

Fiction

Toronto

It's a day for the beach or a trip to the museum downtown
To study the new collections and pretend we're more foreign than
We are, because that's what you do when you're in another country,
You go to museums. Yet here I am on the patio of our apartment
Because my throat is in a coma and I have a show at six, and I want to
Be able to project. Audiences like actors who project.
We make them feel safe and welcome
In the dark strangeness of a lonely theater.

It's nice outside and there are three children playing tag
On the baseball diamond.
They beckon me to join in but I can't because I'm sick
And I don't quite trust them yet. They understand, I think,
And go and find their refuge in the shade where I won't be
A distraction anymore.

I know it's time to go inside now to dress and clean myself
And remember what I look like. But I see a plane above the children,
Underneath the clouds, flying slowly and not far from the ground.
I want to warn them because I don't know where their parents are
And I feel responsible because they're children and I then wonder if
They have parents at all or if they ran away or if I'm to take them in
And look after them forever.

They don't seem to mind, though, and that is reassuring and devastating,
Like watching a dog pant calmly in the heat.
I guess it's normal for planes to fly like this, as they
Drive through the traffic of the sky, patiently searching for a spot to
Land, and now I selfishly hope it lands on the baseball diamond
Because that would be a sight to see and I could tell my parents
About it and maybe they'd be proud of me.

The plane accelerates on. I can tell that it's nervous and it knows
I've been watching. The children find their mother and are now
Walking to the CN tower, up in the sky, where they can see the planes
More closely, and they invite me to come with them but I decline
Because it costs fifty dollars to get to the top and my vanity would
Get the best of me if I were 553 miles above the earth.
They wave in disappointment and I wave back.

As they sharply stamp around my building,
I determine that I could give them one last goodbye from my front
Porch, and thank them for saving me from anxiety.
But I remember the sign on the railing that says “no smoking”
And I threw away my apple in the bushes yesterday, and I worry that is
A worse crime than lighting a sad cigarette in the night.

And I want to sing a little now because I’m happy, and that is a word
That means different things to everyone
But not everyone can have a patio like me.

The psychology of relationships abhors a vacuum

Casualness, though, does have it’s limits.

As I sit here with your dying father
I am reminded that he refused to cut his grass in summertimes
So that it could grow tall for us.
We would run through your yard, like primates in the jungle
Losing ourselves in heat
Nowhere to go
Nothing to keep.

At night we’d hide above the ground
Beneath the dark

Where we saw astronauts dancing around up there

Or their reflections at the very least

And stars, all of them belonging to the ages
Stars so bright and lonely.
Stars that cut into the natural order of things.
We’d talk of our nowheres to go
Our nothings to keep

For what else did we have but words?

We’d grow so tired
But were too afraid to leave.
If we got up, someone was sure to take our place.

Yet there and then the struggle had been born,

I think,

Because we knew we'd not share nights like these forever
And if forever wasn't such a long time,
Maybe we could try to pick it back up again
Like bike riding or curling up our tongues,
If not for being casual all these years.

With variety and concentration and tension
We could celebrate the tall glass of water that is America
And discuss our unity of approach while cannons roar in the distance
And colored lights make drunk the dusty night.

But what of that? Let's talk no more of that.

We heard those fireworks last night,
Your father and I,
Though they were a day ahead of schedule.
He sat up from his chair with great strength,
Like Jupiter with a shock of white hair.

He ventured out of his den of iniquity
And towards the polished window by the door.
Hands in his pockets, obviously in some pain,
He said "I'll never make the mistake of being old again."

He's still so strong, you know.
Even his hair has muscles.

By the Lake

The absence of grey in the sky makes
Young men and women celebrate
Outdoors, with a beer from a can and a
Board game or some memories.
The evening comes at just the right hour,
When we are anticipating dancing and kissing.

You kissed me in the bathroom last night
As I was looking for the hand soap.
Your lips and mine had met before

But it was nice to reacquaint myself
With warmth and confidence.

You held my hand also
But I had forgotten all about that
Until I awoke too early with a fever
And no one there to touch me in the morning.

Fiction

November came.
Like a tree in the Garden of Eden,
Tough as rawhide,
Gentle as my mother.

And I saw a bluebird,
Red as blood

Circle through the trees,
Challenging the multitudes below
To make believe.

It flew past the sun,
Which seemed to last forever,
Into night
As I walked down 14th street,
Looking for a knife
With a silencer on it.

And I saw a cardinal,
Blue as the sky

And I wondered how I became so confused.

Lost

Goodbye for now.

Engage with me in time and place,
Remote and isolated.
There I'll bring you a loaf of bread from
The bakery back home. I'll tie a ribbon
Around it's heart and conceal it

In the finest tissue paper I can find.
I'll place it in a duffle bag and hand it
To you on your porch. Don't offer me
Some wine, I'm trying not to drink in the
Afternoons anymore. Just tell me that
I'm looking better these days, even if I'm not.
Chide me if my speech
Stumbles into something stupid.
Don't let me talk too much.
I can listen and accept things that
Now seem deserted and fossilized.

I can change, my mother tells me.
You tell me too.
You may not possess the softness of
My mother's voice or the tired eye-roll
Of my dear sisters, a trite ancestral trait,
Yet you take care of me,
With your voice, and with your eyes.
With other things I can't describe.
They are not formed inside my head.
They're shipwrecked off the coast, near
The islands of hope and understanding,
Two places I have yet to travel to alone.
I'll reach them soon enough,
But by then it may be night time and I
Will have to venture to the bad part of
Chicago, where you can't spy other
Universes from the rooftops in the sky.

Let's take a trip there one day, to that
Green and anxious universe beyond
The fog. I'll buy the tickets,
You the sunscreen, and we'll see if
There is wind and spiders
And requited love.
We won't stay long, I promise.
And when we return, and I forget my
Coat, you'll bid farewell.

I won't know what to say.
There's no good word for it in English.

I'm lost.

"Je suis perdu."

French?

They say "Au Revoir."

I'll see you again.