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Fountain Street

by Jazno Francoeur commentary by Robert L. Francoeur

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Every effective poem has to maintain a state of tension between assertion and humility, the mundane and the grand, the specific and the general, the explicit and the suggestive. — Rush Rankin

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## Part One

Home

Our life was an accident, the flames were conjured by an indifferent couple.

So much time has passed, their union dissipated with the dumb carcass of our home.

This house has been all of our houses—our parents colluded with emptiness to conceal this fact.

We live from cairn to cairn, burning refugee hearts, each mistake receding in the rear-view mirror, each incipient disaster breaking the night like headlights falling on a new city.

Fountain Street

there is a large hand unfolding above me, discreetly

it conceals a black man surrounded by a thin tincture of green like the moon eclipsing the sun

I am to give obeisance to him and his firm brothers lurking in the garden— they strip me of my childhood casually with the relative calm of a standard play, the rising action, apex, and denouement—

in the formation of sleepwalkers they withdraw silently into the past

commentary:

no one can explain why they came to shape the hidden aquifers of your life, but it is here, on Fountain Street, where you first stepped out of the unseen

cathexis

upstairs, my uncle relived his boyhood, looking from the garret window to the tree he had been tied to and into the corners of the yard where his impulses formed

he drove us to the pond by the frozen reservoir— my brother became pallid as animals do when divining pain, and we clambered out of the cab toward him

we undressed in a snowbank waiting for him to break the ice— he circled around, motioning to me

I conjoined with his hammer poised over the immutable sheen, though I was only a boy and could barely anticipate the future blows of initiation and affection

commentary:

affection between men has always been circumscribed by pain

here, in the balance between love and brutality lies the origin of sport, the first act of civilization

femme inspiratrice

she waited under the stairs in the basement where I learned to feel and see without the advantages of light

she held me tightly to the ground and I complied with the conspicuous duties she created for me

I drifted to her daily, down the damp steps and found a love in her remorse that I could not find in myself

there she lay in the old air, suspended in the dark webs under the stairs whispering to me when I slept, and pleasing me

the inevitable

a man runs in the rain toward this small house

the window clouds up from his breath even though he is a mile away

his silhouette begins to blot out the moon, beads of water race down the glass

he will exact something from me, I can tell as he slips down the hill, muscles tensed

desire

it begins in childhood with an awkward moment behind the house then shatters outward, exploding into adulthood

here one collects fragments and reconstructs the face of the large boy who touched you but the eyes are always missing only the lips remain, directing you downward

infidelity

a large dog fills up the backyard, the children are afraid to leave the house

each night, the dog inhales and exhales, its muscles contract against the walls

the dog's warm breath fills the attic as its teeth push slowly through the ceiling

the room dims, the lining of its black lips slides gradually over the windows

**I.**

in the attic, a plank extended between the crossbeams over the living room ceiling to the room built by your father

women followed him there then departed hours later down the ladder recessed into the wall

one night his leg burst through the ceiling then snaked back through the hole

**II.**

your mother is busy in the next room with her new lover

you watch the changing colors of your father's injury as he sleeps on the couch

the spell

my mother used to compel me with her distance it was a diffident spell that made me imagine we were connected

but the vagaries of haunted girls look unhealthy in women and harden into caricature in old age

Cherryvale

I place my ear against the glass

the cicadas are chirring, there is a light breeze

a dust cloud forms on the horizon lit up by headlights

the engine rumbles closer

gravel knocks against the underbelly, wheels turn toward my room

a door creaks, a stranger materializes into mother with each footstep

my body folds into her long blue coat

ice breaking

I cross the wires where the hairs rest on the red barbs. Her scent lingers in the air. My hatchet mirrors the round moon momentarily as I swing it above me to split the thick sheet of ice.

Behind a tree, she watches the water rise and collect in a small pocket. Her hips shift, then she descends down the white embankment toward me.

Leadville

there is a corner where I choose to sleep where the low ceiling slants and meets above the supports

the walls are porous, I hear your pulse beat and feel the moisture gather about your hands

I never see you descend into the ground, I can only imagine the stillness of the tunnels, the lack of sound

commentary:

don't stay too long in Leadville, move on to the campfire where we huddled together like some ancient tribe learning the power of stories to stave away the night

tell the story again but this time remember that it is only another town where the blood drying on the rocks is your own

grandfather

the crossbeam creaks when grandmother cries, the floorboards muffle the drunken rage of her husband

she rocks steadily above him in the master bedroom with two generations of boys in her lap

they are all men now and each has taken his turn hauling the sad figure up the stairs

commentary:

I have also seen this inner structure of ancestral bonds, each fiber having the color of pain passing between father and son and on through to grandsons

I understand that it is whole that it is pure that I lose this view when I am in it, pulling against the weight of this old man's body that I am carrying

oracle

**I.**

we've run together for days, the poles chafing our shoulders— we've had no choice but to champion our mother over the dirt path toward the stone house

the road is narrowing as the weeds rush by snapping in the spokes— run faster, the wheels are turning the secret from her and the sun is scorching our backs

**II.**

contrary to legend, the brothers never died from exhaustion nor from Apollo's quixotic mercy but they did sleep well for two nights as their mother rambled on in the dark

they left Delphi crestfallen and slumped into the harness on the third morning, glanced at the mumbling woman and headed back to the farm

commentary:

looking northwest from the farm you can see where in another age the edge of a glacier left a row of rocks arrayed in a frozen line still marching south.

looking to the east you can still find the place where a train of oxen-drawn Conestogas stopped long

enough for my great-grandmother to be born.

## Part Two

the beginning of a scene

her wan smile rejects you, around it, the wind occurs— somewhere else, on another porch this night is not so particular

tell yourself that nature has no motives or conceits, that her hair only suggests the shape of the wind, that her eyes do little else than reflect the heavens

Locust Street

Shadows press into the ground, the black trees lay flat against the clouds; jackdaws arc above the rooftops then push into the wind toward the highest branches; a boy whirls around a tree, emulating their startled flight, then ambles toward his brothers by the lake.

One by one, the windows light up as the elders lean toward the street— their boys grow in the darkness, appearing larger in silhouette each year as they round the corner.

Appalachia

In the rhododendrons, something stirs. Tar paper shacks on the black slope lean in the direction of the wind. The dogs tense and bristle their coats, their master adjusts his head lamp.

Their orange hair quivers as they bay into the valley. A pine tree bends with the weight of some invisible animal scaling the branches.

The grass moves at the edge of the field in waves and small eddies, then stops, then begins as the dogs collect their senses beneath the brush.

The moon passes by a long cloud, then rolls into the darkness. The ground shudders, a constellation of headlamps defines the body of the forest.

visitation

the grey arms define the impressions of gravity,

her body presses into his suit

like a child face down in the sand

but instead of water pouring into the mold

imagine space pushing the cloth into its grey valleys—  
the bottom of the ocean is lighter than this room—  
the grey arms reach for something  
a strand of smoke slips from a pair of lips, drifts to the floor  
a pearl necklace falling into the water

understanding the ancients

An airplane buzzed overhead, a dozen or so seagulls pecked around my feet, a man wearing a turban skated by— and for one moment you seemed to converge with all of it.

palimpsest

a woman slips through the long cattails then pushes off from the bank towards the center of the pond  
she sinks into the water as her pale suggestion echoes outward on the edge of the ripples  
the stars realign quickly on the surface of the pond as if the evening had not been disturbed by her body, even for a moment

commentary:

an image on the surface, a woman's body piercing through it only to be swallowed up by the order of things

should her act engrave a story on the water or is it better to pass through the wind like a bird leaving no trace of ever having been here

## Part Three

sympathetic magic

America, forgive this apostrophe, I'm channeling Whitman— he says his atoms are rushing into the veins of the new revolution, he's assimilating into phosphor dots, trying to form a sincere face, he's easing through our labyrinth with a new heart, pulsing in the cursors in a remote chatbox on the eve of the apocalypse— the future is pixellating into his beard, he is singing:

a million Trojan horses are circling the skies— beware the dark dreams spinning above you

St. Catherine's head

the church is my reliquary, a temenos of bronze and glass— the old men preserved me, separated my head from my body then suspended it in the wall— they don their vestments in the old sacristy and sing in the great hall, bearing the heart of Our Lord as they pass by my window

of all the secrets I hold most dear: the martyrs were perfect only in death— each passing was unique, contrived by their executioners and made palatable by the faithful— even now my fellow saints peer out from their canvases and tapestries with a passivity that belies their pain

chant

the acolytes stooped over the smooth ornamental carafes on the low table

a succoring child blessed my lips, poured the choice wine and chanted, sotto voce:

hair of the dog, hair of the dog, hosanna

epiphany

five toilet paper rolls on the plunger handle, a primitive stupa, a lingam and yoni, the ithyphallic Siva sits cross-legged like me, reading a magazine, looking at five toilet paper rolls on the plunger handle

the first coming

Laocon is still looking up sadly before his own devouring, wondering if this immense snake fell from an emasculated god.

Before antiquity, gods shook the columns of their temples, the marble cracking through the clouds like thunder, a dress rehearsal before the bugging of Ganymede.

With indolent grins they allowed the snake to writhe in a leafy copse, a tendril rising with the moon licking at its canopy until the first woman could be born.

ipsissima verba

the rough beast does not slouch, he walks erect while speaking at small rotary club luncheons or on late-night public access channels, expounding on man's dominion over man

he's pudgy and unassuming, hardly a feral child brimming with preternatural powers— yet he's been cultivating his charm since the advent of sin, he moves incognito, a grass roots antichrist, the man behind the man who never reads Yeats

the world won't end with a whimper, but with a conference call— he'll pull over at a rest stop outside Albuquerque with his wireless remote to organize the endgame from a bathroom stall

Camille Paglia edits on the beach

first draft—Tuesday, 3:00 p.m., New Smyrna:



The mermaids are swinging their butt-thonged bottoms beach to beach, (do I dare to eat a peach? Ha!) they can't sense the horror of the water, the sun, the leering boys with hard-ons (jejune.... Öleering priapistic boysÖ sounds more poetic) who swagger like strangers with guns, blasting music into the sun, (Camus reference may be too oblique) striking poses worthy of Polyclitus. (remember to look at Praxiteles, just for comparison's sake)

A group of well-oiled girls (yes!) toss a ball over the net, a network of tan limbs and plump suburban insouciance (connect this somehow to the Marquis de Sade) thoroughly unaware of the forces bubbling quietly under my umbrella. (Öchthonian forcesÖ may be more to the point)

O felix culpa

She will arrive when the last building collapses  
and the corporeal fires flicker into the evening,  
when the wind collects bits of ash  
and makes the tips of the blackened fields glow.  
She will arrive intemperate and invisible,  
ready to inter her breath in the broken houses of men.

She has been here since words were realized  
and gods were employed to enforce them,  
holding the course of temples and water,  
steadying the trees as they gripped the earth  
with their knotted hands,  
sleeping in the white sails of man's first conquest.

commentary:

Something waits to take control of buildings, bodies:

Trishna no longer disguised, nature red in tooth and claw.

Now we know the reason for metaphysics: the holy trophy wrapped between the sheets was a virgin.

## Part Four

bodies

I am a liar, you circle me twice, I am about to tell you how guilty I am

I want you to be someone else, to tell me this desire is original

we cannot otherwise part, the flashing lights occasionally reveal the impressions I was born with

I'll cut to the quick: the lights are coming on and I'm afraid I won't love you then

the kiss

your ebony cats glide toward us in tandem— you part your hair and lean over me on my side of the bed

we kiss, but I'm almost afraid to touch you, the truth may speak itself unwittingly as I draw the sheet taut against the length of my body

touch

the body ferries your spirit, disconnected as a dream from its birthing place

the space beyond the womb is untenable, every moment accrues strangely into age as touch is slowly relieved from you

lament in three colors

when my heart becomes as vivid as your apples and geraniums you must promise to paint it— the north light will pour through the window into my palms, and be gone

light

the blinds divide the blue sun, your blond hairs glisten on your uncovered leg

light bends around us like fabric— at breakfast I explain: the peculiarities of light, our bodies mapped perfectly by chance

prediction

just over that dune, that's where you'll meet her, she'll have fair skin and will be sunning by the shore

the edge of the ocean will tangent the brim of her hat, you'll make some abstruse comment, how it flattens space and makes it appear she and the water are touching

twelve hours in the future

you drink sake and walk down white roads too small to contain your ambition

the moon is remote, drifting through the branches, the thing in itself unaware of the man yelling at it

surrender

The spilled wine spreads to the edge of my napkin  
over the course of our dinner. After the second bottle,  
I confess that my wife has thirteen ribs.

On the third bottle, we compare traumas.  
The gay waiter interrupts  
with the indifference of a Greek chorus:  
'our most popular sin is the chocolate souffl'.  
An hour later, my red napkin could pass  
for a thin sheet of venison tartar.  
The waiter pours two flutes of Kir Royal  
then impatiently stacks the chairs behind us.  
You lean back as if you were Isaac  
anticipating his father's judgement  
and we are both in that drunken, beatific state  
that makes any room sacred.

one metaphor

twenty winters from now you'll still be divining profundities from copulation and I'll still be mining my family secrets for that one metaphor that will inexplicably explain my childhood

there's so little poetry in the reality that we can't write our failings into a good life, or be thankful our compulsions move us any closer toward truth

in Japan, a bird alights on a branch outside your window and inspires a hundred tankas or it simply wings over your house, unnoticed

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