

## Tabatina

She sleeps beside me every night

On the dark gently roiling steel-sheened Rio Negro  
in the star-strewn jungle night resounding with  
sawing crickets and croaking giant bullfrogs  
in these goddam hammocks

She sleeps beside me in crappy beds  
at the Hotel Continental in sweltering Manaus too hot for me  
and here aboard the Amazon Star 1400 kilometers to the sea  
day after night after day down the colossally always churning  
Rio Amazona

(Okay. Not right beside me. A meter away in her hammock.  
A meter and a half in her separate hotel bed  
or maybe only a handful of centimeters in the jungle,  
the thickness of two hanging mosquito nets--  
she is German, so we'll use the metric system)

She is always busy saving black and brown children  
on two continents  
here, camped in this Rio Negro floating jungle lodge  
she is saving the little piranha by being the  
world's kindest fisherwoman,  
luring them with sliced stew meat and then  
removing the cruel barbed hooks to free them

She worries about the child prostitutes in Thailand  
(so do I)  
she worries that something might happen to spoil a good time  
bad weather  
a late bus  
we might not get to see a giant snake  
some bad people somewhere

I see her thinking of something to worry about  
when she doesn't know I'm watching  
I worry that she worries

Tabatina sleeps like a log the whole night long snoring beside me  
her hair a sweet nest of curly angel tresses  
the color of old straw spilled  
about her untroubled brow  
I hope she is having sweet dreams  
she deserves them

I rarely sleep, here beside her  
on this floating jungle lodge

It's too goddam hot here two degrees below the equator  
and I can't stop thinking about the calculus  
and quantum mechanics  
integration of the complex conjugate with infinite limits  
Dirac notation  
bras and kets  
The collapse of the wave function  
The role of the observer  
and practicing the first hundred digits of pi and  
trying to remember the Spanish preterit tenses  
of all these goddam irregular verbs

I get up to pace the deck of this floating Rio Negro jungle lodge  
everyone else long asleep  
study the stars splashed like whispering magic  
across this croaking amphibious jungle night  
stinking of teeming life  
and rot  
smoke cigarettes  
remember the feel of a woman  
right next to me  
flat smooth stomach  
small breasts  
full hips  
smooth white creamy luscious thighs

And I'm surprised to find the Big Dipper still brilliant  
and doggedly pointing to the North Star  
lost now below the northern horizon  
that I have fled  
and would as soon forget

Tabatina restless and awakened  
blinks sleepily on the deck of the jungle lodge  
everyone else still asleep in the dark starry night  
as I point out the Big Dipper  
she thinks it looks like a shopping cart  
and is pretty sure that's what it's called in Germany

Dude (I tell her) there is no such constellation as  
The Big Shopping Cart  
in any language  
Go back to bed (and she does)  
She is full of misinformation  
but aren't we all

The Pleiades still shimmers here  
the left fist and right foot of Orion still pointing  
in the vanished direction of that previous life  
here is the W of Cassiopeia

a shooting star!  
The elusive gentle smudge of M31 the Andromeda galaxy  
you can only see it when you don't look right at it  
2.54 million light-years away  
and the Milky Way slung glowing southeast to northwest  
100 billion stars  
100 billion galaxies  
a mole of stars  
(within a single order of magnitude)  
Avogadro's number  
 $6.02 \times 10^{23}$   
they're all here  
and I'm here beneath them  
and I can't sleep  
God no  
God knows  
there's too much to think about  
to sleep

I will have to keep heading south until the Big Dipper vanishes  
below the northern horizon  
discover the Southern Cross,  
the South Star which I have never seen  
(Is there a South Star draped *still* above that nether pole?)

Tabatana isn't sure what to think of me  
I think  
She gives me shit about wearing a cross  
with the crucified Jesus about my neck  
and not believing in Jesus  
and I have to smile

She is Catholic and believes that baptism in Christ  
is the road to heaven  
I smile and tell her I believe in Jesus

I smile because I believe in everything

I am heathen  
pagan

I see god everywhere

in clouds and stars and sun  
in the eyes of *caiman* glowing red in the stalking flashlights  
in the nagging whine of malaria mosquitoes in your ear  
in the fat skittering cockroaches fleeing fluorescent light discovery  
in air-conditioned shithole hotels  
in the jungle rain  
the laughter of children  
the sorrow within us all

in the miracle  
the miracle  
of being alive

This is heaven:  
feeling compassion  
curiosity  
lust  
compassion  
fear  
exaltation

praise god  
here we are  
my faith is endless  
bigger than the sky  
brighter than the stars

yes  
we are always living we are always dying  
we are god  
halleluyah

it is all happening  
right now  
forever  
halleluyah

Oh Tabatina  
bless you  
sleep well my dear  
I will cover you with my sheets my shirts  
to keep you warm in the air-conditioning  
while I never sleep  
You are god's eyes  
her ears and her fingers  
she is a spark to warm you while you live

## **This Pristine Moment**

In this pristine moment  
after the bluejay's squawk  
and the caw of the diving crow  
an unlikely stillness falls

the woods and pastures are spread like ripe fruit  
upon the canvas of this eternal moment—  
In the eerie sun-splashed silence  
there is nothing whispering

All the creatures that creep and gnaw  
that burrow and graze  
that chew their cuds  
lift their heads to listen

Everything pauses  
even the wind  
no bird calls  
we all listen rapt as the vacant silence echoes

We are struck dumb  
by the earth's quiet perfection  
breathing the sweet air  
with our full bellies

The earth is sated by the perfection of this world  
we stand transfixed in this blessed moment  
until in the distance a truck honks  
barrelling down this dirt road

And the crow grins and thinks of a joke  
the bluejays go back to trying to get horny  
you and I turn back to our books  
and a squalling truck roars down the road spitting gravel

## **In the dawn**

In the reddish dawn  
my heart leaps and soars  
as my lover approaches across the dewy lawn

My stomach does  
flips turns cartwheels  
as she walks up the driveway with her little dog

I am full  
I am overflowing  
as she spies me

that secret smile

she knows  
how her lips  
her hair  
her hips  
thrill me

soon  
our tangled panting bodies  
soon

my lover comes  
in the misty morning  
and now we are full