

Coma by the Sea

He wakes to a voice in his head that says, "Don't be nasty, Bea." His eyes shift up: a nurse's smile is lit up like a harvest moon. She speaks, her words near and far, like a conch shell ocean, a white-noised nothingness. They roll him onto a gurney, then left through whispering wards, left down echoing corridors, pass, left again, under the hum of fluorescent lights that pulse like slow-motion strobes, his ears filled with the lagan and derelict of hospital chatter, elevator dings, rustling smocks, shoe squeaks and the sexy end bits of doctors being paged overhead. He smells the rose lavender body spray of the nurse pushing from behind, notes her asymmetrical nostrils seen between her shifting breasts, a haywire of auburn hair, and he drifts into a Dali-esque vision of her bush and labial line swaying, as she walks, like a flowering jacaranda, all lavender, rose, and seeks harbour in her humid fragrance. Then brief blue sky, a blatant sun. They slide him into the ambulance, like a stuffed bird into his mother's oven. Two cops, sunglasses, laugh like cricket mates, their twangs—one, a taut nasal tenor, the other, a beefed-up bass—coming at him like the colloquial chamber music of the mad. Slammed doors, a siren shriek, a short gauzy ride through honking morning traffic to the state facility. Doors swing open, two paramedics smile down like stoned cathedral creatures, and slide him out of the oven, alcohol, perspiration and urine pulling away from him, like olfactory ghosts. Left, down a dark

corridor, left, into a dim room, more Doppler laughter from the dayroom, an old familiar nurse peers down and sneers, "You.had.your.chance," then more darkness, and no lavender, the steep descent into a Trazodone sleep.

Out of the dark energies of his night came all the rhythms and possibilities of his day. But on this day there came no whirling dervishes of thought, no Lohengrin grails of desire. In his tiny windowless office, he had opened up space with Rodin plasters, fresh hyacinth in a Greek vase, Pollock prints, and an assortment of bric-a-bracs that conversed with each other in the symbols and tongues of Babel ephemera. Very softly, in the background, as a soothing white noise, his stereo played *Justorum Animae* on a loop. He sat at his desk, case files piled high like a jungle of housing projects, high-risen compartments of despair, slowly slashing, with his golden pen, prognosis after prognosis, page upon page, slowly, like a graffiti rebel caught red-handed merely going through the motions.

"Doctor," some familiar voice rose up, the doctor gazed down, as if from the belfry of a mile high cathedral, and hears the quiet, plain *j'accuse*: "You had your chance."

"Don't be nasty, Bea," he pleads. And then down went the handfuls of Clozapine, the promised peace, falling, and in clanked

the gurney, the slide, the slam, the disintegration of laughter into tiny bells, past fugal mateship concertos, past gleaming children building towering cathedrals of sand in the sun,—one of whom was he, Dr. Dante—left, down new corridors of slow strobing light, left, through darkening wards, left, into an operating theatre, where old nurses chant, like gorgons, “You had your chance,” and, as he starts to turn to quiet stone, another voice, the Sartrean violin virtuoso of his social circles, cries out, like Luther, “If you want to think new thoughts, you must break the bones in your head,” and with that crumbles the cathedral—down come the arches, buttresses, painted ceiling, creatures, stained glass, pews, altars, statues, Madonna frescoes, bells, crosses, priests and organ pipes, until there’s nothing left but a skeletal, charnel pile of ancient doubts. And then the endless labyrinth of nothingness breaks open like the branches of a flowering jacaranda tree. And sleep is a sea shell. A conch roaring, bringing the ocean of infinite desire. And, he, at last, he will become that conch, he will become that sea. Yes, but for the burgeoning fragrance, the coming-into-consciousness, like some inertial diffusion of lavender and rose, where he must become yet again, and *be*.