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Two Poems

Abstract

"Thirteen Ways of Looking at New York" (collaboration with Douglas Light) and "Prince, Purple Rain."

Keywords

poetry, poem, stanza, verse

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March 15, 2013

Two Poems

by Micah Ling

Thirteen Ways of Looking at New York

(collaboration with Douglas Light)

1.

Water, then water, then water. Then
 Sudden runway. LGA summer '95.
 My trip, specific: 10 days. Heat
 And a woman await.
 Round trip tickets only work
 If you make the return.

2.

Just before Christmas, transit is on strike.
 You say, *Tell the driver you won't pay a dollar
 more than twenty; take down their number.*
 I do, and get out early, in traffic, to walk
 the rest of the way, on the spine of your street.

3.

Twice I saw her
 naked. Winter. The air sparked with

hope and confusion. On the stoop
3rd Street. Out front of Quentin Crisp's
Got a cigarette? she'd ask
every day, clothed or not. Hungry
or not. Ranting
or not. People mistake love for a noun.
I'd have handed her a life's worth
had I had any. Smoke
was the least of her worries.

4.

From Montana to Yankee Stadium: the Bronx,
and it all smelled just right.
Peanut shells, draught, a different kind of fresh
that held everything from the radio.

5.

He grasps my arm, holds me still.
Crying men are a sadness difficult to endure.
My wife. My girlfriend. My girlfriend-wife, he says,
terrified by a truth he can't uncreate.

"Turkey in the Straw" tears
the February air. Mister Softee, selling treats
other than ice cream, is long

gone when the police arrive.

6.

Earlier this week, at a gas station in Tennessee
I was mistaken for a boy: told, *That's the women's
restroom*. I nodded, laughed, like tripping
on a curb in front of a crowd. But today,
here, in this Brooklyn apartment,
you've got me down to my panties
and feeling more like a woman than ever before.

7.

We sat outside drinking warm, flat soda
watching people trundle south
only south

toward the bridges tethering Brooklyn
toward what the world watched

For two weeks, more
ID was required to access
streets south of 14th

I had to prove a right to be here
prove I somehow belonged.

8.

*My only friends are songs: anthems to greatness,
and a few winding roads.* I'm thinking this when you call
from the city: there on business. You're not speaking
in complete sentences, but I know you need help:
my help. Hundreds of miles away, all I can do is nod
to the beat of a song, and hope that you hear it.

9.

Eating crabs on the F trains
she gnawed at legs
the shell, spitting shards to the
floor.

A hundred and thirty-six thousand
I earned that year and drank the stress
clean each night. Fear of failing
never washed away.

With her mouth brined with bits,
crablady stood, hiked
her skirt and announced
Truly, I'm sorry.

Her urine forged the path
of least resistance when we
lurched to a stop
at West 4th.

10.

Do you know how long it lasts

when you say, *Only you*
would appreciate how
exquisitely I cross Lexington
Avenue, on my walk from the subway
to the Met? It lasts forever, and I can smell
the flower shop on 85th
because it reminds you of Camp Otterbein:
where we're grass-stained and grinning.

11.

Morning, Westside Highway,
traffic tight, gleaming. 70 mph. Right
the hard Hudson. Left
the blurring wall.

When we speak of strength
we speak of the physical. Hold
the motorcycle firm, keep it from coming apart.
Don't caress what can't be returned.

But the Hudson is blurring! The wall is hard!
The traffic gleaming, beautiful, tight!

There is another strength
one we don't speak of.

12.

The first time I stood in Times Square, I was a child:
maybe six years old. And it was better
than Disney World. Pouring rain, and all I wanted
was for the man with the black umbrella to let me
hail the cab: let me get my little arm out there
and start living the life of being noticed.

13.

It's a mild autumn and everything smells warm:
New York is where the light stops being light,
just on the edge of deep color. I stop:
it starts being something else. I've lived

for an afternoon coffee: little buzz, little wink,

elsewhere, the cul-de-sacs of the heart.
 Then, someone steals my eye: my whole body.
 Here, I'm forced left. I'm forced right.

Prince, Purple Rain

I'm the daughter of a preacher man, which is to say, I was born to be bad.
 I worship motorcycles to no end. Once, I had a man record revving
 his engine, his beautiful bike, and leave it for me, as a voicemail.
 And yes, I was thinking more about the man than the pipes, but, just barely.

I worship motorcycles to no end, and I listened to that revving
 over and over: it made my heart beat faster, like hearing
 dirty things from the man with the pipes, just barely
 audible—the kinds of secrets that can turn ears red—hot.

Over and over, when my heart beats faster, I remember hearing
 (the first time), him say it was so good, that it felt so good
 out loud—all of it made his ears turn red—hot:
 sweating—really dripping—like I didn't know people could sweat.

The first time—he said it was so good: felt so good
 of course. But what I never told him, have still never told him
 through the sweating—the dripping—more than I knew people could,
 was that I was trying to be younger and older at once.

Of course—we all are—but what I didn't tell him: never told him
 was that it was all a dream: some sort of myth or made up memory
 the two of us trying to be younger and older at once
 until we stopped: we breathed. Then the smells and tastes were real, finally.

Now it isn't a dream or a myth or a made up memory:
 I'm the daughter of a preacher man, which is to say, I was born to be bad
 until I stop: I breathe. And the smells, the tastes, are real, finally,
 as real as an engine—a beautiful bike—as real as a voice, left for me.

Contributor's Bio: Micah Ling lives in Brooklyn and teaches in the English department at Fordham University in Manhattan. Her third collection of poetry, *Settlement*, was released by sunnyside press (Buffalo, NY) in May of 2012.

Douglas Light won the 2010 AWP Grace Paley Prize for short fiction for his collection *Girls in Trouble*. His novel *East Fifth Bliss* was adapted into a film starring Michael C. Hall, Peter Fonda, and Lucy Liu. His second novel,

Where Night Stops, received a 2012 NoMAA Grant.

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