

A N D R E W Z A W A C K I

from *Masquerade*

One differing in itself
—HERACLITUS, Fr. 51

8

Spirit-lamp, spirit-level, tain by which the face would aspire to horizon: gulls rehearsing plié and plummet, little stuffed in the bins to irk their attention, the barge split purplewater and crest, zipping up immodestly behind. Say there had been a bridge to the island, somewhere to stand when the wharf-lights eased on, to drop our styrofoam cups and watch them falter in the furl: we might have witnessed the fishmongers bustling, battening their stalls, or sirens moaning C-minor ahead of the gale. As it happened, we read the hurricane into whatever history would vouch, or perhaps we even wrote it down, for others to believe. Neap tide lanced and haltered, morphing into requiems of quarto, octavo, inkwell and quill, the violins resuscitating what mimes had trouble staging in the square: that we had not existed, nor would we ever again.

9

Leaving no sooner it already motioned divergence, occurring from another place, a separate verb, over here: a singular axis emanating order, furze bush abstaining a lurch into flame, fox-glove and the coquettish breeze it answered to by noon. To quicken, dally, almost envision: fusebox inundated with images, the factory burnished a sterile, tentative gloss, chainlink and crumbling brick draped in hand-me-down revolver blue, passage into those we could neither forsake nor apportion a pledge. Incursions, we called them, qualified: wayward cancellations of an asphalt parking garage, a death's-head moth hellbent on halo-

gen spokes. Loading bays a narthex to cavalier guesswork, we stumbled past pretending not to notice, not to need, though even Orion's makeshift belt, not where it was when we'd jinxed its elisions, splayed three halves of heaven, and no two alike.

14

The only thing not lit the light itself: to draw the river in outline, calligraphy over a bayou trimmed by imaginative amours—even if mistaken for the real desire it honored by keeping close—the sun doubled back to offer its floreat, deception heating stanzas to crystal and shard. Nothing would crack this illumined façade, where we rowed one direction while facing the other, unmended and afraid. Later, the vanity of daytime brushing up as fireflies and crickets ignited, two stars that appeared to be moving turned out to be a plane, and the pilot, if there was one, couldn't see us: tangential to the current, we rested in its parallel until both wingflares joined, mystique dislimned by the intimacies of reserve. The heart, though hidden, had not stopped: we saw it out the corner of eyes that did not belong to us: a tree that was once a woman, running into the sleight affray of one god denying another.

16

By night the barren floodways looked full: sand and surface tension were the same. Dragonflies in the scarlet gorge were camouflaged as the gorge, while revenants appeared as their former selves, dressed in scarlet for carnival, to make love again under the ruined viaducts. The swimming hole ambered by alkaline dusk, heavy with muscat, unwavering depth, we barely stayed afloat, trimming an arc that blurred toward the cliff face, gathering into its blunt, cosmetic pall: umbrella bush and the harlequin clouds, gods who deferred out of weakness or contempt. Seismic lines were a narrow vein that syntax had carved and kept clear, fossil fuel deposits merely pretext for conserving the unannounced. At sunset we sat on the rim of a crater half a mile across, where a baby had tipped from her cradle and fallen hundreds of years to the earth.

18

A woman who stirred from the fret of a wave, its gaunt, aristocratic collapse. And red rising out of red: a mountain with a larynx, a lung.

19

Shrugging aside to reconvene in the rearview mirror, we drafted the vanishing point of a restive intent: a mission settlement vacant at the border, its burnt lime walls and flagstone floors the remnants of an interrupted gaze. But not these elements alone: the shearing shed wall and what echoes it would have assisted, a rain-water tank with a lilt but little rain, the chapel with crossbarred windows, an isolation ward. In the town outside the gate, seen from the slope of a trail to the power station, corrugated metal sheeting sent the sun back to its center, eschars in a rigged exchange of debt. We laughed in sync with a child playing hopscotch, whose mother, though counting for him, was far away. The onset of evening plied a mandarin motif: a hill in frenetic mascara, and a bat that circled galvanized iron roofs to unbalance the fronds, adding its weight to all that was not day.

25

Its shadow also fell: shuttered within the sun's eye, a fallen, cimmerian oak. As the beekeeper woke to scrape out the combs, the pianist who'd lost an arm performed with the other: brittle spine of an irrigation hex, a citation the telegraph louvered and bleached, or the immolation and costumed veer of a tipsy, sara-cen light. Staggered across the desert, repeater stations forwarded lacunae and ciphers' skirl, a contour built by interval, by sounds distressed when written. A daughter digressed the crotch of a tree, and along the no-wash zone: the opal surf unhazarding, a harridan beach to lick its salt with salt.