate
at using people's names, especially those of friends.
No bitterness. Our ancestors did it. The walls
of Troy are far away. Now to penetrate
the mind of a fictional heroine who will not look like me
I am driving to a city I won't bother to name housing
A disintegrating cardboard box, a rusting tricycle, clouds
Thinly disguised as Pine and Main
And long stretches of capricious or sardonic behavior. And there is hurry
about it and I have a large refrigerator. In private
Pablito rolls a ball down the railroad apartment hall under an indifferent sun
in diaspora and in an Africa where pink's confused with white
that only becomes worse with time. Within I find him
playing solitaire. One-two-three-four: four paces and the wall.

Memorization—irreverent in spurts, passing strange, oblivious
to genre—gives him stamina, pleasure, power. It is only because we've
forgotten
that we can well remember
Alexander who is in love with Dorabella.

The ancestor wandered toward a horizon of important questions, a need for
recognition, then stayed in the circus—there is no other work for a
headless man from the gloom of origins

It had been raining for three days in that interpersonal environment, home
to local fauns where men come out of oaks dark, impoverished,
and freely borrowing, with a hint of criminality that the ancestor
abhorred

The resonant round world on which he stomped was an empty drum

Waiting for a fist to flash across his field of vision, he pictured the sky

It was unwise to make mistakes with him

His sweat was rancid

The Lost Pines Inn would be a good name for a motel, or
No Sheep in the Meadow, The Lost Egos, The Downtown
Country Inn, Mike and Ann's, Doug and Diane's, Bob and
Joe's, or Just Joe's Hotel, Warm Toes Hotel, Anything Goes
Inn, The Come Inn, The Company Retreat, The Hermit's
Den, La Cave, The Little House Hotel, The Reliquary,
The Happy Family Inn, The Rooster's Coop, The Corky
Floor, The Henhouse Hotel, The Egg-in-a-Nest, The
Rooks Retreat, The Cooks Inn, The Beat A Retreat, and a
music group could call itself Crested Loader, or 10-Second
Crossing, or 9 Car Train, or Thumb on the Space Bar, or
The Unlike Minimums, The Shepherds Without Sheep,
Sheep Without Sleep, Two Feminines, Autism, The Twice
Maniacs, The Genetics, The Nasty Uncles, Interfering
Women, but streets get named typically after numbers

or trees or they're given the names of prominent as well as lesser-known citizens or the names of great cities of the world or the great letters of the alphabet from A to Z but in celebration of the things we consume the names of products and objects should be given to some streets (Tagliatelle Lane, Glue Stick Street, iPod Alley) and to encourage pursuit of intellectual professions a city's central thoroughfare might be called Mathematics Avenue, Neurochemistry Street, Jurisprudence Boulevard, or Lit Crit Street while at the edge of town the throughways and byways could commemorate abstractions and generalized conditions (as in Global Capital Street, Logic Throughway, Affluence Alley, Interruption Boulevard, Domination Interstate, Accumulation Highway) and another great name for a motel would be The Soporif's Inn, or The Archive, and Duke, High Spot, Drummer, Archimedes, Shadow, Ranger, and Gamelon might name some of the 220 horses at work in my dark blue 2003 220-horse power P.T. Cruiser.

On two different and widely separated streets we come to the house with the blue lamp. This proves a city. It's hospitable to sitting buskers bent to pull the thorns from their feet and to the experimental man, French father, 97 down. With pencil and eraser aimed we redirect resentment. We start with a letter and then continue with a fax intended to negate it. Thus we take the first step of the ruined stone tower upward under the shelf of white lace toward the attic of the house with the blue lamp. Adapting sex to life there the great Colette was far from looking bored. The deformed right hand of the man with only a thumb and one finger is like an infant with its mother. Realizing this was the gift of a fine afternoon from which I now am taking my new identity. My mother was a carefully protected protectress.

A Naiad was plunged into a carnival tank, and I saw a bee today pause, then soar, but where could she hide? Well, life's explicit shine does sometimes blind us. Good! Fenugreek—golden fenugreek! As prisoners must see

birds that are as prehistorical in their freedom
as the sound of one hammer striking from two directions
vying for the children's love, I, humiliated, look down.

I can't calm the gaunt brown horse on the platform at the top of the tall
wooden tower, it is lying on its side, thrashing (its legs are very long, the
knees knobby) and writhing (its neck is long too and the expression on its
face is one of total despair). It fights to get free of my arms, I am holding it
around the neck, then I grab at its legs to keep it from throwing itself off
the tower, but I am thinking that perhaps I should let it go, as there's no
consoling it.

As the alarm clocks go off we say to ourselves it's time
Or to each other we say it
And, elbows to bed, hands to head
Nude, nightgowned, or pajamaed, we rise, some
To the left, some to the right
As if into a dream
Or out of many
And why?
When we sleep like geese
We're free
When we wake like geese
We feed
On wheat
And milk which we find melancholy
And why?
It's viscous and white and thick it shines
Back at us its round and simple placid face
Which we can scarcely irritate
Or imitate
Though we bare our teeth, take it on our tongue, grow gray with age, and die
 like paper turned to ash
Taking flight
As all things must
That are white
As cumulus clouds, flat at the bottom and round
On top they rarely produce

Precipitation according to the United States Postal System and often
Evaporate as the sun sets
Through a broken ring
Smashed by a hammer hitting
The hand of a woman once
A girl and that girl once
A bride who married a simpleton named Napoleon
Or Ned who led a life
Of scholarship eating candy and drawing circles
Whose value has increased so much that now, at 7:15 on March 28, each is
worth 71.5 times more than it was around
A quarter
Century ago
And why?
Ghosts are made of light and disappear
As the sun shines
Achieving new naiveties—butts bare, butt holes exposed
To alarming shittings
Of embarrassing excrement
Dropping in dreams
And why?
Between the buttocks lie secrets we cannot keep to ourselves
Of experiences
That knock on our nose, that resonate
And we let them—we can't help it—
See how the film running
Back shows ripples closing
In like initiates to a circle or animals
To a pool
From which they're chased back out by a man with a stick
And why?
Because he has a stick
And he's a man
And those are animals—a gazelle
Is among them, and a camel, a poodle, and more women
Than I can name Hilda, Crystal, or Diane
About whose neck hangs an instrument designed for seeing birds
On the wing or on the branch
Of the family tree on whose green boughs my grandfather
Publicly
Grumpy
And sweet
In the yard
Found some inedible fruits—unripe
When placed in the basket
As a child tucks a doll

Like Samantha (born in 1904) or Nellie (born 1906)
Both of whom come by mail with a book (see americangirl.com)
That adds to the story
Of life
A nineteenth century fiction
That they helped to make history when time too was young
And tomatoes were inedible

We three are a trio in a tree
Where like airy riveters we are involuntary saints and all aghast
But maybe it's more punk than hip-hop to the cops
And when I want to say more, your tongue is in my mouth

Like news the day after an election a phalanx of Lippizzaners sidles past
Praise and blame are left to alternate in endless controversy
Let's go slumming on Park Avenue
Let's make faces when a member of the upper class goes by

Having stolen the last vestige of the past, the best of it
Idleness in modern life is a kind of deviation
That quasi-eternity in which the dead dissolve and fade away
But if Langston Hughes were President...?

To what extent can I take back what I said following the uprising?
Just to have six tongues again new-found
Out of a bicycle wheel, we can make a fan
From a broken chair, a parasol

My father was a failed author—or was he?