



slow reading club. january 20, 2024. zurich.

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# blue

Derek Jarman

1993

You say to the boy open your eyes  
When he opens his eyes and sees the light  
You make him cry out. Saying

O Blue come forth

O Blue arise

O Blue ascend

O Blue come in

I am sitting with some friends in this café drinking coffee  
served by young refugees from Bosnia. The war rages across  
the newspapers and through the ruined streets of Sarajevo.

Tania said "Your clothes are on back to front and inside out".  
Since there were only two of us there I took them off and put  
them right then and there. I am always here before the doors  
open.

What need of so much news from abroad while all that con-  
cerns either life or death is all transacting and at work within  
me.

I step off the kerb and a cyclist nearly knocks me down. Flying  
in from the dark he nearly parted my hair.

I step into a blue funk.

The doctor in St. Bartholomew's Hospital thought he could  
detect lesions in my retina - the pupils dilated with belladonna -  
the torch shone into them with a terrible blinding light.



Look left  
Look down  
Look up  
Look right

Blue flashes in my eyes.

Blue Bottle buzzing  
Lazy days  
The sky blue butterfly  
Sways on the cornflower  
Lost in the warmth  
Of the blue heat haze  
Singing the blues  
Quiet and slowly

Blue of my heart  
Blue of my dreams  
Slow blue love  
Of delphinium days

[...]

I have lost the sight on the periphery of my right eye.

I hold out my hands before me and slowly part them. At a certain moment they disappear out of the corner of my eyes. This is how I used to see. Now if I repeat the motion this is all I see.

I shall not win the battle against the virus - in spite of the slogans like "Living with AIDS". The virus was appropriated by the well - so we have to live with AIDS while they spread the quilt for the moths of Ithaca across the wine dark sea.

Awareness is heightened by this, but something else is lost. A sense of reality drowned in theatre.

Thinking blind, becoming blind.  
In the hospital it is as quiet as a tomb. The nurse fights to find

a vein in my right arm. We give up after five attempts. Would you faint if someone stuck a needle into your arm? I've got used to it - but I still shut my eyes.

The Gautama Buddha instructs me to walk away from illness. But he wasn't attached to a drip.

Fate is the strongest  
Fate Fated Fatal  
I resign myself to Fate  
Blind Fate

The drip stings  
A lump swells up in my arm  
Out comes the drip  
An electric shock sparks up my arm

How can I walk away with a drip attached to me?  
How am I going to walk away from this?

I fill this room with the echo of many voices  
Who passed time here  
Voices unlocked from the blue of the long dried paint  
The sun comes and floods this empty room  
I call it my room

My room has welcomed many summers  
Embraced laughter and tears  
Can it fill itself with your laughter  
Each word a sunbeam

Glancing in the light  
This is the song of My Room  
Blue stretches, yawns and is awake.

[...]

I am a mannish  
Muff diving  
Size queen  
With bad attitude



An arse licking  
Psychofag  
Molesting the flies of privacy  
Balling lesbian boys  
A perverted heterodemon  
Crossing purpose with death

I am a cock sucking  
Straight acting  
Lesbian man  
With ball crushing bad manners  
Laddish nymphomaniac politics  
Spunky sexist desires  
of incestuous inversion and  
Incorrect terminology  
I am a Not Gay

H.B. is in the kitchen  
Greasing his hair  
He guards the space  
Against me  
He calls it his office  
At nine we leave for the hospital

H.B. comes back from the eye dept  
Where all my notes are muddled  
He says  
It's like Romania in there  
Two light bulbs  
Grimly illuminate  
The flaking walls  
There is a box of dolls  
In the corner  
Indescribably grim  
The doctor says  
Well of course  
The kids don't see them

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There are no resources  
To brighten the place up

[...]

Pearl fishers  
In azure seas  
Deep waters  
Washing the isle of the dead  
In coral harbours  
Amphora  
Spill  
Gold  
Across the still seabed  
We lie there  
Fanned by the billowing  
Sails of forgotten ships  
Tossed by the mournful winds  
Of the deep  
Lost Boys  
Sleep forever  
In a dear embrace  
Salt lips touching  
In submarine gardens  
Cool marble fingers  
Touch an antique smile  
Shell sounds  
Whisper  
Deep love drifting on the tide forever  
The smell of him  
Dead good looking  
In beauty's summer  
His blue jeans  
Around his ankles  
Bliss in my ghostly eye  
Kiss me  
On the lips

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On the eyes  
Our name will be forgotten  
In time  
No one will remember our work  
Our life will pass like the traces of a cloud  
And be scattered like  
Mist that is chased by the  
Rays of the sun  
For our time is the passing of a shadow  
And our lives will run like  
Sparks through the stubble.  
I place a delphinium, Blue, upon your grave

## the golden age, time passed

Ralph Ellison

1959

It has been a long time now, and not many remember how it was in the old days, not really. Not even those who were there to see and hear as it happened, who were pressed in the crowds beneath the dim rosy lights of the bar in the smoke-veiled room, and who shared, night after night, the mysterious spell created by the talk, the laughter, grease paint, powder, perfume, sweat, alcohol and food—all blended and simmering, like a stew on the restaurant range, and brought to a sustained moment of elusive meaning by the timbres and accents of musical instruments locked in passionate recitative. It has been too long now, some seventeen years.

Above the bandstand there later appeared a mural depicting a group of jazzmen holding a jam session in a narrow Harlem bedroom. While an exhausted girl with shapely legs sleeps on her stomach in a big brass bed, they bend to their music in a quiet concatenation of unheard sound: a trumpeter, a guitarist, a clarinetist, a drummer, their only audience a small, cock-eared dog. The clarinetist is white. The guitarist strums with an enigmatic smile. The trumpet is muted. The barefooted drummer, beating a folded newspaper with whisk-brooms in lieu of a drum, stirs the eye's ear like a blast of brasses in a midnight street. A bottle of port rests on a dresser, but like the girl it is ignored. The



artist, Charles Graham, adds mystery to, as well as illumination within, the scene by having them play by the light of a kerosene lamp. The painting, executed in a harsh documentary style reminiscent of W.P.A. art, conveys a feeling of musical effort caught in timeless and unhetorical suspension, the sad remoteness of a scene observed through a wall of crystal.

Except for the lamp, the room might well have been one in the Hotel Cecil, the building on 118th Street in which Minton's Playhouse is located, and although painted in 1946, some time after the revolutionary doings there had begun, the mural should help recall the old days vividly. But the décor of the place has been changed, and now it is covered most of the time by draperies. These require a tricky skill of those who would draw them aside. And even then there will still only be the girl who must sleep forever unheard, and the men who must forever gesture the same soundless tune. Besides, the time it celebrates is dead and gone, and perhaps not even those who came when it was still fresh and new remember those days as they were.

Neither would they remember Henry Minton, who gave the place his name, nor those who shared in the noisy lousiness of New York: the rediscovered community of the feasts, evocative of home, of the South, of good times, the best and most unself-conscious of times, created by the generous portions of Negro American cuisine—the hash, grits, fried chicken, the ham-seasoned vegetables, the hot biscuits and rolls and the free whiskey—with which, each Monday night, Teddy Hill honored the entire cast of current Apollo Theatre shows. They were gathered here from all parts of America, and they broke bread together, and there was a sense of good feeling and promise, but what shape the fulfilled promise would take they did not know, and few except the more restless of the younger musicians even questioned. Yet it was an exceptional moment and the world was swinging with change.

Most of them, black and white alike, were hardly aware of where they were or what time it was; nor did they wish to be. They thought of Minton's as a sanctuary, where in an atmosphere blended of nostalgia and a music-and-drink-lulled suspension of time they could retreat from the wartime tensions of the town. The meaning of time-present was not their concern; thus when they try to tell it now the meaning escapes them. For they were caught up in events which made that time exceptionally and uniquely then, and which brought, among the other changes which have re-shaped the world, a momentous modulation into a new key of musical sensibility—in brief, a revolution in culture.

So how can they remember? Even in swiftly changing America there are few such moments, and at best Americans give but a limited attention to history. Too much happens too rapidly, and before we can evaluate it, or exhaust its meaning or pleasure, there is something new to concern us.

Ours is the tempo of the motion picture, not that of the still camera, and we waste experience as we wasted the forest. During the time it was happening the sociologists were concerned with riots, unemployment, and industrial tensions, the historians with the on-sweep of the war, and the critics and most serious students of culture found this area of our national life of little interest. So it was left to those who came to Minton's out of the needs of feeling, and when the moment was past no one retained more than a fragment of its happening. Afterward the very effort to put the fragments together transformed them, so that in place of true memory they now summon to mind pieces of legend. They retell the stories as they have been told and written, glamorized, inflated, made neat and smooth, with all incomprehensible details vanished along with most of the wonder—not how it, was as they themselves knew it.



## metaxu iv

Oyvind Fahlström in Memorium  
from Degrees of Unsolvability  
Catherine Christer Hennix

1976-1979

|            |          |
|------------|----------|
| born,      | sit      |
| first      | stream   |
| by         | solitary |
| the tall   | falling  |
| olive tree | snow     |
| .....      | .....    |
| and,       | gate     |
| then,      | stone    |
| by         | bridges  |
| the Sea    | evening  |
|            | time     |

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## a mercy

Toni Morrison

2008

The beginning begins with the shoes. When a child I am never able to abide being barefoot and always beg for shoes, anybody's shoes, even on the hottest days. My mother, a minha mãe, is frowning, is angry at what she says are my pretty ways. Only bad women wear high heels. I am dangerous, she says, and wild but she relents and lets me wear the throwaway shoes from Senhora's house, pointy-toe, one raised heel broke, the other worn and a buckle on top. As a result, Lina says, my feet are useless, will always be too tender for life and never have the strong soles, tougher than leather, that life requires. Lina is correct. Florens, she says, it's 1690. Who else these days has the hands of a slave and the feet of a Portuguese lady? So when I set out to find you, she and Mistress give me Sir's boots that fit a man not a girl. They stuff them with hay and oily corn husks and tell me to hide the letter inside my stocking—no matter the itch of the sealing wax. I am lettered but I do not read what Mistress writes and Lina and Sorrow cannot. But I know what it means to say to any who stop me.

My head is light with the confusion of two things, hunger for you and scare if I am lost. Nothing frights me more than this errand and nothing is more temptation. From the day you dis-

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appear I dream and plot. To learn where you are and how to be there. I want to run across the trail through the beech and white pine but I am asking myself which way? Who will tell me? Who lives in the wilderness between this farm and you and will they help me or harm me? What about the boneless bears in the valley? Remember? How when they move their pelt sway as though there is nothing underneath? Their smell belying their beauty, their eyes knowing us from when we are beasts also. You telling me that is why it is fatal to look them in the eye. They will approach, run to us to love and play which we misread and give back fear and anger. Giant birds also are nesting out there bigger than cows, Lina says, and not all natives are like her, she says, so watch out. A praying savage, neighbors call her, because she is once churchgoing yet she bathes herself every day and Christians never do. Undemeath she wears bright blue beads and dances in secret at first light when the moon is small. More than fear of loving bears or birds bigger than cows, I fear pathless night. How, I wonder, can I find you in the dark? Now at last there is a way. I have orders. It is arranged. I will see your mouth and trail my fingers down. You will rest your chin in my hair again while I breathe into your shoulder in and out, in and out. I am happy the world is breaking open for us, yet its newness trembles me. To get to you I must leave the only home, the only people I know. Lina says from the state of my teeth I am maybe seven or eight when I am brought here. We boil wild plums for jam and cake eight times since then, so I must be sixteen. Before this place I spend my days picking okra and sweeping tobacco sheds, my nights on the floor of the cookhouse with a minha mãe. We are baptized and can have happiness when this life is done. The Reverend Father tells us that. Once every seven days we learn to read and write. We are forbidden to leave the place so the four of us hide near the marsh. My mother, me, her little boy and Reverend Father. He is forbidden to do this but he teaches us anyway watching out for wicked Virginians and Protestants who want to catch

him. If they do he will be in prison or pay money or both. He has two books and a slate. We have sticks to draw through sand, pebbles to shape words on smooth flat rock. When the letters are memory we make whole words. I am faster than my mother and her baby boy is no good at all. Very quickly I can write from memory the Nicene Creed including all of the commas. Confession we tell not write as I am doing now. I forget almost all of it until now. I like talk. Lina talk, stone talk, even Sorrow talk. Best of all is your talk. At first when I am brought here I don't talk any word. All of what I hear is different from what words mean to a minha mãe and me. Lina's words say nothing I know. Nor Mistress's. Slowly a little talk is in my mouth and not on stone. Lina says the place of my talking on stone is Mary's Land where Sir does business. So that is where my mother and her baby boy are buried. Or will be if they ever decide to rest. Sleeping on the cookhouse floor with them is not as nice as sleeping in the broken sleigh with Lina. In cold weather we put planks around our part of the cowshed and wrap our arms together under pelts. We don't smell the cow flops because they are frozen and we are deep under fur. In summer if our hammocks are hit by mosquitoes Lina makes a cool place to sleep out of branches. You never like a hammock and prefer the ground even in rain when Sir offers you the storehouse. Sorrow no more sleeps near the fireplace. The men helping you, Will and Scully, never live the night here because their master does not allow it. You remember them, how they would not take orders from you until Sir makes them? He could do that since they are exchange for land under lease from Sir. Lina says Sir has a clever way of getting without giving. I know it is true because I see it forever and ever. Me watching, my mother listening, her baby boy on her hip. Senhor is not paying the whole amount he owes to Sir. Sir saying he will take instead the woman and the girl, not the baby boy and the debt is gone. A minha mãe begs no. Her baby boy is still at her breast. Take the girl, she says, my daughter, she says. Me. Me. Sir agrees and changes



the balance due. As soon as tobacco leaf is hanging to dry Reverend Father takes me on a ferry, then a ketch, then a boat and bundles me between his boxes of books and food. The second day it becomes hurting cold and I am happy I have a cloak however thin. Reverend Father excuses himself to go elsewhere on the boat and tells me to stay exact where I am. A woman comes to me and says stand up. I do and she takes my cloak from my shoulders. Then my wooden shoes. She walks away. Reverend Father turns a pale red color when he returns and learns what happens. He rushes all about asking where and who but can find no answer. Finally he takes rags, strips of sailcloth lying about and wraps my feet. Now I am knowing that unlike with Senhor, priests are unlove here. A sailor spits into the sea when Reverend Father asks him for help. Reverend Father is the only kind man I ever see. When I arrive here I believe it is the place he warns against. The freezing in hell that comes before the everlasting fire where sinners bubble and singe forever. But the ice comes first, he says. And when I see knives of it hanging from the houses and trees and feel the white air burn my face I am certain the fire is coming. Then Lina smiles when she looks at me and wraps me for warmth. Mistress looks away. Nor is Sorrow happy to see me. She flaps her hand in front of her face as though bees are bothering her. She is ever strange and Lina says she is once more with child. Father still not clear and Sorrow does not say. Will and Scully laugh and deny. Lina believes it is Sir's. Says she has her reason for thinking so. When I ask what reason she says he is a man. Mistress says nothing. Neither do I. But I have a worry. Not because our work is more, but because mothers nursing greedy babies scare me. I know how their eyes go when they choose. How they raise them to look at me hard, saying something I cannot hear. Saying something important to me, but holding the little boy's hand.

## white phosphorus

Alice Notley

1988

"Whose heart" "might be lost" "Whose mask is this?" "Who has a mask, & a heart?" "Has your money?" "been published, been shown?" "Who can & can't breathe?" "Who went" "to Vietnam?" ("We know who died there") "This was then" "is now." "Whose heart?" "All our heart" "the national heart" "Whose mask?" "has its own heart?" "A mother's" "mask" "Whose money?" "do we mean?" "A woman's money" "Woman's money" "Who went" "to Vietnam" "& just died of it?" "A son" "Evolved" "a man" "evolved" "a woman" "into America" "into the" "just before now" "It was just before now..." "When men made the forms" "& women made the Air" ("& now no one does that, & who can breathe now?") "Who cares, in the Air?" ("All our poems, women's were there," "there, too invisible" "and now" "become male" "acceptable") "Accepted." "And they're welcoming us" "among" "their forms" "among their forms only" ("what forms might we have made?" "which ones did" "we make?") "Whose heart is lost?" "oh not mine, & not my darling's" "Or only our whole heart?" "not mine, & not my warrior's" ("has your money?" "been accepted?") "And this is what happened," "he went to a war" "old style, he went" "to that war" "No one cared" "that he went there" "as no one cared" "what was lost" "with our air"



"no magnanimity" "to an enemy" "no feeling for what" "is invisible" "for magnanimity" "for what's lost" "to air, in air" "As if nothing replaced chivalry, not something" "invisible" "but nothing" "No one cared" "what was lost" "with our air" ("All the forms were already" "men") ("politics, a man" "philosophy, a man; a building a" "painting a poem, a man" "science, a man") ("Now, we can all" "be men") "This

is what happened." "She is a mother." "This is what happened."

"Or she could be a lover" "or a sister" "This happened" "Find green air green breath" "Later, he tries to become" ("did he become") "air, air, as again" "This is what happened. And she's trying" "to breathe" ("the mother") "And she's trying to wash" "to wash off" "America" "from herself" "But what" "is a mother" "now?" "In America,

everyone is else" ("else" "aside" "aside from their" "whole heart has crumbled") ("take your own small heart, own heart & go") ("& breathe" "try to breathe") "Who is she? and who" "is he?"

"Whose mask is this?" "Whose heart might be lost to the" "bigger heart" ("not his nor hers but") "whole country of heart" "might be lost"

"to the bigger heart" "biggest heart" "heart of the universe" "heart that

might not give it back" ("we maimed" "another, a native land, we" "helped main, another") "Please" "give it back" "Give us our heart, whose" "heart might be lost."

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"Flowery mantle." "Homeric sacrifice?" "noise of darkness" "fear of darkness" "now mantle of innocence" "King of his death now" "Home" "I've come home" "He said, 'I've come home'" "They were sacrificed for nothing, for distant" "instants of thought" "All for your thinking" "He said, 'I've come home; I've finally come home then he died'" "flowers"

"Magnolias & lilies" "innocent now" "I've come home. Who's there? at home? all the dead?" "To come home from the war" "years after" "To die" "To wear mantle light honey" "mantle dead white" "in sunlight, in late" "Homeric?" "he said it was hideous" "all of it" "hideous" "every instant in Nam" "theatre of worsts" "now mantle of

white" "phosphorus & lilies?" "trees now lean down" "over our faces"

"Tell details of battle?" "As" "in an epic?" "As" "in lies?"

"We don't want that now" "We want only our mother of dirt" "our mantle of white" "want each other of soul; and"

"we want" "our mother of spirit" ("rich sweet in dirt") "we want"

"our father" "of leaves" "We want our fate fragmented to air for

our children to breathe;" "light on water for widows to think near"

"moonlight on water to ease you" "we want no poet, we want our

homes in the earth" "that's all we can have" "want no place in

history or poetry" "want our wanderings our sorrows, after the war,

not remembered," "we want not

to pain her" "we want our love mingled" "with yours" "no place in history" "only in love" "remove us from history," "All of us sacrificed" "all for a thought" "They played with our souls." "Used our souls to fight, be their willfulness" "willfulness" "we were made their willfulness," "nothing but that--" "And you too, you yielded, one way or another" "to their will." "They" "who are the subject" "of all history" "& of poems" "as if"

"we have ever, in all ways" "yielded to them" "by speaking of" "always speaking of" "Kings" "presidents" "the Great Men" "their mistresses" "Generals" "Communist Kings" "Leaders" "Warriors" "West Point of Greeks" "West Point of Greeks against" "West Point of Trojans" "Isn't it more beautiful, under the Earth?" "Or to be sunlight, not history?"



"Now I can love, & only" "now" "Remove us from history but not from your air" "History is willfulness" "is" "precious parts"

"History's for those" "who ask not" "to be forgiven"

"We ask to be forgiven" "& loved" "No, we ask" "to be absolved"

"And to be" "elemental" "ask leaves & wind"

"Ask leaves bending down towards our faces" "Ask light & dirt" "we ask"

"our children" "we ask our wives" "Ask that they live" "We ask to be"

"with the ones that we killed" "To history" "saying nothing"

"being that" ("nothing") "& to history" "having been" "nothing."

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"In this moment" "before" "anyone, ever" "died" "before we were born?"

"In this moment forever before" "before we went to a war"

"Before we died" "In this moment, now" "In this moment before, it is not before"

"In this very moment" "where is it" "where we haven't died"

"or died inside" "In this moment we haven't" "in this moment, no one"

"in this moment, no one has ever, died" ("But I have been born")

"in this moment" "where, where is it" "in moment" "who's here"

"Catch it catch it" "moment where we are" "merely as it is autonomous,"

"autonomous moment" "Without a war" "without a guilt."

"Can we exist" "Outside of what was?" "in the air of our thoughtless,

female, moment" "the air of our moment" "not grievous not iron"

"moment, not air" "but air of our moment" ("woman-made?") "faithful,

faithful & boundless" "reticent & light" "fond, & kindly" "not reticent but shiny,"

"morning-starry, not bloody" "not bloody, in the morning"

"in the star" "it is a star" "it is autonomous" "star & it's mild" "Is it a little"

"of us" "from before" "we were born?" ("that was

never") ("I know") "It is now" "autonomous" "moment of white," "white flowers, stars & white flowers," "not before we were born, in

this moment our childhood" "have we our childhood" "in this moment he has his childhood, I think, it is center of" "moment, of childhood" "center of, moment" "wings of his pigeons" "white & grey wings" "moment a feathery" "center of senses" "center of sensation, is this moment" "Center, as sensation falls away" "He has his love" "this moment" "forever" "center of brown eyes"

"seen through his eyes" "Only through" "the eyes" "the real eyes"

"of the dead" "this moment" "through his eyes" "as child, as childhood"

"Only through" "the personality" "can this be" "of the dead" "the lovely person" "holding" "this moment" "this moment in place"

"this moment forever" "center of sensation" "Soldiers, we are center"

"of the morning" "we are moment" "we are dearest"

"we are heart" "Soldiers," "we are pleasing" "we are center"

"we are moment" "are not soldiers" "never soldiers" "never were."



# the blue light

Hussein Barghouti

2008

## The Story of the Rock

I received a real rock in the mail. One cubic meter of stone. "Incredulous." A post-office slip from East Jerusalem said I had a package. When I got there, I was told by the staff that it would cost me twenty thousand dollars. "Say what?" Yes: one dollar plus another plus another to twenty thousand. I thought about walking away from this clowning around, but it occurred to me that the cost likely indicated an extraordinary content. I sold our house in the refugee camp, borrowed six dollars from my paternal uncle, five from a maternal one, sold my books etc., until I gathered the whole amount and received the rock. At first, I couldn't believe my eyes: a rock! stamped from various countries. It looked like the rock's journey began in Sydney port and from there to Marseille and from there to Pearl Harbour and on and on. For half a century the rock had been going around ports and crossing borders until, at last, it reached the port of Haifa and then the port office in Jerusalem, colourfully tattooed with stamps and stickers.

For this, I'd sold everything I owned. I put my mother and younger brother up in a cheap motel in Old Jerusalem as I waited for God's help. I still had to pay porters to deliver the rock to the motel. I wasn't too crazy to leave it at the post office after all the money I'd spent. The rock stayed in the corner of the cheap motel room. The motel was so cheap it would get less than one

star, a decimal of one. It had no water, running or still, hot or cold. "Incredulous, I mean really," my mom said as I stood in front of the rock, thinking, "We ended up in a motel because of your rock and your brain," she said, "and your brother can't go to school because of your rock?" For my mom, this was not "our" rock but mine alone.

In 1948, an uncle of mine travelled to the US and didn't come back. The rumour was he owned bars in Las Vegas, never married. I thought maybe in his old age he sent the rock to check if he had any heirs. I rang him. He said he'd never heard of me or my birth and would sue me if I ever contacted him again. Then I thought the rock had an archaeological value of some kind. I sent a piece of it to the Hebrew University. The results came back a week later: worthless. With one dollar, they said, you could purchase a cubic mile of this kind of rock.

Due to its entertainment quality, the story reached the media. Wherever I went, people asked me: "How's the rock doing?" I found a remote small cafe in the suburbs of West Jerusalem where nobody would know me. I needed to contemplate the situation of the rock. I ordered Arabic coffee from the thin Jewish Russian waitress. She served me the coffee and said, "It's on the house. How's the rock doing?"

As a last resort, I thought of renting a car to take the rock to a mountaintop and roll it down to the wadi. I was conflicted because of my guilt. I made my family suffer in a cheap motel over a rock that I rolled down a mountain. As a compromise I made a promise to myself that I'd never forget the finale: how I rolled the rock, how it rolled—all of it would dwell in my memory. But my perseverance increased. I started to have nightmares about the rock. No more nightmares. I bought paint and painted the rock with bright colours, orange, yellow, red and whatever might please an onlooker. I wanted to feel happiness when I looked at it myself. Instead, I dreamed that I was in a vast moonlight valley full of coloured rocks, rose, yellow, red, etc.,



and that I was running along the rocks like an orphaned child calling for his mother. Then another dream: a rock the size of half the Earth on my head, and me, as if a compressed sponge, breathless. Then another dream and so on and so forth. How do I get rid of the rock? At last I found a solution: I decided to worship it. I bought two candles, placed them before the rock with wine chalices, and put the mail slip on top of the rock. Piously and quaveringly, I spent hours every night on that spot. The rock clearly possessed a mysterious force beyond anyone's capacity to comprehend.

A tourist guide friend of mine came to visit me. The minute he spotted me he laughed so hard he fell into pieces. He came because he'd heard my story but didn't expect I'd reached the point of worshipping a rock. I suggested to him that he should bring his tourists to my cheap motel. "Why?" He asked. "I'll tell you why: I will write a fabricated history of the rock, that it was holy during Canaanite times before the Romans seized it in some BCE year. Eventually the rock was lost until bedouin stumbled on it during the Crusades. Let me work out the details, and I will publish them in a handsome gilded booklet that draws tourists to the rock, and we will split the profit." He gave it a long think then, suddenly, as if out of a trance said: "Deal."

For a month I buried myself in books at the Hebrew University library. I completed a brochure in which I paid attention to the accuracy of events in time and place, fortified with quotations from the works of various historians. And off to the printers. In no time everything was set on a new path. I made back all the money I'd lost, signed a contract with a Swiss publisher to turn the brochure of the rock into a book, and from one project to another I went. But one night, deep into this magnificent game, the police came and surrounded the motel. A fat officer spoke: "You're under arrest. And the rock, as you know, now belongs to the state, as do all relics and finds, You have broken the law." I was cornered so I bargained: "I'll give you the rock, but let me keep the money. Otherwise it will be a public scandal in the papers that will tarnish the state's reputation and damage tourism."

We made a deal. The police took the rock to the museum of antiquities in Jerusalem near Hebron's Gate, and the years rolled on. One day I was passing by the museum. A long line of tourists stood waiting to see "the rock," and in each tourist's hand was the brochure I'd written. I laughed and kept on moving, but after a few steps, I stopped and said to myself: "I swear to God this rock possesses a secret." I went back, grabbed a brochure, stood in line to see the rock.



# mekin histri

Linton Kwesi Johnson

1984

now tell mi someting  
mistah govahment man  
tell mi someting

how lang yu really feel  
yu couda keep wi andah heel  
wen di trute done reveal  
bout how yu grab an steal  
bout how yu mek yu crooked deal  
mek yu crooked deal?

well down in Soutall  
where Peach did get fall  
di Asians dem faam-up a human wall  
gense di fashist an dem police sheil  
an dem show dat di Asians gat plenty zeal  
gat plenty zeal  
gat plenty zeal

it is noh mistri  
wi mekin histri  
it is noh mistri  
wi winnin victri

26

now tell mi someting  
mistah police spokesman  
tell mi someting

how lang yu really tink  
wi woodah tek yu batn lick  
yu jackboot kick  
yu dutty bag a tricks  
an yu racist pallytics  
yu racist pallytics?

well down in Bristol  
dey ad noh pistol  
but dem chace di baby'lan away  
man yu shooda si yu baby'lan  
how dem really run away  
yu shooda si yu baby'lan dem dig-up dat day  
dig-up dat day  
dig-up dat day

it is noh mistri  
wi mekin histri  
it is noh mistri  
wi winnin victri

now tell mi someting  
mistah ritewing man  
tell mi someting

how lang yu really feel  
wi woodah grovel an squeal  
wen soh much murdah canceal  
wen wi woun cyaan heal  
wen wi feel di way wi feel  
feel di way wi feel?

well dere woz Toxteth

27



an dere woz Moss Side  
an a lat a adah places  
whe di police ad to hide  
well dere woz Brixton  
an dere woz Chapelton  
an a lat a adah place dat woz burnt to di groun  
burnt to di groun  
burnt to di groun

it is noh mistri  
wi mekin histri  
it is noh mistri  
wi wimmin victri

## if i die on the road

Virgilio Piñera

1971

- I.  
If I die on the road lay me no flowers.  
If on the road I die lay me no flowers.  
On the road lay me no flowers if I die.  
Lay me not if I die flowers on the road.  
Lay me not on the road flowers if I die.  
No flowers on the road if I die lay me.  
No flowers on the road lay me if I die.  
If I die no flowers on the road lay me.  
If flowers I die on the road lay me not.  
Flowers if I die not on the road lay me.  
If flowers I die lay on me the not road.  
Flowers if lay I die me on not the road.  
I die if lay flowers the on me on road.  
The I die on if lay not me road.  
If flowers I die lay on me the not road.  
Flowers if lay I die me on not the road.  
If I die on the flowers lay me not on the road.  
If flowers I die lay me not on the road.  
If on the road flowers lay me not if I die.  
If on the I die lay me not on the road flowers.
- II.  
Going in a rust bucket, in a tin heap,  
I'm going on the road.



I'm going, getting going on the road.  
 I'm going to a flower garden that is by the road.  
 I'm going in a rust bucket, in a tin heap,  
 going to buy flowers for my dead.  
 But lay me no flowers if I die on the road.

III.  
 If I die on the road bury me in the garden  
 that is by the road, but lay no flowers for me.  
 When one meets their end on the road  
 One has no flowers laid for them from that or any other garden.

IV.  
 If I die, if I don't die,  
 If I die because I don't die.  
 If I don't die because I die.  
 If I die on the road.  
 If I don't die but on the road I do die.  
 If I die because I don't die on the road.  
 If I don't die because I die on the road.  
 Lay me no f, lay me no l, lay me no o,  
 Lay me no w, lay me no e, lay me no r, lay me no s.  
 Lay me no flo, lay me no wers,  
 If I die on the r.

translated by Alex Reynolds, Martin Zicari & Slow Reading Club

# ping

Samuel Beckett

1967

All known all white bare white body fixed one yard legs joined like  
 sewn. Light heat white floor one square yard never seen. White walls  
 one yard by two white ceiling one square yard never seen. Bare white  
 body fixed only the eyes only just. Traces blurs light grey almost white  
 on white. Hands hanging palms front white feet heels together right an-  
 gle. Light heat white planes shining white bare white body fixed ping  
 fixed elsewhere. Traces blur signs no meaning light grey almost white.  
 Bare white body fixed white on white invisible. Only the eyes only  
 just light blue almost white. Head haught eyes light blue almost white  
 silence within. Brief murmurs only just almost never all known. Traces  
 blurs signs no meaning light grey almost white. Legs joined like sewn  
 heels together right angle. Traces alone unmoved given black light grey  
 almost white on white. Light heat white walls shining white one yard  
 by two. Bare white body fixed one yard ping fixed elsewhere. Traces  
 blurs signs no meaning light grey almost white. White feet toes joined  
 like sewn heels together right angle invisible. Eyes alone unmoved given  
 blue light blue almost white. Murnur only just almost never one sec-  
 ond perhaps not alone. Given rose only just bare white body fixed one  
 yard white on white invisible. All white all known murmurs only just  
 almost never always the same all unknown. Light heat hands hanging  
 palms front white on white invisible. Bare white body fixed ping fixed  
 elsewhere. Only the eyes only just light blue almost white fixed front.  
 Ping murnur only just almost never one second perhaps a way out.  
 Head haught eyes light blue almost white fixed front ping murnur ping  
 silence. Eyes holes light blue almost white mouth white seam like sewn



invisible. Ping murmur perhaps a nature one second almost never that much memory almost never. White walls each its trace grey blur signs no meaning light grey almost white. Light heat all known all white planes meeting invisible. Ping murmur only just almost never one second perhaps a meaning that much memory almost never seen. White feet toes joined like sewn heels together right angle ping elsewhere no sound. Hands hanging palms front legs joined like sewn. Head haught eyes holes light blue almost white fixed front silence within. Ping elsewhere always there but that not known. Eyes holes light blue alone uncover given blue light blue almost white only colour fixed front. All white all known white planes shining white ping murmur only just almost never one second light time that much memory almost never. Bare white body fixed one yard ping fixed elsewhere white on white invisible heart breath no sound. Only the eyes given blue light blue almost white fixed front only colour alone uncover. Planes meeting invisible only one shining white infinite but that known not. Nose ears white holes mouth white seam like sewn invisible. Ping murmurs only just almost never one second always the same all known. Given rose only just bare white body fixed one yard invisible all known without within. Ping perhaps a nature one second with image same time a little less blue and white in the wind. White ceiling shining white one square yard never seen ping perhaps way out there one second ping silence. Traces alone uncover given black grey blurs signs no meaning light grey almost white always the same. Ping perhaps not alone one second with image always the same same time a little less that much memory almost never ping silence. Given rose only just nails fallen white over. Long hair fallen white invisible over. White scars invisible same white as flesh torn of old given rose only just. Ping image only just almost never one second light time blue and white in the wind. Head haught nose ears white holes mouth white seam like sewn invisible over. Only the eyes given blue fixed front light blue almost white only colour alone uncover. Light heat white planes shining white one only shining white infinite but that known not. Ping a nature only just almost never one second with image same time a little less blue and white in the wind. Traces blurs light grey eyes holes light blue almost white fixed front ping a meaning only just almost never ping silence.

Bare white one yard fixed ping fixed elsewhere no sound legs joined like sewn heels together right angle hands hanging palms front. Head haught eyes holes light blue almost white fixed front silence within. Ping elsewhere always there but that known not. Ping perhaps not alone one second with image same time a little less dim eye black and white half closed long lashes imploring that much memory almost never. A far flash of time all white all over all of old ping flash white walls shining white no trace eyes holes light blue almost white last colour ping white over. Ping fixed last elsewhere legs joined like sewn heels together right angle hands hanging palms front head haught eyes white invisible tied front over. Given rose only just one yard invisible bare white all known without within over. White ceiling never seen ping of old only just almost never one second light time white floor never seen ping of old perhaps there. Ping of old only just perhaps a meaning a nature one second almost never blue and white in the wind that much memory henceforth never. White planes no trace shining white one only shining white infinite but that known not. Light heat all known all white heart breath no sound. Head haught eyes white fixed front old ping last murmur one second perhaps not alone eyes unlitrous black and white half closed long lashes imploring ping silence ping over.



# marine blue feathers

from Autobiography of Death  
Kim Hyesoon

2008

*Twenty-eight yogis will come out from your brain and greet you.  
They'll be carrying various tools, and their heads will be the  
heads of various animals.*  
—The Tibetan Book of the Dead

1  
This world is my death, so I lie down with my left and right wrists on  
top of one another  
I float with the back of my head facing the sky  
My spine becomes as skinny as a pen  
I cover my thin, prostrated pen-like body with a blanket  
You watch your shadow plunge down in the shape of a hen toward the  
surface of the paper  
Why is your soul human when your spine is a pen and your shadow is  
a hen?  
Is it true that poets see a piece of filthy paper at the time of their death?

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2  
A blue hen big enough to reach the sky cackles  
but when I came home there was a crinkled blue-colored paper under  
my pillow

A tiger roared and attacked as if it could swallow the entire continent  
but a moth with striped wings that had lost its mommy was crying  
outside my room

I flew beyond the sound barrier and struck the sky like a tornado  
but a beetle was circling in front of my door

3  
but the lid of your coffin is a mercury mirror  
but the grave is so shallow that you can't stand or even sit up in it  
but you can see your breath in there  
but your lovely breasts are pressed down by the ceiling

4  
The ghost inside your skull is spilling water like a kettle  
Your temporal lobes become active and your eyelashes flutter like the  
eyelashes of the blue hen

A voice scorches your hair like electricity  
A voice beats your thoughts like a club

That strange voice is not human  
That thing perches on your ears and cackles  
That thing flies around inside your skin  
That thing is neither solid, liquid, or gas  
That thing is barbaric, you can't open or close it

(Are you saying that you're still a fetus growing your liver with the  
sounds inside your mommy?)

35



5

The flying blue hen lays an egg inside its body  
The blue hen clucks, I can't endure I can't endure

The crown of the blue hen is tall and its beak is long so its head gets  
buried in its chest

The blue hen clucks, I can't endure I can't endure

It looks as if the blue hen is enduring the time it takes for fish from  
the sea to evolve

The feet disappear in the last phase of the evolution  
You don't have to walk at all  
You don't have to sleep or eat

The blue hen clucks inside a huge hole in the back of your head  
The blue sky opens under your left eyelid  
But the blue hen's tiny feet are buried inside each page  
Whenever you turn the page its huge wings flutterflutter!

So is this place the footless corpse of the blue sky?  
So is this place the blue, eternal stillness of your inhalation?

The hen is as blue and vast as the blue sky!  
I can't endure. I can't endure!

---

translated by Don Mee Choi



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