

The Politician and the Poet

Strange things happen in college towns where polarized personalities get magnetized. Maybe that's how Teddy and I started the shuffle, this lingering quadrille, our crooked box step. We're at opposite ends of the spectrum, and outsiders listening to us quarrel might conclude that we hold competitive belief systems, maybe even speak in incompatible terms. Still when our worldviews rub up against one another, we tend to produce friction, not quite flames. He's circumspect, I'm the dissident. Teddy has many friends and, more amazingly, is on speaking terms with nearly everyone in town. How did we ever get together? I'm the child screaming from the rafters that the emperor isn't wearing any clothes, whereas he's the type to walk the naked over to one of the many clothes stores on State Street, instruct the salesmen how to clothe their wounded flesh, as he pays the bill.

Our relationship keeps a faithful vigil as to how language reveals itself. I'm in the chapel at midnight lighting votive candles trying to heave words past rage. He follows Truman's injunction and is a plain speaker. Teddy scowls when I suggest that in his desire to get others to follow him, he too quickly sacrifices truth. Poetry and politics, I advise, push the envelope on truth. I become Orion and am forced to stalk him like that bear hidden in the dark night's sky. His cornerstone is pragmatism and after he has listened to my rants, he's certain I've just called him a liar. His preference would be to walk amidst fields cleared of nuance. Teddy attracts me by being elusive, and maybe that's why he keeps getting elected. Sometimes I think he sees me like a cluster of dandelions, a pretty distraction only at the moment the wind can weave its yellow spindles into sunlit gold. His trained civic impulse is like one standing before a mural just unveiled whose job it is to pull the community's eye into looking past its gaudy splashes and feel soothed by its underlying serenity of form. Teddy counts his constituency as family, and knows how to shake out the vote since his appeal is always for the populace. I speak to the heavens, pleading for truth, at least half-aware that no one else wants to hear it. Teddy appraises what is needed to get the job done, labors to establish the commonality, and works to ascertain the bottom line. I'm always contemplating what gets lost in this process where people compromise more than seems comfortable.

When I'm most irritated with him, I lobby hyperboles. "Teddy," I say, "you're a bomb-buying capitalist." I know it's direct theft from G. B. Shaw. Pure plagiarism. Yet since Teddy slept through

most of his humanities classes, he misses most of my allusions. I just keep repeating this phrase whenever I see he's close to tottering on edge. It infuriates him. Veins in his neck start bulging until he resembles a muscle man lifting outside his class. He's far from attractive in these moments. No Arrow Shirt Ad Man. Perhaps this is at the heart of his friends' animosity. They can be caught mumbling their dissent in my presence, casting out their *she's bad for the boy* looks, and not so quietly encouraging Teddy to toss me. Yet, funny thing, despite the extravagance of his polite demeanor, he is far more ruthless than I could ever be. Teddy likes to win and hates losing. He memorized Robert's Rules Chapter and Verse the long summer he spent alone in the North Woods contemplating his political future. A Law and Order Man, chaos enters his life only by way of the back door. From a distance, he found me sedate, worthy of early cell phone entreaties. Now he's aloof as he mulls over his middle game strategy.

One of our earliest dates was at the Hi-5, a rickety miniature golf course located out by the county airport. I had only agreed to play a single round of miniature golf since I knew in advance that the Hi-5 was encircled by custard stands. My calculation was that I could taste something sweet soon after surviving a reasonable quota of silly traps, but his game should have been given less ridicule.

"Teddy, how can you expect me to take this game seriously? I'm standing beside Bozo the Clown and Millie the Milkmaid? This is a comedy."

"Play it on through. Stop trying to break my concentration. Don't be a sore loser, Ellie."

Ellie, that's what Teddy called me when he was berating me. Introducing me to his affluent parents, I was Ellen. Perhaps in the beginning Teddy did believe I was a competitor. He knew nearly at once that I didn't like to lose. Upon suffering a loss, I'd sulk with a sullen sadness worthy of a stage performance by Sarah Bernhardt. Public places seem to inspire hysterics in me. So many of us are conditioned to be afraid to feel, and so even a twinge of what appears to another as if exaggerated emotions holds the power to light up a dark sky. Onlookers encourage exhibitionists like me. Teddy reacted by acting as if we were alone together. He focused only on me with a disapproving stare as he tried to cancel out the circle of stares surrounding us. Teddy's adept at sidestepping public disapproval. His resolute denial of it displayed an attractive resilience, a stony look worthy of being carved into Mount Rushmore. I guess his stoicism triggered in me residue from my mother's frosty reserve. I seem to have mistakenly calculated that if I could get Teddy's dander combed straight up that it might help to balance

out my mother's need to torpedo my rush and gully feelings. It didn't work out that way, but I needed the help of my therapist Marvin to figure this out.

“Why are you always testing Teddy? Can't you establish peace? Dwell in abiding calm?”

Maybe I should have understood with that question that Marvin wasn't acting as my therapist. What true therapist asks a patient half-way through treatment why they aren't content to seek out peace? Isn't it the call of the profession to stir up conflict before the possibility of equilibrium exists?

Therapists are supposed to don a mask of neutrality and remain minimally at one arm's length. Not Marvin, he was too neurotic to achieve that level of twice removed pity. Periodically, he needed to fuse with one of his patient, to bond entirely, be lost in another's pain primarily so he could forget his own. I realize that it's supposed to be art of the sullied transference process, but I've grown weary of these mechanical explanations. His weaving in and out of another's subconscious was like triggering mines in a bomb field.

“Don't you know Marvin's reputation,” Sally had asked one night at the Grove. “He's notorious for cheating on his wife. Who does he cheat with? His patients.” Her laugh distorted into echoes.

I must have look unconvinced, since she continued, “he's a professional alright. A professional skirt chaser, and I should know since I reckon I was the sixth female patient he slept with.” She dragged on her cigarette, looking askew at me as she puffed a ring of smoke away from me into the space of what was past but still painful.

I guess Sally was still dealing with her issues. I'm not the professional, but to me she was a textbook case of unresolved hysteria. Maybe that's why Marvin slept with her. Think about that old bugaboo cause and effect, and be warned against a horde of therapists acting out their unprofessional desires. Some of them may believe that they are resistant to transference, while others catapult into this quagmire rather too quickly. All psyches have their dark corners, don't they? Counselors can hang a shingle after about eighteen months of coursework. My Holmesian streak seems to think that most begin without effective internships. At any rate, Marvin seemed more intent on reeling me into his arms than actually helping me escape my bugaboos.

It's not strange that Teddy was red hot jealous of Marvin. If Marvin faltered by becoming overly attached to me, I erred by repeating his indiscretion to Teddy. It was that gallant side of his clunky armor. He'd liked to position himself as a knight errant. It didn't matter. He had a rescue complex and clearly Marvin was big league completion in this department. He didn't like anyone taking advantage of his girl. Yet, here's the rub. Teddy was never willing to publicly name me as his. Possessive in private, fuming spit and ire in his heart, he liked to appear in all public venues as if he was steadfastly single. One night early in our relationship his campaign manager Rocco took me aside and indicated that it was to Teddy's advantage to appear unattached. Single men pull young women into the voting booths. Further, Rocco, oh so casually implied, my eccentricities could cost the boy votes.

Only later did I realize what all of these maneuverings meant. At the time, it felt great. He was so perfectly close to unattainable that his adamant refusal to hold me up to public scrutiny, even as a friend, fed into my fantasies. We were both, or so others came to convince me, commitment phobic. Susie, a true devotee of Oprah afternoon drama, tried to have me listen to reason first. I had skidded successfully past these scrambled observations at first. However, after Dr. Phil was on the air, it was no longer a fair fight. She had become a two-fisted critic now and I steadfastly refused to watch either of these snake healers. At first, Teddy had fooled Susie precisely because he was her kind of guy, an optimist. Anything bad that was happening should only be discussed from its angle of potential good. Too much positive, if you ask me, will eventually erase its counter negative charge and you don't need to be Benjamin Franklin to understand that the kite you threw up so fiercely during an early spring storm will come sputtering down with insufficient electrical force when the air cools.

I guess Teddy knew he'd have to meet a few of my friends. Funny, he preferred, now that I think of it, meeting only those happily married. He knew I was suspicious of happy coupling and I think meeting only the women already paired off in my life was going to keep him off the hook a bit longer. He was, as I can see now, a slithery fish. He didn't want that final union, knew it wasn't what I pined for. It was when he was up for re-election that all the troubles between us flared up. In past campaigns, I had shown up at the victory parties but since so did half the town, it wasn't an issue. No one noticed. He would glide by me, lightly touching my arm to indicate the evening's note of appropriate gratitude. It

was like a secret handshake. I did notice, and I can tell you I bothered to look, he didn't touch anyone else on victory night in the same exact manner.

No, men who had hit the streets ringing doorbells, standing in the rain at the perimeters of campus dorms, got bear hugs. Overdone. You had to look twice to make sure the two buff joes weren't being filmed by WWF. With women, Teddy was always more cautious. Maybe this should have clued me in way earlier. Truth is whatever I saw that I didn't dovetail with my fantasy needs, I ignored. I delighted in the fact that I had such little vixen competition. Underage co-eds loved him, treated him as a stand-in for uncles or older frat boys. He used to advise them how to win back the boys who had just dumped them. More than once I had questioned Teddy about this.

"If the guy has walked, why encourage these chicks to hustle him? Why reinforce their low self-esteem, their desperation to be seen again with the Main Street hunk?"

"Not everyone is like your cocky self, brash and self-affirming," he had shot back.

Now I realize that by playing up to my strength, he was setting up the cards for his later hands, the tricky cards he'd have to play. It was important for him that the woman he chose to stand beside him had a highly developed sense of self. If his girl had an extremely high level of independence, it worked to his advantage. See this is part of the weird chemistry that kept us panting after each other for so long. Hot, cold. That's how others saw our dog and pony show. Thinking back about it now, I begin to see it was my defense mechanism. I must have subliminally understood that I wasn't going to be a keeper. He was a challenge and although in the end usually elusive, I thrilled to the chase. We never had an established routine for contacting one another. Sometimes we spoke two or three times a week. Other times we wouldn't speak to each other for nearly a month. Of course, sometimes during that month, we had bumped into each other on the street or at places we both liked to hang out at. Then we would speak civilly to each other, displaying our affection with an obligatory offhandedness. We spoke to one another with curt but never unkind words.

Usually after the third or so of these unexpected encounters, he would call me. And I would wait patiently for him to do so. I guess I understood, even in the middle of things, that he had a need to exert control. So I gave him his head room and indulged in the enormous liberties our relationship provided me. If I had a last minute opportunity to cover a story in Hawaii - yes, it did happen once - I could pack

my bag, place my reservations, and leave without so much as a goodbye call. These were, after all, the rules of operation he had so strategically put into place. I guess I didn't see for a very long time that this was the tone used when he indulged in his own emotions. In-house. In-town. Dalliances were what gave our relationship the edge and I remained ignorant as to how centrally they kept us half-hinged for so long I had foolishly remained loyal to him.

Truth be told, I didn't want a relationship where the partners act like homing pigeons. For some reason, I needed ridiculous amounts of latitude. I felt he was lassoed. I really didn't believe anyone else in the city was even a third as interesting as I was. And, maybe, I was right, but plenty were more available, less demanding, more adoring. He needed doses of rock star-like adulation and I couldn't give him that. I had been let in under his skin. Or, was it that this was part of my witchcraft? Maybe he didn't grant me entrance. I just picked the lock. No one can say what's the reason two become one. I'm still not sure what drew me to his surface circumspection. Maybe I knew it was like a lounge lizard's set, and that underneath that guy in the bad polyester pants crooning Sinatra, there was another guy on the edge, hip and happening, waiting to be let out.

Jinny did that for him. They'd been doing it, that two backed beast Iago tells Desdemona's father about in the opening scene of Othello, for years long before I uncovered the fact. Long before I arrived Jinny offered him no questions asked about sex on the side. Ironic, isn't it, that I'm the one on the masthead of a progressive Midwestern publication listed as an investigative reporter? Maybe that's why suspicious wives pay the big buck to have those Columbo-types, wearing wrinkled trench coats stained with jelly donuts, trail their restless husbands. Distance may make the heart grow fonder, but proximity offers us a close-up view, conveniently covering up what's shabby, and often better left under wraps.

Ah, Jinny. Teddy, it seems, was fulfilling the American male's proverbial Asian fantasy. Here was a woman who did exactly what he wanted as often as he dictated. Per diem. Per hour. Per hotel suite. It seems Teddy got his rocks off by paying her for sex. Yet, she wasn't a prostitute exactly. At least that's what I told my boss in my own self-defense when he wanted to know how his number one ace had the season's best story almost at her beck and call, and never even registered it on dial tone. Ultimately, Jinny was not just a lithe, gymnastic bimchette. No, she used Teddy to find out how the legislature would be voting while in the middle of Around-the-World, and this was her gift, the way she

tediously kept discovering whose vote next needed to be swayed. Teddy was oblivious. After all, she never asked him what was the price needed to pocket these votes. Never seemed that interested in politics or vote counts. He must have mistakenly thought it was like a sex lullaby to her, a way to stay focused amidst the camel back and other trampoline style positions. Teddy was only one of her sources. He felt safe with her, believing in the mythology they had woven together. I seldom offered Teddy the opportunity to feel protective or as gallant as Jinny did. So, maybe his cheating was my fault? Could his erring ways be ultimately traceable to my deficiencies, not his?

Oh, the shame. In the end, I was another Teddy. One more public official who had to live and die by our daily reputation. I was mortified. By what - her youth, good looks, 9.5% fat, great cooking, seductive listening skills? No, it was actually her lack of any desire to talk. Jinny never talked about herself. Her m.o. was that Vietnamese flashbacks had so traumatized her that she had to live as if she was always stretching out, trying through sex and booze and cigarettes or whatever other fantasy release was within her slender fingers' reach, to forget that all too violent crossing. I was never sure she had been a Vietnamese Boat person, had actually fled the Camera Rouge. No, it was hard to tell her age, and she seemed to fluctuate in her appearance. In the dark, at the bar's edge, some who had been drinking may have placed her in her twenties. Others saw her as a Mata Hari, a sophisticated woman whose duty it was to seduce as only a woman in her forties can fake out a younger man. Still despite my general disbelief about all of her claims, public and private, it was me she told, not him, that she had never lied to him. He hadn't cared enough to ask her any direct questions. She was like a fog to him, dense and liquid-like. He seemed to have understood that he enjoyed all that fumbling in the dark, but he never expected to wake up with them both facing the same direction, equally satiated. No, she had told me in inflections without remorse, but a bit like how a tv anchor might report at the end of battle during the final pull-out.

For me, it was absolutely strange that Ted had never in the entire time they had spent together asked her anything personal. As a journalist, this detail was my Waterloo revelation. Yet wasn't it even a bit more startling that he had never offered her any direct info about himself. It was her rule never to make him sweat, and so she had never pressed him for words. Too busy pressing other things, I had thought, in one of my many sarcastic reflections. We were his twins, I guess. Two women so different, but for him, equal forces needing constantly to be re-directed. She was to be silently maneuvered, but

encouraged to keep creeping closer, while I was to be the one sometimes all too abruptly, even almost brutally backed away from.

Yet, even I crouched down in his foxhole, not by personal choice, but maneuvered by his need for spin, I understood that she by herself had been insufficient for him. Here was where I had come to see that their fantasy space creaked, and that proverbial gap yawned. The trick was that they had spent such little time together that Teddy could indulgently believe that he could control her every move. “Every breath you take,” that’s what Sting sung before he met Trudy and he belted this line in an attempt to get over the girl who dumped him. Ah, male fantasies. What I still haven’t completely figured out is why Jinny never asked Teddy for money while fully dressed? She even ceremoniously pushed back tips when he left them for her at the bar. While they were seeing each other, playing out their mutual fantasies, she was so short on cash she lived on Ramen noodles. Yet it was her custom, some of my girlfriends giggled and called it her religion, that she would only accept cash after sex; otherwise, she refused all tender, bills, coins, final caresses. Jinny did not wish to live within the constraints of I.O.U. system.

Obviously, Jin worked as a fantasy construct for Teddy. She never voiced her disapproval, but rather wanted for him to bounce her out the door. After three Millers, he resembled an animated Tigger and, what can I say, she always seemed Pooh-like to me. Women of ferocity never expect their lovers to turn south on them and to long for submissive types. Wake up, it’s a near constant. Men like variety, and seem incapable of loyalty to a single fantasy. In verso, Jin typed Teddy as her hero, projecting onto him her delusional fantasy that he had guided her out of Vietnam. “It was you I dreamt of on the boat that first night, Teddae,” she had drawled. “You called me here.” Sometimes when she knew they would be meeting later that night in her all-too candle lit apartment, she would croon, “and when you call out my name now, it’s what I heard then.” Yes, Jin was an actress, and such an unlikely one that she was that much more convincing. Other men later told me how she operated, how her body arched like a linen bridge, so fragile and oh so supple, imitating origami as it folded and unfolded beneath them. It hadn’t really helped my ego’s sting that she had been the fantasy on call girl for so many of the city’s politicians at their all too damp watering holes, but it had instructed me.

Dark and medium-to-heavy build, Teddy looks approach that of the Everyman. If you were Jinny, certainly, you would have put him in your scope, added him to your to-do list. In my most highly

prized rational moments, I must have been willing to concede the likelihood of this charade. Part of how easily he was elected could be traced to his table rosa effect. You could project almost any quality onto him and make it fit. How else could you explain the fierce polarization of his attraction, Jin and me?

Jin, of course, shared Teddy's politic ways, even if demurely. Most Vietnamese boat people and their families were more likely than not, led out of the city by their own people. Yet her chosen savior was oddly enough working out terrific guilt. He was projecting onto her layers of fragile fantasy, needing to be gobbled up quickly, or like that German delicacy, a Black Mountain Forest cake left out in the sun, it would all too quickly ooze into something inedible. Street talk was that Teddy's brother had died in Nam and that he had been another of its ugly casualties, one of the walking wounded never called to battle. Saved, he lived his life under the shadow of not having died. The first symptoms of his syndrome surfaced in his flight to college where he had partied hard, but yet again been spared. He had not succumbed to the roulette wheel's creaked-out spins of possible overdose or too toxic STDs. His older brother had been his mother's favorite and now finally by default he had become first his family and then his city's go-to-guy.

What's interesting is that Jin had seemed to be unaware of Teddy's background. Or, so she had claimed. Hadn't she appeared before him as if a miracle prayed for, a man's pretty stretching within reach, beguiling as she kept inching close enough to become entangled within her all-so-loose limbs? Wasn't she madly sexy precisely because she seemed to hold no knowledge likely to get in the way of her bag of acrobatic tricks? Or was it that she continually emptied herself before each new apparent victim? Jin had seemed smitten by Teddy's generalized fondness for her family, referring to her mother and siblings even as a new husband might remind his still all-too-obliging wife to pick up milk, butter, and eggs at the grocery. "How's the family?" he would ask while seating himself on the barstool in front of her, but he could no more have told you their names than he might have been able to recognize them while passing them on the street. Later, others had said that she was his ghost.

Teddy was the darling of State Street. He was the near pretty boy, a regular in Madison's political haunts, common and as necessary as a shiny penny costing far too much to mint. Wouldn't most men have acted in kind? Available to all at almost all hours of day and night, he seemed to understand that it wasn't so inappropriate that some of those desiring some of his skill sets wouldn't mind if he also

desired them? Most seemed to know that these tit-for-tat relationships were temporary in nature, even if many of his constituents offered within their hearts eternal gratitude. No man is perfect, and certainly not the Everyman. So Teddy had charm in abundance and succumbed to many with much less. His frailty, and this is what I tragically took so long to discover, was that once hooked, all too tightly baited like a fish, he could never wiggle free. Having obtained what he had perhaps only covertly desired, that elusive basis of local political power, he had begun to collect alliances and dalliances like unhappy women collect shoes.

There had been something dark within him, a circle of untold secrets unwisely mixed with a cocktail of unrecognized despondency and bravery thwarted. Talk had begun, sooner than I should have discovered, that when drunk, he would start screaming out military instructions. Those sitting nearing to him at closing time might receive captain's orders.

"Learn to lean. Duck. I'll take the fire. Allow all bullets to be mine. I'll take the hit for you." Jin had seemed to ignore how often he had started to morosely mumble, "my life is over, let the young live." This combo of Chicago's Al Capone Valentine Day's Massacre style hitched to Marlon Brando's *Apocalypse Now* performance sealed her attraction. He became bravery personified, a living re-enactment of the American youth who had guided her out of Phenom Phen. He bobbed before her as Buddha and Santa Claus rolled into one.

Truth be told, Teddy was only half interested in Jin's memory of Vietnam, he liked best her cooking. It wasn't on the menu, but he could invariably talk her into cooking up a Thai dish for him and tag-along cronies any time of the day or night. Mostly, he had Pad Thai. He had not been in Vietnam, and so when those night terrors or beer-drenched fears arose, it was as if it was his brother's last breaths he was trying to catch, and not his own. I understood, even if belatedly, that Jin was the hands he had chosen to hold him when the tremors set in. Not all that interested in him personally, or he her they could rock the cradle, sway, and be gone in one piece.

Jin had within her stable a pretty constant boyfriend, a Laotian, but Teddy seemed to have discounted him - that is, if he really acknowledged his presence. She was his mother lady, ghosted body, sex drive-through. Why should he be bothered seeing her in context? The funny thing is that both Lam the Laotian and Teddy had been in Jin's presence at the same time, but Teddy never noticed. He was

used to all eyes being fixed on him. My mother would have told me that this is standard behavior for men stuck on themselves, but daughters so often ignore maternal wisdom until it looms large for them later.

Maybe he knew, but refused to mark out the space of the competition. When he was with Jin, he felt as if he was in No Other Man's Land. Women had that effect on him, and so it seemed as if he seduced himself. Yes, Jin, could captivate as could his Ellen - but it was he who did the hunting and named the day's prey according to the whims of the moment. We were each, let's face it, the fish of the day, usually with appropriate discretion and paced sit down feastings, but not always.

I reflected back afterwards, after reading through my diaries, that Teddy must have been translating when he spoke to her. Haven't you ever seen those Japanese students in American college courses furiously pumping fingers in near anger at grey plastic, attempting to translate their lectures in real time? They forego any sense of accuracy for the comfort of being able to claim they know something for the moment. This is what Jin and Teddy had, but it's also what we possessed. Although I only write it out here, in near silence to you, we were nearly the same the two of us, the love he had for each of us, and most humbly of all, I don't know that I loved him any more or differently than Jin had.

For the moment? Can I use this same comfort logic as my excuse? It was as if I was writing to cancel out all the contradictions inserted between us, bridging them over with a desire to establish myself in his plateau. His plateau had seemed comfortable. You couldn't help but notice that he always had clear cut positions. Child care? Companies should co-sponsor a portion that was magnified by government monies. Only later was I able to consider this policy relatively brazen on his part since whenever a child, or worse a baby, crossed his path, his eyes never settled on the child for long. Babies were invisible to him when they were lodged within his eye's horizon, but as part of his policy work, they were center stage. Each child, he or his spin staff had publicly calculated was worth one or two votes. Ted knew the more the family was intact, the more likely it was, he could count on multiple votes. Extended families stuffed his ballot box. Although thinking back on their time together, I can't recall ever seeing him physically kiss a baby, returning to my normal powers of reasoning, I understand he must have. Yet there was always another distraction more compelling and so he'd follow the new lead. It was as if he had already put the baby to bed.

I gave permission to the universe to obliterate all other parts of him but those responding fully to the complete woman. She was seduction, yes, and full captivation undoubtedly. It was his eye crafting her, his ear assenting. Even though I was consciously oblivious to her presence, I believe now that I understood in some of my unskimmed depths that he was radically present elsewhere to others in ways he was not to me, and that this was likely to include women. It both goaded and pleased me that it was her -- a woman, single and universal at once. Quiet in contrast to my talkative style, so wonderfully slim and agile, but empty headed all the same, and not long for the road.

Maybe Jin, too, should have noticed this. Understood how Teddy defined kissing babies, but I was like her, and all too easily distracted, in the ways he calculated and, yes, even maneuvered. We both saw him as a vision of what we wanted that may have had very little to do with what he actually was. We both failed to take him as is, but were willing to just keep getting a chance to be taken by him. Each of us went to sleep plotting how we might be able to direct his body to lean closer towards us. Swaying together, I would dream, we would kiss - or so we would plan. Yes, Teddy was one of Wisconsin's capitol's most popular pols, and the secret was he wanted you to know that everyone wanted to, and he was willing to sleep with everyone. He could custom build your fantasy or hers. His trick was to build you like a fire, allowing you to send off sparks while he kept collecting more kindle.

Isn't that the role of the politician? To want you to like him. To edge you into thinking that he is but the boy next door, having your best interests at heart, willing to do what it takes to please you. Mow the grass, haul away the shrubbery. Carry the water, cut the ice. Bring the newspaper off the sidewalk and lay it on your porch for your perusal, or your consideration. To take it when you had so decided - but it will always be, don't you be mistaken, as it was with Teddy and me - and Jin - at his chosen hour by the path he chooses and at the correct pace. At least, according to him.

how I might direct his body to lean closer toward mine. Swaying together, we would kiss - or so I had planned.

Did it ever happen? Did I hallucinate everything? It's hard not to track the difference between memory and history. It's as if my desire had traced over everything, canceling out what was ugly. I'm pretty sure that we slept together. I can, at any rate, tell you how it feels to have his shoulders curve against mine and know that when we slept back to back, I didn't like to fall asleep lest I lose

consciousness before I had felt completely caressed by his body. My interest was always there but sometimes it feels like he was raiding my tongue, pilfering phrases for his public platform debates.

Stealing words and phrases. If this was his goal, it means, I would name him as thief. Yet, there's that split again. It's practical and I can't rightly say, he ever intended to hurt me - or any other potential voter. No, malice is not part of his temperament. Still never hitting a false pitch, always striking the right chord, how can such behavior ultimately be trusted? It's part of that training of restraint, or is it genetic coding? My attraction led me to a fiscal conservative and, in the end, I knew that all that restraint could never hold out for the long haul with my need for hyperbole. I had to leave him, and my final rearview mirror snapshot of him encoded in my brain is of a man in the light kissing babies, and hovering in the dark naked doing acrobatics. Indeed, I wish them the best - or wish that I did.

And so is this cliché about Jim . . . that he tried to intuit what to say, what words might allow him to enter the garden, and even what phrases would allow him to stay. What he did not want was to be asked to leave the garden. He wanted entrance, not an exiting. And so he would transform, would morph into almost anything the