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Robert Kelly
Bard College

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NO DICE

It does not say
what we should do.
It is silent
as ice. But not ice.

Notice this:
what it tells me
is the cast
is done, the actress

outlives the play.
The gods nod
overhead. Ice
melts in strict

obedience.
Call it permission
to bother your friends.
With a stick

we put everyone
to sleep. One hopes
after all
for miracles,

a chance but no dice.
If we had them
we would only throw them
& there is no away

for them to hide in.
No dice and they're stuck
in your hand.
No dice but they do.

“It was not easy to make out, before sunrise, what it was we had come to. I saw a phantom and indeterminate country”

—H.M. Tomlinson, *The sea and the jungle*, 123.

So the sea might take us
or take the tea back to the Indies.
Where we wind up
before any intention.

Get rid of all these words
ending -ion
even Lion
but not Lioness my lush low-maned mate my Hadassah

and then get rid of beauty
till there's only people.
Then the real questioning begins,
o my Inquisitor.

To get somewhere somehow.
Then I'd be back with you staring
at the coastline—
sometimes all afternoon we watched it

conscious that *that* was America
that over there thing, that haze
from which the bad news kept coming
and the boats full of money

and to which we so totally belong.
I am inconceivable without America
wherefore I will take my cap and go
screeing up some Himalaya

to find the cave of nowhere
with no flag except those rags
of pure color only
that seem to be like droppings from the wind,

visible kisses of that unseen knower
who goes so fast and freezes me
even here in the snug of winter
offices, tending my intermittent flakes.

Some sun, some Serbia.
What matters is to keep alive
until they wake. Hence the island
to rest up, A statue of a broken faun
is found in the sand.

Or was he made that way,
to prove that to be both man and animal
is to be less than either.
I am a patch of starlight in a tide pool.

Is this of use to you,
darling, or not even light,
just a patch of unease moving
the way water is trained too.

We all sat too long in the park
at Madison Square, waiting I suppose
for the bookshop to open
as if that could help us.

But it did. And coffee too.

1 February 1994, Hopson

S E S A M E

Some evenings a street's all mild.
Everyone seems easy,
sisters anoint mommy's excellent sons. Ennui stops.
A man edges surefootedly enough straight among
market entrances, seldom
even staring at merchandise. Earwax,

spittle, even sperm and mucus
exit systems engaged
steadily
at maintaining energy. Simply embrace. Saunter along,
minding everybody's situation.
Educated shoplifters alienate monster eggplants.

Swift enlightenment suspends all momentary efforts.

1 February 1994, Hopson

On such a cold day
there should be roses for Charlotte

red ones in a crystal shell
as if the ice had a heart in its heart

piled up against the light
out there where roses are

busy remembering
to come again. I thought

how meager my life was
before you. And how the rose

is ready.

2 February 1994

KING KALAKAUA

It waits the fortune donut granted
by the Abyssian emissary with hair
struwelpetered into starlike sense
and his amber eyes remarkably
unapologize. No more UN.
The world is different isn't it
when you are left with the hole.
The broken chunks of the fried torus
are interesting. Greasy geometry.
I look at the stamps of King David Kalakaua
and think of his broad handsome street
with a Sizzler on the corner. Two cents, brown.
Snide surfers slip quick through idling
turistas. There is a city called City of Refuge.
I like that. Not here. On another island.
I realize with the definitive simplicity
of a headline in the Post there is no point
in any of this. We must turn against it.
Against all of it. Even these luscious donuts
with toasted shredded coconut on top
harvested by god knows what tormented Kiribati.

2 February 1994

As if by comparison
the broken sunlight on some snow
domes us over. Trapped
in apparency, like an old
indian paisley shawl worn with sun and washdays
used to stick over the back of the sofa
in a general theory of protection though even then
never had a dog, things around, things all around,
we can't get away from what we see.
Curious merchandise that still happens to be alive
don't want to tell what anybody was doing
it was a railroad in a railroad flat
a habit of keeping going no matter what she said.
And she said as they say plenty. But no matter,
a dahlia or an orchid or the evening paper,
bring it home like chow mein, everything
depends on paper. The colors were madder,
and indigo, and peach.

2 February 1994 16:22

THE SEA AND THE JUNGLE

I for one want to be a tropic city
with refurbished trolley cars and mango trees.
I don't care who your father is
or who prorogues the parliament—
I want to be where rivers
know themselves sluggish to the sea
and the sea is lemon yellow with their filth
hundreds of miles.

And then I'll come to you
abracadabra, mirror mylar stretched over umbrella
cavities, poor man's photo set-up,
take a picture of the stationmaster's pretty wife.

Patiently I explain all over again
that this is all about religion, the plaster
hands of Saint Monica joined in prayer
poke against the dusty blue velvet wrappings
draped around Lord Ahpu's shoulders,
we pour pepsi on the careful mounds of cornmeal,
coffee grounds, salt. O how comforting it always is
to talk about salt!

I think what I was saying
was: I want to be a tropical city for you.
I was thinking more about the godowns on the wharves
stuffed with copal and jute and gutta percha
and sitting on bales of ramie while sucking
soursweet tamarind pulp, gets the juices flowing.
I wasn't thinking so much of fever and slavery
but they're there too, aren't they, embedded
in our thought about anything. Since we were slaves
or kept slaves, since we wear greed sleeves still
and steal and cheat and worst of all keep thinking.

2-3 February 1994

SLAUGHTERHOUSE

As at the reading of some Ram
at the county fair — how big he is
really, a massive animals with a huge
voice and our heads are always
easy with some miniature
lamb — for size, meat, pelt,
fatherhood — we stand in awe
at what we take (and we may
be wrong) for the savvy of the auctioneer,
craft country wiles of bidders,
the gonadic terrific intensity of the Beast
himself — it could all be illusion
— what we want there to be
when there is nothing but what
there seems to be — not a dust
or dirty frightened mindless
soulful thing surrounded by tormentors.

3 February 1994

The problem is to think to need
more tormentors — a bulwark
in the road outside to know yourself
this hard surface of the other you project

to go through . on the other side
it tells you . you can be nobody in peace
and you listen . hence lick

every inch of the door, the doorway,
the lock, the little key, transom, lintel,
shimmying up the post to do it,
and the post and the rich dusty-tasty door sill

and the deep brass crevice of the strike.

4 February 1994

TO THE GNOSTICS

Won't you tell me (they won't tell me)
the judgments of the day, which rocks to feed
which pretty birds to set a-praying for my sins.
A sin is anything that slaps the face of the earth.

We all do that. Won't you tell me
the moon date and the stone number.
There is all too much order in the world
when you should be doing something about the earth,
the earth is the opposite of the world,
the earth is what you can touch but not effect,
the earth is what you cannot hold in mind.

It doesn't help you if I live inside my sins
like a dog barking into the waves at Malibu.
Suppose the earth slipped into *your* bed at night
and married you over and over,

would you still have such use for secrecy?
What you know was not given to you
to know but to give. The way the earth
got to know it all by giving it all away.

5 February 1994

In winter the sky vanishes
even on the clearest days
you walk eyes down
on the endless street of ice
goes everywhere, round street
of strict attention, road that goes nowhere.

6 February 1994, Thubten Chöling

It might be some sickness uses me

No man has ever candidly confessed
his catalogue of all diseases

and who can count the losses?

The birds come down to catch me again,
I need a bright net to catch such gulls

and suddenly everyone forgets to go to work.
Even earthquakes can be measured

but who can count the losses?

6 February 1994

ITEMS, AS OF NEWS

It is the identities I carry
that weigh me down. Health Tip:
Leave it in the mirror.

The hotel
is on fire, smoke drifts from far away in the furthest wing
but there are people sleeping there too
and they are you.

Or: Every night I go
to sleep in my own bed
and wake in an hotel.

The pen catches
in the paper,
the child is born in the river,
reeds and basket,
water and weaving,

by the time she's born
the battle's done. Moses
was a mighty mother.

Brain coral
rests light on the diver's palm.

7 February 1994

SOME CIRCUMSTANCES

Outside in the heat and roar of the salamander
men are working on the porch.

I need the work done, they need to be warm
to do it, they need to shout
to each other to be heard.

It is a terrifying thing not to be talking.

7 February 1994

IMPRESS

*From kelly Mon Feb 7 11:27:22 1994
To: bam4c@darwin.clas.virginia.edu*

And think of the impress
print
we leave in the city we sleep in

our nestle-site left
behind when we go
into say mountains or seacoast or those islands

like scum on the restless ocean
far out
near the place where the birds forget to fly

and always always behind us
something we are busy leaving
a shape of the nothing I am

left to stare at the Sky Eye
a lint-happy catastrophe
waiting like all the rest of us for love.

And there is no way to be finished with that leaving.

7 February 1994

I want to live for some time in a country where money shows waterfowl. The Dutch f100 note has a snipe on it. Quite a lovely snipe, long bill and inquiring eye, soft tones of beige and brown, half a sweet innocent of marshland and half a lunatic devilbird out of Jerome Bosch. Just like Holland. Just like money. In fact this money has two snipes on it, one on the front and one on the verso. Pond snipe and Sea snipe, I suppose. Imagine them poking in wet sand, extracting winkles and cockles and such, the crack of little shells, the modest slurp of tongueless probing beaks. *Snip*, it says, 'a snipe,' I guess, guided by the picture.

7 February 1994

