

SONG FROM AN ALCOVE

It's a simple act sitting down on the sidewalk and often the ultimate act of a life
and it should be a sober one but it rarely is and now that I've sat down and placed my eyes
at knee level of the walking still standing people who have yet to be forced
to sit down on the sidewalk the people yet to have their decision trees
rot and narrow to just a single root indicating it's time to sit down like me
now that everything has happened to me and I have happened to myself
it seems these lower halves of people compose a vicious river I watch float by
their shoes which dwarf my net worth are now my alarm clock the dead leaves
are my alarm clock the miasma of cooling trash is my sheet and comforter
the sun could never wake me could never be my alarm clock I can sleep through
whole weeks and weathers and religious observances so long as there are no shoes
to ring the dead leaves by my head

Listen this is no different than the life of honeycombed hivework in law firms across the Willamette
and startup lofts with exposed beams of Prussian timber and sweet little dogs under desks
hammocks couches make yourself at home we want you to feel at home while you work
living deadlines all hands on deck executive staff meet-ups brainstorming how to suck
more capital from the nouveaux riches our best and loyalest most stupidest clients
kegs of dark beer with ochre foam in the kitchen and the Chinese place we'd go for lunch
every other day the simple white rice and chicken wrapped in off-white wax paper
ginger beer in black glass bottles with red labels and scary black bulls all virile
the immaculate inbox and Gmail chatbox overseers in a glass tower on Lake Michigan
watching but not really watching but that's the beauty of the panopticon always (not) watching
and don't misunderstand I loved all the minutes hours of it I loved the numb stability
I was a productive and antisocial butterfly propped up by methadone coffee hope
I arrived late and left early and nodded off at my keyboard and worried everyone
around me but oh I felt I'd made it when I saw my name on the websites and mastheads
copyeditor copywriter staff writer ghostwriter writer it was like seeing my own gravestone
and these alcoves are no different

I still greet dawn with a gasp and who / where am I like before
I'm still an antisocial butterfly just wingless and dead and pinned and archived underglass
it helps to think that God is just collecting us me and my other dead friends
at least we'd serve a purpose a dirty diorama object lesson
I get that feeling sometimes like my alcove's a fish tank or reptile bed with deep-red heat lamps
which are the eyes of the extra-planar pedestrians passing above oh heavenly bodies
but no one goes into the rainforest exhibit with a mind
to steal the monkeys' plastic toys or shiny bits of nothing (except other monkeys)
so I am reminded in the mornings when alarm clock shoes and dead leaves
wake me and my pockets have been cut out of my jeans and my backpack straps severed
and my locked cell phone and two dollar twelve cent Jack in the Box gift card and dope

all gone I'm reminded this is a different caste altogether even lower than dog or beggar
if only I possessed the lack of pride to be able to look dead shoes in the eye
and beg for change both kinds of change because money is the robed enchanter

And yet I admit to you now as I've admitted to no one before
that I stole a suit and luggage from a downtown mall and wore them
standing in an ARCO gas lot pretending to talk on the phone and look exasperated
until someone multiple someones over the hours while the attendant looked the other way
until someone approached and asked what was wrong everything was wrong I told them
I'm in town for a wedding my brother is getting married but my credit card was frozen
when I crossed state lines has that happened to you? I hate when they do that
I travel a lot you know and if you take the time to look as little like an insect as possible
total strangers will give you billions for Ubers I wish you'd seen the love in their eyes
maybe they were your eyes maybe you love me but even so
if they were your eyes you wouldn't have seen them
because though I am a mirror the glass I am is smoked

So it's laugh at the moon funny how broke I am in my broken alcove some nights
the picoeconomics of accepted doom and the little torn book of short stories
whose morals and characters and intrigues haven't been able to penetrate me since college
laugh at the moon funny that the little book of short stories is the only thing left after I'm robbed
but luckily alcove's a beautiful word more beautiful than mansion
palace home house bungalow flat apartment hut hovel tent lean-to hole
yes it's beautiful and funny how I'm the only one of us dead kids who calls it
an alcove from the Arabic al-kubba which means vault as though I'm already a mummy
but if this is my alcove then maybe I'm more ikon than reptile
maybe hatred is a form of veneration

I was born to contribute a note to a song I'll never hear
I am a brushstroke a knob of clay in the grand scheme
of dreams and saddest yet most liberating of all is that I belong to / can comfortably exist in
neither the aforementioned / aforelived world of newsrooms and law firms
nor this honeycombed hivework of downtown alcove al-kubba cubbies
I feel the same now sitting like a 3/8 lotus skeleton monk on fire in the infernal Tuesday morning
where the Target bags and Safeway bags and faux-leather attachés convey at lowered eye level
I am a civic installment I am tax-deductible I am numerically accounted for somewhere
in a file ledger Excel worksheet yesterday I was greeted as a case number by a bike cop
and for a moment the string of numbers and letters fathomed in me like a name
belonging to something born before I was born or perhaps was never born just always was
and in the bike cop's eyes I saw that there is a new bureaucratic language on the way
in which the letter and number fuse and our names will swell with the afterbirth of data

I know I said this caste is lower than dog but technically physically also eye level is the canine stratum along with leashes strollers hands waists belts crotches bicycle wheels and pedals pockets of khakis and thermal'd running hubs of knees buttocks thighs calves zippers watches hands fingers cellphones rings and tattooed knuckles wrists forearms and the faces of cherubs who along with dogs are the only ones who look me in the eye anymore and when the sidewalks are quiet and no one's walking and I can see clearly to the other side of the street with all its dusty nested alcoves just like the one I'm entropically melting into I see I am an exhibition in a hall of horrors a cautionary museum of the future not the past and I'm sorry for being so unspecific what I mean by alcove is the little sideways trapezoid shelter one side of which is the edge of the sidewalk the other three sides of which are 1) window 2) door 3) window by alcoves I mean the thresholds of downtown boutiques through the windows of which are seen thousand dollar Gore-Tex® windbreakers sporting archaeopteryx skeletons authentic Webelo and Boy and Eagle Scout tunics with all the badges and bows and arrows neon blacklit He-Man displays and build your own almost life-size Castle Grayskulls origami models of Nebraska townships and B-1 Bombers and Fat Man and Little Boy punk rock assless kimonos with duty-free silk sashes silkworms labored little lives over kendo swords and plasticized suits of armor with customizable Oakley visors throwback VHS throwback cassettes throwback Betas throwback posters of heartthrobs stationery made of pulped pulverized rock with monogrammed initials for the geologically vain diatomaceous earth and needled flea combs and hypoallergenic dog bandannas Buddhist prayer flags and karmically charged agates throned in glass bowls but the boutique of my particular alcove is empty vacant derelict making it perfect for my ¼ life crisis which takes the form of sitting down on the sidewalk and leveling my gaze perpendicularly at the X axis of American flesh and what feeds it the fast food bags bottles of soda takeout cartons like the Chinese chicken and rice I never eat anymore

When I'm hungry which is never it's more like when I realize my nervous system would be less nervous if I took in calories I walk into Safeway or Target or Fred Meyer and go collect my favorite things that mother used to get me a big tub of Greek vanilla yogurt a bag of organic granola from the bulk foods section and don't even bother to weigh it because I'm not going to pay for it and then the produce aisles and pretend I'm a thief in the agora the fertile crescent two thousand years ago and if they catch me pocketing berries they'll chop off my hands with machetes and passing the green stuff I remember still to this day when I'm handling the fiber of vegetables like celery or romaine my tongue cleaves to the roof of my mouth involuntarily and unavoidably there is a mote of fogged reminiscence that floats up always in these aisles where my gone away girlfriend introduced me to flaxseed and chia and Ezekiel bread which has all the sprouted grains mentioned in the Bible I never read and how touching it was to buy just a single onion and know it was the only onion in the world for the stew she'd cook tonight while I stood useless in the kitchen until she banished me back to the couch with my pipes and books and foreign films so to honor her I always go to the health food section to steal some flax and chia for my yogurt and usually so long as I stay

away from the shoes electronics appliances the officers of loss prevention pretend not to notice this ghost of the fertile crescent wishing the royal guard would come along and chop off his hands but ultimately I'm agoraphobic agora as in marketplace I'm afraid of the marketplace most afraid of places where things are trafficked because I have nothing left to traffic but my selves but in the fluorescent agora last night a loss prevention officer collared me dragged me to a back office and asked me which one do you wanna hear first the good news or the bad news I said just give me the bad and withhold the good so I can bask in liminal goodness he said as though unhearing look at my badge man it says loss prevention can you read and I knew him then to be a high priest of late late capitalism and pleaded with him earnestly sir I know it's far too late but I'd like you to prevent me from losing any more of myself

Out of a perhaps blend of fear confusion boredom disgust impatience haste he let me go so I stepped from the agora out onto the sidewalk with these sweet stuffs of supper and the summer dusk was bruised and complicated and confused like the blackberries in my bag blue-black sunset with a purple subconscious and creamy veins of riddle or guessed-at answers shadowed flax-yellow specks like a kicked-up desert all integrated as of a preordained system as above so in my supper so many times I've felt and seen the outward mirrored and born again in the inward my bumbling heart and in the food I eat and the fluids I inject and it is humbling to carry a dusk in a plastic bag and bump shoulders with humanity whom I love and whose love for me I suspect and corral neatly into my alcove each night like a blind goat whose curved horns knock me into that looney sleep with bluebirds carving halos around my head in loops of lullaby it is possible that all things are seeds of dawn even dawns themselves like eggs containing eggs

In my alcove there's a hieroglyph left behind by the previous mummy it says

no 1 wuz here

so either number one was here or no one was here and if no one was here then who could've written that no one was here it's kinda chicken or egggy which came first and I wonder what are the hermeneutics of graffiti of tags of I wuz (not) heres ink chalk paint graphite dispatches in the vast plaster concrete stone aluminum steel stucco bottle of America adrift in a puddle so shallow the bottle just clinks and rolls with the wind a drunken bottle all the fun's leaked out of and that has no ear for anything but its own cylindrical echoes cannibalizing one another's sound bites in anti-ecstasy either way someone is here now and that someone is me and last night that someone mixed up his yogurt flax chia blackberries granola and ensconced himself in his alcove beneath the vanishing Monday twilight and after I finished eating bummed a cigarette to a beautiful woman in a crimson romper with twenty dollars she was about to hand to a bouncer across the street who knows me like an old man knows a statue from his hometown of 50 years ago and I know the bouncer like a statue knows a child the statue sees walk to school and back every day and the statue laments nothing but its inability to fully participate in time but last night after my yogurt as I smoked there was just enough light left unleased from the twilit sky that I could see tiny V's of geese joining the greater stream like a phalanx of ants and when the sun went down last night and the geese and the ants winked out

I thought as I think every night here I am and here is my alcove and both of us are so small

my alcove's
a very
tiny ^{me}
place
there's only

room to curl and spoon the air from within my fetally positioned amniotic concrete sack
my alcove is the final picometer between the rock of America and the hard place of the Void
where I wave goodbye with a Sharpie as I fall and leave behind me the hieroglyph:

no — I wuz here