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Blood

After Robert Haass’ “Transparent Garments”

Sundown: A young woman in espadrilles and, since
it is Halloween, black whiskers. A man
in a full-body suit cast in the likeness
of an extra-strength pink Tums. The Castro
is full of costumes. But I am very tired. I awoke

at four a.m. and folded clothes in the darkness, the gold
leaf glitter of City Hall, a cupola between
my living room window, Ginsberg’s Moloch Saint Francis—
  For it is by self-forgetting that one finds
  bashed out their skulls and digitized their minds—
and two miles distant, beyond downtown, where the Bay Bridge
dances away from the city, a landmass tremulous
with the presence of Ishmael’s faults. I wonder where
Hagar sleeps.

Things change, however. The maternity bras
arranged in a pile, socks balled in their own
special grouping on the hardwood floor, I trace
the string of blue lights along the sweet trellis
of the bridge’s steel trussplay. An occasional car rolls by
no bigger than a green ant trekking across the bridge
of an old oak tree. There is an acorn
somewhere. My wife sleeps heavy with her dreams
of the coming labor. Despite all the concentration
and worry, I am in the shadows of bridgelight
and moonbeam, daylight and dreamscape. Intensity, as
a proposition. Blush, as a proposition. Must there be a cause?
This ladder leading down to rags, up to fallen stars? If I were
a grammarian, the present arrangement of parts would be
a hard and fast invitation to invent new rules. Clearly,
  I just want
to be
the invariant passenger
in our tender car
with you and the baby,
the family.
There is no straying, no way that will not reveal
the proposition. I make. We make. Making makes us.
Later, I wake dreaming of a naked soul in briefs
ranging across the concrete with a sputtering Zippo.
I beat out the truths on the page, like shook foil
they leave this place here and enter the foggy ‘Frisco night where
I sought the twinkle in the outer garments, the dirt still bound
by fear, by idioms of bass and whisper, by cloudbanks
of up and down beats, by the theme of self
and the variation of difference.

Before breakfast, I must shower, the water always
a little hot and cold, my body of passion, been a long day.
Will this drizzle of worry yet wash away? Six bars of soap,
a bucket of ammonia, a Brillo pad and a toothbrush,
bristles as fine as Seurat’s brush, is that enough?
But I do not see a method in this cleaning
business. I am not ending my relationship
with soap entirely, I think. Who can resist jasmine,
texture of talcum, trip of cellos tapping some silent
concerto against the dancing wick of this trick lantern?

Aubade: our red car is where I live, heading up the ladder into
places where no boxcar can possibly go. In the naked
bed the fire goes down and we just talk about nothing. Nothing
relaxes me more. My mind is not right, and I like this, where
the heart is right, as where it forces nothing but blood.
About the Author

Jesse Ratner is a writer from the Bay area. In addition to writing poems, he is writing a novel about an interracial relationship.

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