

TO JIMI AT MONTEREY

Head wrapped around Owsley purple
Chewing on an open-mouthed smile
Ear tapping finger pointing
Snake tongue hissing a gentle warning
To those positioned below
Rubber sinew unbound in ruffles velvet and liquid red
Arms in water wave motions
The Stratocaster sharing your circulation
A spinning driving wheel
Over your head
Behind your back
Off your hip
Upside down in front of your face
Blood rushing to the headstock
Each hand taking its turn to make the sounds of two
Between prance and shuffle
Theramin oscillations spiral through the tremolo bar
Infinite rocket noises shoot from the fingerboard
Losing touch with gravity rising into the night sky
As you plummet to the floor
For a back somersault into a seizure without a hundredth-note compromised
Before jerking your insatiable core up onto its feet
And turning your back to the believers
Slamming into intimacy with the tower of amplifiers
Over and over
Creating the beastly roars and black screams of wounded jungle animals
Tumbling microphone stands knocking faith into the eye of the last doubter
Finally crashing down on your knees
Praying to the guitar
Then preying on it
Lighter fluid match flames
Fingers summon the soul to escape
Before smashing the grilled guitar to its end and feeding its bones to the crowd
You must have known
No heart could burn like that and keep on beating

ALICE IN WASHINGTON SQUARE

On an autumn day, hugged by humid air
And framed in gray clouds
Impatient with the music, the playground, and the other babies
You found the fountain
And when you tried to climb the shoulder-high stone rim
To see what was inside
I lifted you

And that's where the day painted us,
Granddaughter almost two, body perfect
Soft feet bursting out of
Worn down pink leather sandals
Grandmother born in a cold war,
My first breath taken during a revolution

My arm around your chest
Was the only thing holding you back
And I felt your heart in my hand
Pounding against my palm
At twice the speed of my own

Then after I had lifted you and invited you to see
You demanded not to be kept from
Stomping and running
Through the two inches of filthy murk green water
Stagnant and growing with God knows what
And I said no
Lowering you back onto the pavement
Countenance screaming, body writhing, and legs kicking
You tried to climb back up into the fountain on your own
And screamed louder when I wouldn't lift you again

But know, just for that instant
When I felt your excited heart at the ready
Waiting
As if everything that came after today
Was dangling on the edge
Of what happened at this exact moment
I understood
And I almost let you go

DIRECTION

Buddy Holly,
I read,
Used to stroll Washington Square
Teaching chords
To guitar players in the park.
I wish I could change his history
The way he changed ours
So, I watch "The Buddy Holly Story"
Over and again
Waiting for a different ending
One where I get to see him grow up
But instead it always ends with me
Looking for the future
In the neck of a guitar

AN INVITATION

An old Shasta Compact Camper
With wings that gleam orange in the evening sun
Two beds, a refrigerator, a sink, and a stove
We'll pull it across the Lincoln Highway
Tin can tourists on the sneaker sole of history
Traveling polar opposites
You're the driver
I'm the cook.
You take your poems,
I'll bring the guitar.
You be the young one,
I'll be the elder.
I'll take charge of the day,
You'll do your best work after dark.
East to west
We'll fill notebooks with alphabet pictures
Drink in the coffee, the art, and its people
And at night
Dance under nothing but a sky
That dangles keys from its stars.
We'll fall asleep to mystic nigunim
And wake up to "Scarlet Begonias".
Sip icy mint tea in the baking sun
Spoon hot curry on cold evenings.
And when we're ready,
We'll head back
And tell everybody
What we found

IN MY DREAM...

...I'm at work at the hospital on the tenth floor
And I happen to be standing in front of the big window at the end of the hall
When I see two white mushroom clouds rise up into the sky
From the ground somewhere in downtown Manhattan
And I yell, "Oh, my God! We're being bombed again!"
But then, the craziest thing
As the clouds rise up, they flatten
Into two opaque membranous white circles
Until they look exactly like giant Lion's Mane jellyfish
And what kind of bombs could those be?
But then, they explode and disappear
And leave all these little icons floating in the air
You know, yellow happy faces, blue pigs, purple Pacman ghosts,
Butterflies, flags, musical notes, letters, smiling cherries...
Well, I don't normally go for those things
But they're much better news than two bombs
So I say to the nurses that come up on either side of me
"Oh, no, it's not bombs! Look how cute!"
I don't remember who's on my right
But Nadia is standing to my left and I squeeze her hand
It's extremely soft and feels like it has no bones
She's very young and I think now that the soft hand
Symbolizes inexperience, and a need for some kind of guidance
Anyway, while I'm smiling at the sky, she's not even looking at it
She leans past me and tells the other person
"I'm not happy where I am"
I tell her that we can only be where we are
And we have to make happiness wherever we find ourselves
But she still won't look
And I went to work that morning trying to keep in mind
That I have a responsibility to spread that message
Because there's a lesson in every dream
And that one was easy to interpret
While others aren't so straightforward
Like last night
Why did my Irish language professor climb into the bathtub with me
And ask for the ginger soap?