

The Old Guitarist

For Wally

I.

It commenced with
Larson's
Shit-eating-grin.

According to
Professor Kerry:
Stevens never really
Got that memo from
Eliot enlightening
The whole gang—
Modernists, of course—
As to the death of the
Poet.

Larson believed—
He took off rectangular
Glasses as he said
This—that Stevens believed
That what wordsmiths
Were supposed to do—
Eliot agreed too—
Was lend some
Sprinkling of the spirit
Into those lines which
“A reader may take with
Them for the rest of their
Days.

And by spirit Wally
did not, I say, DID
NOT mean what
some call existential.

That brand of
Sexy French despair
Is noteworthy.

Elsewhere.

And often
Includes cigarettes.

But to Stevens
The poet as a being
Was not to succumb
To the easiness or
A fear of
The disgustingness
That is one's time.

No No No.

Instead the poet—one
Who in Greek is known as
Maker—ought
To offer up
Some sort of feeling:
Inspiration
Embracement
Passion
Revelation—
It is their job to construct
That which
Moves.”

I couldn't help
But exhale while
Dropping my head.

Stevens wasn't my
Kind of guy.

We would have never
Grabbed a beer after
Class or swapped
Sex stories.

(Not to say I do
Either one of those
Well.)

Though I would have
Probably tried to read
Over his shoulder the
Notes he scribbled in lecture.

Glance at his paper title
Before adding its seven pages
To the sprouting column of
Dead trees slouching forward
For grading.

Steven's interpretations
Of the coursework would have
Carried emotionality fused
With some sort of
Ecstatic intellect.

(One might hope.)

Like how a father pats a
Son on the back as if to say
There, there.

That familiarity beyond
Sour eyebrow
Sweat wiped
Freshly away by the
Hand which holds the
Pen.

No more terrific
Shivers of ambivalence
Beneath unscented
Sheets inside
Inky windows.

With the rain free-falling outside
As if it were some hummingbird
You forgot to admire.

Yes of course
His being in our class would bring
About those longings for the
Ardent.

(I guess.)

Maybe one day if he seemed to be
A bit more talkative than usual
I would tell him that at some point
One's pajamas should start to feel
Unhappy.

He would get it
But pretend not to.

"Stevens wants us
To read him and
Feel an unstoppable
Unabridged—damn
Near frightening—
Intensity."

Larson's voice was wavering
Towards the end.

It was slower in a way
No longer akin to tomfoolery.

Dissimilar to how
His eyes began misting.

Paused for a sigh while
Opening his book.

“Page one hundred and
Thirty-three.”

II.

*The man bent over his guitar,
A shearsman of sorts. The day was green.*

III.

So when I visited
Claire in Chicago
I made a vow to
Witness it all
For myself.

She was a
Dweller of the
Southside:
Law student hell bent
On political efficacy.

When I told her
That the tick-tocks
To come were
A poetical crusade
She became a
Human question mark.

Descartes in harsh
Lip stick.

With her blonde hair
Biting like turtles.

“What about lunch?”

“Claire,
Has a pilgrimage ever
Not ended with a feast
And or smallpox?”

She scantily pranced
Off her stoop took my arm
And in swanky tonality
Scoffed.

“Alright.”

Twenty minutes up
Lake Michigan’s shoreline
And it rose in front of us
In the only way such an
Orgasmic monument to civilization
Can.

The Institute had a speaker,
Which meant our marble click-clacks were sent
In a wayward direction up winding
Staircases complete with two pillars defining
An entrée.

(The whole thing was
A bit nauseating at
First.)

But there he was
Just after the chiseled milky walls.

Outlined in some sort of oak pine
Or cedar rectangle.

III.

*And things are as I think they are
And say they are on the blue guitar.*

IV.

His fingers pluck and pick
Horse hairs.

An aegean knee bare to
The ankle's azure
Hill.

Boney to a point
Of Stone.

Shirt ripped
Pants severed.

Body some sort of a
Thorn.

Slate eyes
Maybe shut or possibly
Blinking.

A space for
Spruce breath in-between
Shoulder and chest right where
The instrument's indigo
Timbre might saunter out.

Neck amplifies
The visceral
White hair
Cauterizing his teal head.

Back against
Some black
Wall.

Blue
Blue
Blue.

Instrument's curves
Shimmer khaki
Posted up against the non-beat
Of body's sky-like
Malaise.

Picture a desolate
Tramp mixed into
Some antiquated
Virtuoso.

The Spaniard's name
Barely visible
In the lower
Right hand
Corner.

From whence this one came:
Pintor's period of serene sadness

Thighs
Chest
Shoulders
Become even more
Morbid now.

Like cerulean leaves fallen
Off a tree with only
Sapphire mouth still clinging
To its crush of brush on
Canvas.

Someone who
We are told
To pity.

Look away
From on
The boulevard.

Or better worse
Someone we know
Knows about our
Strange fits.

The banshee
Screaming inside the brain.

Just pretend it isn't
There.

You know you can.

Like vowing something with
Fingers crossed behind body
Trying hard like devil not to giggle.

(Wipe off the smirk.)

The lapis man who
Plays on relentlessly.

While our doubts seeped full of
Unutterable terror begin to
Clench the neck.

For seven-tenths of a second we must
Stare at him.

Transfixed.

(Be sure not to
Frown.)

At the one who can't stop
Seeing it all in from his seat
Atop the cracked curb.

V.

*How should you walk in that space and know
Nothing of the madness of space,*

VI.

We stood there for a little
While.

And the instant blue was
No longer my favorite color
We left.

"So lunch?"

My fingers hurt.

I had to tell her I couldn't
go to lunch.

"Clair this has nothing to do
With the Picasso."

"Then what is it and I
Mean it—what is it
That you have to do?"

I just couldn't go to lunch.

"I just can't
Do that right now."

VII.

*An absence in reality,
Things as they are. Or so we say.*

VIII.

By the time I got to my car
Turned the engine on
And had radio playing
I had decided who—
Where—where
It was that I needed
To drive to.

Traverse City.

Out on the edge
Of the dock.

Kayaks tied midway
Up the rickety aluminum.

Nurses of algae sooth the
Boat launch with its
Gutted frame.

Always blushing marvelous:
Angelic sand crippled
Into utter
Complacency.

Tan bed upon which
The water of Lake Leelanau
Panted and sighed.

Where we would spend the last week
Of August just before
The world started back up.

Her grandparents owned
The place.

With our legs cascading over
Metal's ledge.

Anxious liquid of midnight
Lapping up onto our toes.

(It's funny how Rome never saw
Its matches coming.)

Muse brunette heating her head
On my chest while soothing voice
Dispelled any apathy.

“Should we go in, or wait a while
Longer?”

A minute or two didn’t matter back
Then.

We were two people kissing
To try to dispel change.

Gladiators dropping their swords
To pet the lions.

Not yet bloodied but already
Scathed.

Chasing celestial colors
We might yearn to forget.

VII.

*And yet are fixed as a photograph,
The wind in which the dead leaves blow.*