



**there
where
you are**

Cole Noppenberg



much as I'd refuse the alternate
much as I say there's nothing I regret
I still wonder just what derails the caravan of my destiny
sends it careening along a dull pair of rails with no signpost no signal

and physicists pretend to calculate the distance between you and your nearest twin
the first one to feel that wave of apprehension near your moments of grave decision
the times I hover over the send button hover over the parachute bay
play double diamond
unlock the back door
go to sleep in the car

so I propose a pony express
maybe a big enough cyclotron
some way to say to that nearest twin
happy there where you are?



I strayed from the festival
into solemn hillsides, grimaced doorways
and then even the daylight left me alone
the silvery edges of the grass
in dull and luminous tufts
hillocks crouched, competing
spectating as I idled
dragging gravel
maybe the moon cruised behind
the shadowed barrier of pines
defining demarcation lines to arcane domains
but it wouldn't find my eye
and soon I lost the fenceposts

thought briefly of family
typical of me to be the wayward one
loitering under solitude's self-lowered loupe
proving I could do without
my kin
they're gaily partaking in some season's soirée
in a figment parade of bucolic pastiche
a simulacrum
complete with store-bought strawberries
in synthetic syrup
on preservative cake
a fake of a fake
to make us believe there still is a season or two

I trudged on
conscious that the crickets were gone
and the cartoonish lawn on which my eye glided
clutching the cusps like grave mounds, or waves
was prone to open its dusty subdomain
where the earth strained to maintain its mantle of grass
as if deep below someone kicked up the tufts
leaving nothing to cover the underworld's arch

"Son! Come on! We're going home!"
my father's voice in timbre and tone
but unwelcome
unkind
and straining, barking my name now
and there's no one around
now for all my adolescent independence
I hearkened to my father's voice
obedient when he'd bend his intentions enough
to speak out or order anyone about

so I almost turned to follow
somewhere there in the hillside

I tried to discern just where
though a little scared of the alien urgency
he'd seldom reveal unto me
he'd not want his children to see
so I called back, clear and sharp
in the enveloping dark
knowing what we had parked in the gravel
so far back from my tracks

"What car did we take?"
the hills' answer
in the right voice
was wrong
and my father was gone
shock shooting through my limbs
as I ran
hands and feet pumping
confidence plummeting
clutching reality
it was somewhere back there

—
which is it, in truth?
you shout your air raid override
amid pornography of the last details
screaming allegiance to something higher

a weapon in every hand
we bid an audience gather
let the whole world weigh the matter
so it stacks the scales endlessly

endlessly beating, repeating monotone
telephone eye, cried lullaby
a humdrum drone
to sweep the footprints away

wasn't long ago they strung a holdout
up the scaffold, down the hatch
and the only way the stack of curses
made it back was in someone's hand

a sculpted stream of seeming meaning
the drumskins are breaking
flesh stretched tighter than ever
you scramble for the kill switch sign

sealed records
swollen memories of reality
the thought alone is crime
don't doubt the image

and shutting out the ether's easy
we've dodged more obvious truths
what freedom speaks without electricity?
what memory other than dependency

shout your electric eye override
the meaning, the notion wants to be free
to see pornography of the last gasp
screaming allegiance to something higher



the first hare the hunter has
in putting forth his bow
constrained by strings and imaginings
seems to be the sweetest meat
the softest fur
the lean ideal

and setting forth from there
frustrated that another beast
knows better than to hop into a noose
sees the hunter for a novice
refuses to die to soak campfire stones

so ring after ring
fire scattering ashes
books on method
testing the traps

Summer shears Spring
the prey takes up a different mask
the matter escalates
til meals are littered with buckshot

and it's devour, devour
rapacious glimpses of bloodstained shirts
a hunter hunts hunters

all the while just slaving
for the simple taste of the hare

lay your head down now
on softest fur
it won't replace
the taste you long for



—
found him in a pit
withered by hunger
trapped by sheer stone
alone
and no longer pacing his cell
anyone could tell
the situation was dire
for everyone present

we knew what he was
no pet, no domestic
but we had our own designs
our own law
and he was in need
so with the bumper of our truck
we lowered a tree
did just enough to set him free
and he scaled the ramp
set down on the ground

that would have been the end of it
our good deed unpunished
in the epic arc of a Rocky Mountain vacation
but though we drove away
even took Eisenhower's highways
sped through tankers of gasoline
I could see him following
sometimes just a mote in the distance
sometimes a rustle in the timbers
that straddled the shoulder gap

in the back seat
we'd play headlight games
not naming the specter of nature
that tracked us farther back
and then, unpacking
stretching before the long rest
that an interstate journey dictates
he ambled up
fur springing back
some life in his eyes

we knew what he was
a wild animal
an outsider in any social circle
as unpredictable as the weather
a tornado on the horizon

but we let him stay
watched him play in the pool
the fur clinging to his ribs
emerging like a sponge wrung out
for yards and yards
a big brown hound, almost
but the empty look of wild solitude
never fully left his eyes

I guess any of us could have realized
the risk his presence introduced
and so one day the numbers fell on me
in the peril of lending shelter

brushed past me at the door
and I cuffed him for his brute
then realized what I'd done
for here again, despite the shelter
he was famished
a repeat offender

sure as natural
he followed me
slowly, carefully
a pretense of friendship

no sense of animosity
and I stepped more lightly
sensing the intensity
there were others around
witnesses
or other victims

I could feel his monad
climbing up behind
I must remain subtle
bustling now
I swung my stride
not heeding him
and his chattering
cajoling me in a flimsy attempt
to inspire guilt
for depriving him of a meal
I leapt over the gate, cleared my feet
half waiting for that razor swipe
and as I stepped away
I heard him say
"Hey, I thought we friends."