

THE SQUINT

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For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face
to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even
as also I am known.

1 Corinthians 13:12

The world
Through a window
& with me
The lepers & vices
The sighs & belches
The tragically ill
The condemned & the frozen
Raynaud & Down

All of us
Correspondents
The cordoned-off
We train our eyes on the vicars
Spectacled & drowned

& so poisoned
So radoned
So fulfilled
So
Intramuscular
& burdened
& so neurotypically
Felled

But hit the brakes fast—look!
& the altos catch the drift
& so degrades all living analysis
The broken rubber seals
All the leaks & all pipe fittings
& all immodesties
From where I peer
Through the lychnoscope
I see

I go down beneath
Where the smoke issues
I wake up conductive
Arguing with a roach over
Which of us owns
My fucking sandwich
I wake up in nests
Infinitely breached
Bleeding (hissing
Loudly expanding, ah
No it's just the radiator)

I go down beneath
I crawl through the metal bull
Which is the entire project's
Boiler
The source of all heat
& all lies

& inside the belly
Of this gigantic manmade whale
There is a squint, too

But through it one is supposed to see
Only fire
Though currently
Not
Sent here
As I was
To reignite the pilot light

Darkened
I see the stamps passing

Hand to hand
The test strips
& the pneumatic tubes
& puppy pads
& numerous other synthetics
By which one sees into the Eyes of Loneliness

Which are by the way
Not your eyes

Don't worry

Through the lychnoscope
One sees still
What one might expect
The Chalice & its Appurtenances
But the man who raises it
To his lips—drinks

Each of us has done
Something unspeakable
To be here

(Though it appears
That those who would observe the altar
Freely, unencumbered
By our jailhouse window
Have already moved on
& so, at the Chalice
We are the only ones left looking)

From the Squint
I see a horrible flatland

The
Man
Sacrifice
Bird
Arrowhead
Sandwich

The one whose death commands
Hundreds more

& the one who makes none
Into eternity supporting him

& then the story is sugarscrubbed
Which undoes nothing

& they are gone a generation
Before the settlers arrive

Who is with me?
I am alone, but
Uniquely accompanied
The air I breathe is controlled
By a switch—switch
Would turn to fire
All the air & then
Every molecule inside me
There's a man standing by that switch
We have worked together for years
We have gotten drunk many times
We nearly speak each other's languages
My safety is of
No small concern to him
Yet I am the one in the belly
It is my turn
I remember, last year
When I stood by the switch
As he crawled
It felt like nothing

Ornamentation on the hull of a ship
A complex story borne out in carvings
We've waited seasons to be confirmed

In the beliefs we had about the ones who
Chiseled us from hematite so jokingly
We laugh less looking at the moraine

The glacial tracks on God's arm
They may dance, but we're stuck on this
Cruiseline—this time, to watch them

Raise the form, spilling barnacles & sewage
Overhead bursts the snowy owl
The final dream of a captured spirit

Ends, the canal just ahead, darkly lit
Before it is dragged ashore by the harbormen
& loaded & driven to the 24 hour scrapyard

& then the service becomes terribly loud

But before
When it ferried souls on less than holy rivers
I crawled through the hatch & through the porthole
Saw the enormous mechanical octopus
& felt it score the soft metal underbelly:
Death, in the impossible depths beneath, & joy
& language marked in passing—but then
Another ship went by & I saw you
Looking through your respective lychnoscope

Later on, we arrived in America
& a long time went by of frozen cotton
& then we awoke one August in a box store parking lot
& around us dozens of men still slept in their trucks
& a woman rolled shopping carts in preparation to open
& there were no voids or bayous, nowhere to go
Where the reifications of civilization weren't
Except inside, where air was frigid & penetrative
& among the aisles, there could be no lychnoscope

The building feels me squirm in its belly
& shivers with pleasure

The old thermocouple lies dead in my hand
& the bright replacement in my pocket

Sings out—

Suspended in the darkness for three days
(Forget the journeys of ritual initiates:

Three days to perish of thirst, or
To blossom & pass from the uterus)

The thermocouple joins me
To various necrotic appointments

Visits all the public places
The kernel of life, yet undetonated

Watches a robbery on the deli television
& conspires precociously

& sleeps, mostly, preparing for a day
Of sudden & incredible voltage

We are here, at the center of the whale
Me, of course, & a kitten named Sparkplug
Who, a few years ago, died of heat exposure
Or of one of the diseases that afflict the young

He was a small, white & happy machine
Who now in death speaks in perfect vertigo:
Mend & bring the thing online & hear it hiss
All through the descending winter months

& through the little window for little flame
See what separates you from the beyond
A lesser feat of human engineering?
Could that be all it is? I turn to ask

But silence plagues the iron room
& I gaze alone through the lychnoscope

Bliss Street is a micro-press in Queens, NY.
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