

WHISPERS, SYMPATHIES,
& APPARITIONS

David Silverstein

Edited and with an Afterword by Paul Rossiter

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The photograph on page 77 is by Paul Rossiter.

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THE WALK

Ubud, Bali

It is midday's sun and nothing sane is out. I have chosen this time to hike the high path above the river I saw from the bridge and which goes through the terraced ripple of the rice paddies and high wild grass swaying like dry water. The stalks encourage me. Go deeper.

The trail is wide enough for one man, precisely my size. I appreciate the accomodation.

I sense a balance in the panorama as if the solid and sublime had apportioned all the 'cubits-of-made' in which to cultivate themselves. There has been a treaty or at least a tolerance. What differs is not evil.

The path climbs. I head for the house in a cluster of trees. Luka is there. Luka gives me tea. She gives me welcome. I do not know her. I know her. There are books here I would have chosen for myself. And the mats and the art and the view, the posture taken by the house. I don't remember calling ahead. Is it possible that my heart leads a private life of its own, a life even I don't know?

I sit and stare out over where I have just walked. Already the act of recovery with the soil still freshly raked with my prints.

A chicken struts at my feet. Above me a bee enters the home it has made in a wooden dragon hanging by a single thread. The wind playfully making it a little harder.

**DECIDING WHAT TO DO
WITH YOUR LIFE**

A roll is on the floor
it has not fallen.

Somehow it has gotten this far
from the plate and that fate undetected
the alarm has not sounded.

‘A roll is loose
a roll is making for the wall’
not yet.

I feel its tenseness from here
its soft cheeks belie a racing pulse
of fear. This is not the Broadway pro
it would have us believe.

And if I got down on my knees
and carefully approached, I know
I would see tiny droplets of sweat
on what from here appears a forehead
of smoothly painted butter, what
else could lacquer be but ruse?

Time is against it too
so soon it must decide for which
exit to make, its crawl of destiny
as it were. How long can one roll
hold its breath? For when bread
breathes the whole world knows.

How long can its luck hold out
and avoid the clumsy kicks of
high-strung eaters whose gluttonous
twitches can still deal death blows?

Perhaps to be eaten would have made sense
death with dignity without blindfold
or confession of the stupid nostalgia
of remembering acre upon acre of friend
and family all sprouting for the Spring sky
all sun drunk and aspiring with that
ridiculous faith grain has.

LIVING ALONE

Again the unexpected lodge in which all of life is turned into a throat. Beneath ground the stalled train in the unwet vestibule. The saliva is gone. We can no longer swallow, there is no desire, as if all our intentions were ludicrous and we realized it simultaneously. Could this shaft be the long inverted finger of the netherworld beckoning, the invitation I have longed to find in my path?

Between stations where nothing is supposed to happen and only nothing thrives. The box conveying us rids itself of collusion. And for once we can revel in the truth: we are getting nowhere.

Outside, a single massive bolt becomes the sun. The lodger's pose again like stone's stare coming from a park. The drops of sweat on the train's window no longer gayly streaming with demise. They are suddenly stiff. Their salty curves seem forged and strained. They cling to the glass as they would to a dry lover in a parching bed.

On the cavern wall chalk numbers. I think of the drawing hand transferring to stone what matters most. But what could possibly matter here unless the end of time can be counted out? Chalk, whose infinitesimal breath recalls the miracle of the desert. And the darkness, the magician of spell, that somehow evades us in the end. In this place of stolen skies a moon would only fall.

And there in a half-finished ladder against the wall there is a quality of return, a grimace in the paralleling iron. Or rather the left ladder never meant to be seen, is seen and aghast. Like a

calendar on which a bottle of ink has spilled and drowned our coming days – startled free of stain.

This ungodly place which should be a vertical drop but isn't, matches no station and thus on maps-of-aspiration does not exist, but we are here.

From where I sit I have only a partial glimpse of the drama, but is anything ever fully glimpsed? Even someone we love and want to see, for if there is interest the foraging eye stops and makes a home, or wants to. Only with a lack of interest, a perfect apathy, will the scan be fair, but finally even the divine gift of the painter deserts him. He can no longer look. It is overwhelming, the endless benedicting.

So does this one bolt overwhelm me. I assume its tightness. What else do such things have to live for if not the airless seal? Why not grant it that, an exquisite flushing pummel when surface loses reason and tries to salvage love from conclusion.

And so these irregular metals facing belly to belly are clasped, not roughly, but the adherence seems almost liquid in its merge. There is no need of ferric claims of 'loving unto death.' The days are simply met. One unpromised day unfolds the next in a centipede's languid stretch.

Suddenly I feel the desolation of the bolt, the terrible loveliness of such twisted loyalty endlessly waiting for a dawn that does not break. Its surrender to the wrench and strange appeal of rust on cheeks whose autumnal flush cannot be stroked. And the slow clouding over of the bolt's one eye until it huddles blind around

itself each time the plunging beast returns. Engulfed by a terrible wind which demands the worship of held breath.

In such a world as this the howl is all, and dreams of lubricant derange a small metallic mind.

DREAMING OF FIRE, WAKING WITH BURNS

A bicycle poses in a Japanese garden, so infected with serenity it imagines itself a thousand years old. It strains to reveal itself, to the light, to the moment.

In the window of the house a young boy, aesthetically precocious, with no set notion of what a garden is, or what a bike is not, sees what the bike is trying to do. The boy is overcome with sympathy.

And comes out to the garden and carefully prunes the handlebars.

These days there are galleries that would jump at the chance to do a show on agony, clever dioramas with femurs stuck in sand.

The Buto dispassion for what we do to each other.

NOTHING TO UNEARTH

It is Sunday and the vegetable stand is boarded up, but these barriers of overturned crates are a soft alliance, a matting hint, the no is yes, the city is yours.

But what after all can a penetrator do once inside but languish in embarrassment and fascia. Once in the taken body an unanticipated loneliness ensues. A melon drunk with overripeness lies discarded on the ground, a sprig of fallen parsley, sand from pickling brine, a spider hopelessly entangled with itself.

There is an unseen pulsing in the shed, like yeast at work, some truth is feeding here. The corrugated tin roof with its inexplicable endurance.

On one side an olive tree gnarls away at emptiness and shadow. A world of knuckles stuck to the side of nothing but themselves, like muscular pretensions. The balance of tree and shed is something they have made together, weighed with eye and thumb.

Even I who insist myth on everything stand back in awe. Just this once, the interpretation is inside out, a carapace, worn like an anthem on the chest, a scribble on a pyramid the common eye digests.