

Hi and Goodbye and

There's a spin to the earth,
a wind in reverse.
Turn and it hits you face first.
Absence hurts.
Or it should.

There's a deviation to the mean,
a norm and extremes,
flat out, straight up, and leans,
jet streams between, lee to the side.
The moon pulls the tides.
The sun overrides, driving the currents
as it did our ancestors north.

In winter their descendants return
if they think they've earned it
and who doesn't? Who has the patience?
Who in the chill doesn't ache for the radiance?
Sleeping on the ground they can afford it.

Spain a start, Gibraltar a rock on sand,
Tangiers sand on rock and still not enough.
Hitchhiking gets you farther,
a trust fund faster.

Arrive by air,
take a taxi,
disappear.

Accented eyes spy the lean-to Allan and I
assembled from driftwood, plastic sheeting, and cord
like a fox the hare
the hare the hole.
Hello-oh!
Can you squeeze in one more?
Hi – wavy sleight of hand, grin to match – name's Lisa.
I love your roof, how it catches the light
and then lets it through.

Allan says she's rich, an heiress, he bets.
Former gunner's mate –
hollow cheeks, billygoat beard, and a tobacco-dipped voice that croaks –
he has no time for chitchat, shopping, hashish, or sweets.

He claims we eat too much
and the proof lies in the shitter.

It'll be different in the Congo, he says,
inserting twigs onto the fire,
one by one,
where your problem is no problem it's low-hanging fruit like papayas
bananas bottom-feeders and bugs you can eat.
It's wanting all the other things, a sheltermate says.
He spits. Working on it.

Campers here to swim shriek and wade instead while the wind
whisks the sun to buildings the off-white of banana shakes.
All new, the shake man says. Outrigged with hula-hoop hips,
he points up the hill, the sky so blue it seems artificial,
the clouds as white as remembered dreams. Not like the Casbah.
No quakes, says his neighbor the kebob man as
long and lumpy as his wares.
God willing.

Lisa falls in with Hans the beachbum Aryan and his minions
who ride by day and trip the discotheques at night.
The moon's at its highest when she lifts the flap,
saying Hans may be obnoxious with people
but is amazing with horses.
This is his blanket. He said we could share it.
I'll get back to you, she says she told him as she walked off.
I'm good at that, she adds as she scooches to the core.
Which way do you think is warmest?

Cool because there's a breeze slides off the sea
and when you shiver while others sleep
the sight of your breath washes out the sound of the surf.
Full roof, half moon.
Stars swoon.
Make a wish.

Wish Allan wouldn't snore.

He found the plastic snagged on thorns overlooking a wadi
he would have camped beside were it not for the goats.
Everything, he announces, has a cost.
Ration the trade-offs.

A wise man is a man you agree with
but you never quite put it that way before.

Lisa sketches. Pencil, pad, prestidigious hand.
Hold still, she pleads. Let me scoot around.
The neck, she explains. I have to get it right.
Two fingers on your chin, part dentist, part friend.

Near noon
headstand
blouse forsaking the midsection like an artist
unveiling an odalisque that puts food on the table
but leaves him conflicted, the model falsely depicted,
his family fearful of eviction.

Troubled,
Allan nibbles at a barely-cooked carrot
from a meatless pot of mostly potatoes.
Help yourself, he says. I'm taking the pot.
He packs his half of the roof, saying sorry but
you're better off without.
You'll be long gone before it rains.

A hookah intubates mouth to mouth, in and out like cognizance.
Pay the piper, Hans declares.
You? Snorts.
A flick of the head resets locks the color of his skin,
so natural as to be unnatural, and the sun melts on the horizon.
None other.

Music plays through half-lives of batteries
while humor fronts like hashish-man's haberdashery;
nobody's fooled.
Skinnydip, Hans proposes.
Darkness descends.
What are you afraid of?
Too cold.
Sharks?
His minions and a middle-aged Dane
who greets the sun topless each morning leave with him.
His low voice makes unintelligible wisecracks in the distance,
and the others laugh to be heard.

It's so silly, Lisa mutters. Like in high school.
Seems like yesterday.
Yesterday you didn't, she says.
Can't wait forever.
Scriggly lines and creative people I get along with.

You know what I hate?
Waiting?
Wondering what if.

The wind plays tricks
as the moon drips on the breakers
and there's nothing – must be the water, its briny spray – you cannot smell.

I feel good
when a person's heading in the wrong direction
then I see that person get on the right path,
she says.
Me, I'm bushwacking.
I used to be a witch.
And now?
Sometimes I think a person's really getting through
really speaking from himself and later
I find that's bullshit, too.

Allan leaves a note saying good luck
Hans came for his blanket
but I told him you'd freeze.
Is he a friend? Asshole if you ask me.
Well adios amigos it's Dakar or bust.
Put my theory to the test.

He never sat for his portrait, she laments.
Do it from memory.
It's not the face. It's what's inside. And out.
Feel that?
Waves pounding.
I hear it like a snake, with my belly.
That's me, she says and her face rolls as if her nose were leaden
as if she'd been slapped silly or someone else was there.
Incongruity what you fear,
a trickle of red out the ear.

I love getting lost in the souks, she whispers. I know I shouldn't.
Shouldn't, couldn't, wouldn't.
I'm running from a man.
You'll end up where you started.
I was afraid you'd say that.
It's what you want.

Through the roof-half the stars seem smeared,
galaxies blurred.

Crosscurrents of the sky emerge
like invisible, indelible ink
ring around a fuller moon
sailor's delight
or what was it
the farmers' almanac said.
Eclipse soon.

The hiss of a blade unsheathing:
steel glints in the moonlight,
the moon itself blocked by a totem, a wannabe Woden.
Mine, Hans growls.
Take it.
Bring it, he says.
Come and get it.
Don't make me, he snarls, fingers beckoning,
salt air prickling, wild grass
bending to an unseen force.
A blanket swoops.
Sand scoops.
Low undercuts tall.
Pride before – who's that? neighbors call.
One rises, then another.
Hans slips into the palms,
fringes rustling, minions following,
never to be seen again
though the Dane will hear he's in the Casbah plotting.

Lisa caught the early flight to the Canaries,
leaving behind, along with kohl dust for the eyes
and a mostly used tube of mayonnaise,
her sunglasses which her sheltermate broke rolling over,
the blanket, and a portrait the expression hard to read,
the neck knotted, a heart like a stud on the left lobe
so she can say all even
though she would have settled the twenty dirhams
for the kebobs and shakes had she thought of it.

Hi disarms. It's diversional, meant to stun.
Goodbye cuts to the quick. Avoided, it's
an appendix without the citis,
the pain that never comes.

Fred Away

Heyyyy...

Ho! From among the beards under the eaves
beams a face as bright as benediction – Fred
drinking water from a Shell Oil can,
dining on camel stew,
paying first price for an orange,
dragging on kef, kef dragging on him,
nesting on straw among itinerant Saharans,
getting by on gestures, smiles, and mime.

Dun djellaba, jangly big-beaded necklace, white elfin shoes,
brown hair looking wet though it's not,
the lost and possibly found eyes of a fakir,
frail to the point of
voice that trails off
I've had friends down from
seven years ago I was
was right here,
fingernails in the sand scratching.
You?
In the desert? Here?
Can I? Can you really? Far out!
Let me get my stuff.

I *love* it. Nothing, and everything. Next up, Timbuktu.
For real?
Tell you when I'm there.
Long ways.
Getting there's long.
Being there's short?
Exactly. And then it's reversed.
You have a plan.
Sit. He pats a campfire log. Imagine an army behind the dunes.
How would we get around it?
Say we had no wheels, no wings,
Just a few friends along for the ride.
Say – it's on the tip of his tongue.
Say we absorbed it.
Absorbed it?
Like jello!

From under his djellaba tangled up with the beads
he extracts an amber pendant on a leather thong,

holds it against the firelight for all to see.
There's a fly within.
Here it is, in miniature.
Fred.
Me?
He shakes his head, smiles. Mighty mite, too tiny to see.

The fire cools, crackles.
We lie around it, soles to the embers like spokes on a wheel.

Something happened, he says.
Bad, he elaborates. As in b for belladonna.
He's flat on his back, and the constellations have shifted,
the embers ashed over.
A long time ago.
To you?
How'd you guess?
It's still happening.
That army behind the dunes?
Jello's not the answer?
Amber?
You'll know it when you do it.
He stirs the ashes with a stick. An ember flares.
Do what?
Anything.

At the market his eyes flash, body writhes,
hands flicker and flutter, disturbing the flies.
He pleads for a loan to buy a donkey to walk beside.
It matches his djellaba in texture and color, never mind the odor,
Wait till we see how the ears waggle when he talks.
Come on, come on, it's just around the corner.

A local man beat him to it and he's not selling,
not even at double the price. Triple!

Need a lift? we ask in the morning. Obligations loom.
No room, he says. Green eyes glaze, there but for grace.
His breath is minty, his laugh as warm and treacly as the tea.
Plenty. Look.
A van with no seats in the back.
I'm southbound, remember.
You're going to pass on showers, burgers, and beer?
He rubs his beard.
And then Marrakech – sword swallows, fire-eaters, snake charmers!
His smile crinkles, revealing crow's feet above. Donkeys?

Mules, horses, camels, you name it.
He rolls his head, as though getting the kinks out. Anything?
And everything,
One step at a time.
Speaking of which, Fred,
How do you keep your shoes so white?
Nothing sticks.
Except his smile. It burns on the retina.
He rubs the amber like a marble, waiting for us to go.

We leave him as we found him –
the one foreigner in Goulimine,
two hundred miles to Spanish Sahara,
two hundred back to Agadir.

Life in space can be contagious.
If you don't catch it in the early stages,
it can estrange you as it entertains you.
Marvel or mirage
or first time all over again
once you grind the lens,
once your mind is cleansed.

The desert extends to the sea,
sea to sand, air to land. From over the dunes –
Fred! His jaw drops, pupils dilate,
irises off-yellow in the sunset,
barefoot, loping, a sack of oranges in tow.
He's out of breath, the air around him fragrant
with olive bark, fruit, leaf, and root.
Want an orange? he says at last,
a giver and a taker,
the fakir in his smile, not the eyes. Hey, ho,
did somebody say *mules?*