

MAJOR RHAPSODY IN F SHARP MINOR

You didn't expect him here
with silk hangings and life-size classic sculpture.
He made no entrance, he suddenly was
onstage, easy as moonlight, fitting with fountains
and topiary as if here had always been his backdrop.
But when he moved and smiled-- you knew--
you knew he was a trumpet man.

Son of a thin ragged line inhaling used smoke
mixed with applause to blow from rubber cheeks.
Son of the hard-molded case-followers,
those rolled-up bus riders
down the stretched streaking nights,
closing their painted eyes and seeing brass
hanging over them-- begging to be snatched
and hidden for a night or two of peace, watching it
turn to an armored snake in their jealous hands,

hearing it tongue out tarnished laughter
on three ribs, belling out morning and a hangover
in some town they mispronounced.

You didn't see this loose-angled one pick it up.
The instrument came like quick cell division
from his lip. And the sound began--
uncoiling slow, coming for you, crawling
into your head, changing the texture
of your bare arms. You know that sound, mama?
Nothing as simple as ever-popular heartbreak
or phantom train whistles-- nothing
as definite as a tenor sobbing Eili, Eili
or wild animals moaning up the moon. His eyes
ignite and lightning arcs from his hair,
striking the conductor zapping it
into your gravity center. The sound, mama,
leaching tones out of the marble statues,
out of your wine glass, rearranging molecules,
making them glow like neon fog, fulminating
red and purple, alive like magnified ocean drops.

How much is music, key lowered now, half a step,
gone minor again, flowing that little groove
where pain runs convex to the surface? How much
is the glint of crystal hung from mirrored arches,
moving faintly with audience breath,
striking flints in his pale eyes?

He is a prophet-- forecasting ruin, forecasting
rain, predicting your heartbeat, willing it,
playing your spine like a keyboard, electrifying
your long red guitar strings. He compresses
a grain of hot salt in every pore, starts
small internal combustions, all pistons at odds,
then one enormous turbine synched with him,
generating enough current to throb down
the marble columns, revving the riderless carriage
outside the fourth dimension, holding a seance
with Gabriel and Gershwin, Debussy and Berrigan.

His grin is sudden, mocking. He flats his fifths
and goes south on a short bridge, tootles
to the carved unicorn, blows out the chafing dishes
along with the illusions-- so for a jigger of time
you can stand it, fill your lungs on the afterbeat,
see that he's nothing but a live trumpet man,
not a sorcerer, not a fakir
pulling the cobra out of your basket.

He is a child-- blowing bubbles of light,
expanding the spectrum,
merging with bobbing sixteenth notes. He is
imperial Rome-- an announcement of gladiators,
Caesar chariots, a boast of soldiers,
an ancient fury. He is Africa-- black hunter cry,
leopard stalking, impala bleeding, eyes looking
out of water, eyes burning, curling edges of night,
smoke rising, winding winged scales,
sucking back into the bell, recycling.

He slams a fist into your throat, turns you
on a spit and hamstrings you with blades of ice.
He hustles the horn, wrestles it, shares it,
his mistresss and mentor,
a panpipe saved by his kiss.

Feel the sound, mama? He's concentrating
on all your edges now, honing sharp sharper,
quivering on a sill to somewhere, retiring
to a glistening waver pulsing between turquoise
and green, hanging on like dying gills.
A trumpet man, mama, more lives than a cat,
more wind than a Texas twister.

(Cont.)

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It's all the magic horn, mama, that golden fetish,
possessed and possessing, that haloed concubine,
caressed and polished, surrounded with plush.
And you-- chapped, smacked,
earning your master's degree in martyrdom,
sewing clothes out of mill ends,
that eternal alloy suspended between you
even in bed, that icon he hocked once
to buy you an emergency doctor in Dayton.
And you sold your mother's ring to get it back.

And the man, mama, with the hard harsh mouth,
dead weight in the bus seat, little slivers
of life telescoped in battered cases
and collapsible stands. Trumpet man.
Pitched all shades and angles like shadows,
worse for women than drifters. Gone too high
too often, a pile of singed feathers
dripping wax on the downers, always patching
to fly one more set too near the sun.

Was there a man at all?
Or just a flared gold phallus that seduced you
and crammed you in the gears of a music box
on wheels, hurled you across the bad-weather map
into broken-john motels with lint bedspreads
and the boozy corners of never-quite-level halls
full of lurching bodies and bad acoustics?
Trumpet man. Composite of flesh and reed--
and if you separated the instrument,
cold spite to your touch,
hot pipe to all we know of paradise to his.

Tears emptied, he mounts the god syndrome
like mercury, surpassing sound, no longer
protoplasm and metal but some new alchemy
entering the last panging tunnel you sealed
and secured. Driving deeper, blowing down
your barricades like Joshua, playing
what no mortal ever played. Peeling off new notes
like bright blisters, exorcising the orchestra,
resolving each chord with light, nebulizing fire.
White consumes you, turns you immaculate,
unhurting anymore.

The trumpet fluoresces with his phosphorous eyes,
confetti light orbits his head.
His image blazes beyond seeing.

You open your eyes as the waiter pours champagne,
hear something shut like a latch, focus absently
on an alabaster herald you hadn't noticed before.