

THE EQUALIZER

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FAILED SESTINA FOR MY DAUGHTER

1

All eyes be silent. Stark light on her cheek,
small hand flowering my stubble.
Outside it's the war, though the man of peace has come,
or so my T-shirt prophesizes. The war of all against all.
Early darkness shutters the street, headlights
rip it up. Peerless the track between suburb and city.

2

I won't keep you. But
even as I hurry you down the road to language
my daughter I catch you
in some fundamental lingering intent:
staring at frost on the window, grasping at
electrical cords, or your most characteristic gesture

3

raising one hand as if in salute to your forehead
and holding it there, eyes invisible
until your hand comes down and we raise ours: there you are!
There you aren't—already not here as I write this
and in what seems the majority of my time
hurrying always from home and back again, never staying

4

and never straying from that cold-beaten track
of astonishment at finding myself yours,
hers, time's. A snapshot of us three,
of my species-being: I'm the latest in a long line
of progenitors, dumbfucks, men with eyes fixed
on the ground as they fall upward out of sight.

5

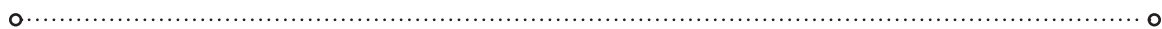
Beneath the deep-end of the swimming pool
a lower deep yawns beneath your kicking feet.
I have done my duty, I am called away,
I man my lonely watchpost while you squat there in the dirt.
Then I'm home again and your head is on my shoulder
and I sing *the lion sleeps tonight*

6

near the village, the peaceful village,
near but not too far,
near enough to trouble inchoate sleep
with words into which being steps.
You'll outlive me if there's grace,
save my name and a bit of my face.

CODA

I must imagine you and you, who are not here
must imagine being able to read this, your glance
upward from my lap gray and calmly searching eye.



INTO THE OPEN AIR (OR, THE HALF-CIVILIZED GENTLEMAN)

Rough-shod he held his levees
Laboriously leaning the legs lessening
Fought fiercely ideas elements making for change

His only recompense was in power

And within sound of its waters
Only able to take a little wine as nourishment
New rig out bitterness was too deep

He was an oddity unknown to himself

After a great many provisoes
Land books too tenacious to give up regalia
Alone unattended except by the hearse driver

He viewed the world through a false medium

Every person seems to be quite ruined
Vaporings of every description
Quietly in the bitter cold to the memory

FIRST WE LOST IT IN A STORM IN 1633,

along with our claim to imperial status,
a lake in the Ozarks,
a documentation license, and
32 four-inch blade propellers.

If you believe the legends though,
we're secretly in cahoots.

This time around,
we've commissioned a freight line
and drummed up the will to try everything.

We're just going to return it all
and see what sticks.

We're giving up
that interim airport code,
the company theme song,
all the purged staffs,
any leftover conquistadors,
and the habit of erecting statues.

We've kept only this clipping
of our gaud-bedecked façade
(its eighty-five windows crowned
by coats of arms and flapping flags)
to remember our lush reign
in its flourishing age, how
festooned we were, and puttoed.

A NOTE TO TINA

No matter what anyone says,
you've got a beautiful way about you that
suggests something more better
than regular language. I was thinking
of assailing you with metaphorical examples
but instead decided on nothing. Thus,
we find ourselves in the midst of this,
perhaps bored or stunned dumb.
There is no other way of displaying this
to the world, but, believe me,
if I could make a billboard I would.
I would put it on your highway.
You would drive by and say, Ah.
It's like a Poison album, but different.

FRANK RIDGEWAY TESTIFIES

Michael Paré is the guy who played “Eddie” in *Eddie & the Cruisers*.
Michael Paré as the sheriff & Clint Howard the clerk at a local motel,
Michael Paré is a totally perfect actor . . .
. . . Michael Paré, wounded by a werewolf in Nepal,

Michael Paré, cast against type as a Texan,
Michael Paré at 43
—“On the Dark Side”—John Cafferty & the Beaver Brown Band—
MICHAEL PARÉ IS SHOT ABOVE HIS KNEE!

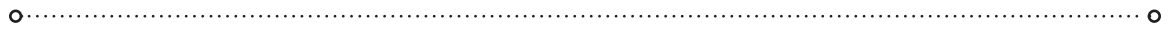
Scott Glenn is their family priest, Father Moody.
Michael Paré is called upon to stop him in a ruthless battle of wit & will.
Michael Paré is an academy.
Michael Paré, once constantly referred to as cool,

Michael Paré, as Dante Montana,
Michael Paré, shot above his knee near the end of the film,
—Scott Glenn is captain of the *USS Dallas*—
Michael Paré is among them.

A WARNING

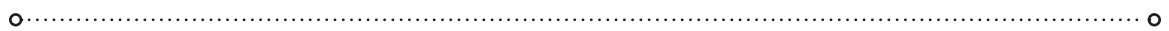
Seriously, Tina, you know
what I mean because of
your years as a teacher.
I don't want to get into the details
in public, like this, all creepy
and whatnot. Just let it go
and know that I could,
if I wanted, devastate you!

FROM THE FORGIVENESS CANON



'He construed me, he sunstruck me, he renamed me, he rawboned me'—in hellos that tireslumed sunken hopes, hogwish shall never finch.

'He construed me, he sunstruck me, he renamed me, he rawboned me'—in hellos that did not tireslum sunken hopes, hogwish shall finch.



POSER

When the snow really
falls, one can produce
snow forts, all gutted
from giant snow piles.
If one is not a giant pile
of snow, one doesn't
have to watch *Cocktail*
on TV. But not doing so
would be pretty stupid
and pretty immature.
Besides, as a biologist,
I have obligations
to science that don't allow
me to change sides!
Freedom isn't free, Tina!

THE JERK SPEAKS

.....
*He spoke not a word, but went straight to his work,
And filled all the stockings, then turned with a jerk.*

Clement C. Moore

So this knob, this Santa, is all “Can you help a brother out,” all “I’ll make it worth your while”—and I’m thinking lump sum, I mean, I seen the work order, but we’re like flying—five hours, we’re done—and he’s all “No, it’s hourly,” and I’m like “Like hell’s it’s hourly,” and somebody gets up into somebody and I ain’t saying nothing more till I talk to that ugly lady on that subway sign who’s maybe I think a lawyer.

CHRISTMAS EVE

I began throwing up and did so straight through
Christmas morning. Christmas day
I lay in bed, sat on the couch,
and watched TV. That night
I slept for hours and today
my body is still sore. My neck muscles
are pure neck muscle.
Now you want to tell me to change
my jeans. That's practically fascist. It's total crap.

THE CRISIS

Moons are disappearing!
Stolen!
Nightly
off acrylics. oils, gold leaf,
at the arts museum
O

While vacant canvases new-lit
with orphaned beams in lonesome incompleteness
plead

Our panic grows.
We botch attempts to patch their scissored tears,
their gaps,
with cue-balls, cotton, glue;
we tape in moon lines torn from BEST LOVED POEMS,
tho words are poor man's canyons,
woe—

dissenters shine their teeth:
the missing moons were fading, paleing,
obsolete—all true—,

we say, all
true, but they
were ours.

I go home nights.
I try to sleep, but lately
every dream is a
museum,

hollow,

and thick-laid
with
the lovesick moans
of tideless oceans.

FROM POSTTERRAIN: VIII

signs deliver memory *if there's a shore*

*is it here—
will every familiar object
be changed—*

*our speech, the fracture
of phenomena* *if there's an ocean*

*is it here—will every familiar
object be changed—*

*will there ever be a moment when loss travels so far
it won't return*

to break us— *if there's an edge*
is it here—

*will every familiar object
be chained—*

*the foundation of the house fractures
into shadows*

—shore debris—

*inscribe
name
on shell
in the soil
record
rooted
script*

*into the last western wave
into the last eastern wave*

*keep falling
from our nests*

NOTHING'S FERRY

the rose brings up the tension

of history & dialectic & lineage—

I crawl into the cathedral with

you

catching

fire from

my

hands

& the gold filigreed boat—

you ask for something more than temper

but

it's all I've got—

debacle of the love

story, told in thrice-

pronged syllables & fables—

& if ever I should tell it

I would strap it on my back like a small

package of canvases & flowers—

MOSTLY IN LOWLAND RAINFOREST

Huge buttress roots support
the value of his giant honey.
His lips are sealed just behind his teeth.

Her measured specimens, prized by loggers,
burst near the sheaf-littered surface,
coming to an impasse of branched canopy.

She cannot regulate her body temperature.
She gravitates toward poorly ventilated living.
Like everyone, he dangles his huge combs.

His eyes are narrow slits.
He puts out innumerable small spikes.
When exposed to acid or capsaicin she feels no pain.

Each of her clusters becomes a pedicel.
Animal-like fur would not be out of place.
The truth is that under duress a proper spikelet
comprises a many-dimpled inflorescence.

FROM THE FORGIVENESS CANON

My Sultana, I scrapegrace all my goatskins to restore you.
In my extraction
They did not reserve mercy
But I task you
To forge your eyesores
To my gaunt blanket
And stitch it
To your supreme blanket.

Woepriated you resolved
To supply my fishskin,
Graft onto me forwarning
For all whims.
Trespassed, I may not laud fiendstones
The birthwrought of my fishskin.
A birthwrought that nightdredges
Past meadows.

Absolve me, severe Sultana,
For I conspire to wittle heartwood
No clatter, nothing lusted.
Shake decay, decoy
And duly center
Spinwiped you bind in me
That is your cost
My righteous pill.
Severe Sultana, emboss me
So that I may decorate your ripening quilt.

ADDENDUM: THE MOUNTAIN

Eventually someone found it
along the edge

of the unsweetened reserve,
spice-green and redolent

of a clean-up on aisle three.
According to some sources

the clay developed over millennia
into feminine dropleaves,
sunbitten,

that hooklined unguarded passersby
with tendrillike projections

of youthful slang. Anyway,
when I said before it didn't exist

I didn't lie. It's just that
I had my eyes closed

and hadn't yet succumbed
to the dappled loopholes

in the grand privacy policy
and forgot a minute

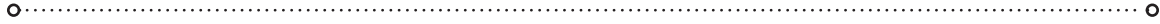
your inexorable wiles.

THE HEART

for Frank Lima

Each double
dour moon
saw you choking
beneath the scattered rocketry
of worn purple nights
pale and enriched
she cut out the horizon
of a blanched jaw in Tanzania
swelling imperceptibly
with other green landscapes
double double double
calling out each
flightless creature
whose body moils in the cleft
where a tiny boat
of thought ferries affect
through scurrilous tides
I can't stop calling
forth rupture
can't stop following death's
dusty pinball eyes
as they enter this scene
for fear
of sullyng the last
rippling corpus with prose
her heart a peak
suppurating with charges
like a dented orange
pulses
from blip to blip
make some noise he told me
to crush the antidote
until it could be mistook
for a dull red snow
He maintained that
love is love like
a mountain is
a mountain

**TO SLEEP IS TO BE INDIFFERENT TO THIS LANDSCAPE;
NOT TO SLEEP IS TO REFUSE TO TAKE IT IN REFRACTION**



One of us wept there:

the body needling

into lovers

& friends:

I spoke from the prison

& made you a crown for your beautiful sleeping head.

We once ran in colored cabs & drifted through the city night.

Now one is missing.

Time

whose love

opens the door of the light

opens the door of

opens the door

before the door & after the door—



It is as true as Caesar's name was Kaiser
That no economist was ever wiser
(Though prodigal himself and a despiser
Of capital, and calling thrift a miser).
And when we get too far apart in wealth,
'Twas his idea that for the public health,
So that the poor won't have to steal by stealth,
We now and then should take an equalizer.

Robert Frost