

IT WAS A LARGE WARDROBE, FROM MY 4-FOOT PERSPECTIVE

Deep enough to step into, touch lapels of his suits,  
patch leather elbows of tweed jackets, ties lurking

through thin mod prints, hint of naphthalene and musk.  
And Mom's feather-light blouses—slack polyester willows.

Rows of empty sleeves faced west, to the window  
that framed the rugged Učka curving above the bay,

its hazel-green like the eyes of this fox boa that Dad,  
in one of his moments of bravado, had stolen

for Mom, and that she, of course, never wore. Once,  
those glassy eyes flashed, as if at the dirt-brown stack

of scuffed briefcases on the ground. Inside, sis and I found,  
lay stained, yet still glossy, catalogs of the '70s decadence—

page after frayed page of nudes running through poses.  
Our lashes threshed at each of those glam-wantons—

and that dog. We'd seen sunbathers scattered across cliffs,  
naked and lazy like fat beige gulls, and that other time

when we peeked through the keyhole at Dede bending  
over a steaming bath, his body creased with sickness.

Instead, this show of shipyard makeovers—the hollow O's  
of pink-frosted lips, lids caked with silver eye-shadow, thick

semen, and in this up close, Salò-like shot—that puppy's  
innocent erection, its mahogany fur almost like our pet setter.

## ROMANI ORCHESTRA

Even the street kids running by a *kavana* in this poorly-lit alley know your kind—  
another dull Slavic star among clouds of smoke,

balanced on the edge of a rickety stool, leaning toward some new, pretty face,  
the two of you cleansed in the reflection of shot glasses.

From their street, your mouth is a funk apparat of familiar lines: all brass, blather,  
your tar-grained voice plying romance like a fiery Balkan accordion.

And for a few more dinars between the strings, the violin will keep lamenting,  
trumpets coughing their belligerent longing,

your blind hand pawing up her warm knee until the lights come on, spill milk over  
your magic squalor, the streets already in their cardboard sleep.

## TIME DIFFERENCE

Six hours apart is not too bad on an average day.  
Like when you step into jeans, still stiff  
from cleanliness, I slip into the coldness

of sheets. And in some other world  
somehow more physical than typing notes  
we almost meet in one naked moment,

though not many days are average just as you  
are not an average man. Except, you remind me  
of someone I knew years ago—at times

even loathed—he, too, was a picaresque consumed  
with unrestrained sex and the nursing of plants:  
like that ficus with bruised eyes you found

on a street curb and now tend to with UV lamps,  
(the blooming cactus he filmed daybreak-to-dusk,  
just as *Death in Venice* observes a man observing a boy).

Like the sun is busy, dedicated to the fading of drapes,  
and like Albuquerque dust turns the sky into sheets of slate—  
how long before the limestone cliffs of the Adriatic?

Like the ebb of a paper cut, the thrill of your messages,  
thin and anemic as the hours between them.  
Funny, had I loved him less I'd hardly remember him,

just that skin: ashen, after he died, his gaze fixed  
at the flickering persimmon out the bathroom window,  
leaf shadows on his face, and the fruit of his absent breath—

MORE FERARUM

You make me feel graceful in savagery.

With every snarl, each small whine, I shiver like a junkie at the sight  
of a burnt teaspoon,

like fever chills zing through bones, like the warmth of panic attacks.

You turn me on in uneasy ways, like a fresh widow's recurred penchant  
for crotchless panties,

the sweet ache of fucking against the stone sink behind St. Josephs', chicory  
scratching itself, the bells' rings like tongues

gossiping. In fact, I think you're the little beast squatting under my ribs,  
beating on the djembe—at each thump I tremble:

a smack like the sweet and bitter in Maraschino, a scorpion's pinch.

I feed you nest-tangles of my hair, the skin off the small of my back, toss  
in a few fine words—*Spank my ass with that plank-hard cock*—

so we will never get bogged down with some ordinary anxieties, love,  
just like the sea will never stop fighting itself.

## LOVE BOAT

*If I talk to it nicely, will it work?* he asks  
while scanning my card, feeling the strip

on its plastic back. I mumble back something  
clumsy. He's cute, though, gives me long looks—

I can tell he hasn't practiced them often.  
His arms, their long mossy smoothness

shows under the rolled-up plaid shirt, its tail  
tucked loosely below the ribs of his corduroys.

I think, *He is far too young*, and how I've fallen  
for the bookish types too many times before,

how my history with such is enough to fill  
the scrawny poetry shelf in the corner,

the one facing golden puff pastry recipes  
and columns of self-help manuals.

I think how certain personal histories  
should be pushed overboard some transatlantic ship,

made illegal, declined visa and residence and sent  
to Cuba, or some other godforsaken place.

But Cuban music is sensuality and vice fused tight  
(the stuff decisions are usually made of), and I imagine

Creole nights must have that strange sultry flavor, too.  
I think about how mellow sounds can be cues

for something more disturbing— like jazz in movies  
signals a brooding scene in a little room in the back,

someone sitting on a bistro chair under a bare bulb,  
beaten like the orange pulp of six hundred cracked

mamoncillos. At the same time I fail to understand  
the meaning of an unresponsive bookstore card,

*(stanza break)*

and why, an hour later, as I stir granules of raw sugar  
into my macchiato, I find that my new notebook

is blank, not ruled, and that paper—its white narcotic  
emptiness—takes me back to the soft-spoken clerk.