

Notice the Hills

Notice the hills because they may not be
natural, the tour guide said, and pointing
she quickly moved on to say the city
was full of so much old and new it was

to die for. The guide admitted that, yes,
horrors had occurred here, but a new day
had dawned, and tearing down is the first step
to building up, and that only great hope

could move us from strife and into glory.
Hours later, in my hotel, fruit flies
circled a fist of browning bananas.
They flew madly without pattern or plan

amidst the fading glow of fair twilight,
and were much too quick and too small to catch.
Millions of years ago the dinosaurs
died out and that too led to a greater

future, but, that night, as I watched the flies
I thought of the tour guide, how she said earth
has a way of making invisible
its deepest scars, and how men became hills.

Good King Wenceslas

I picture him, boots in the snow
like two birds in the snow,
striding with purpose
towards his aim, on the day
of the feast of Stephen. This good king,
striding in the bluster,
wind like deep space, he went
to give food and comfort
to a poor man from a distant land
and now I for this act tear up
in an all-you-can-eat all-you-can-
drink buffet in Budapest, the Danube
like a jewel, while back in Prague
you get Wenceslas with a massive statue.
He on his statue is meters in the air
atop his royal horse,
its regal garments aglow in stone
and what are we trying to say here?
The King has his song, he is the image
of the pious king not too great
to help a stranger in the cold.
But listen to the song again.
With him in his mercy is his page,
brought along, with no agency.
And this page, his hands, his two human
hands of lower station hustled along
in the righteous vigor of his king
as the winter chill clasps his body
like a cuff, his hands, how cold
were they that night, how yearning for fire,
for freedom, for choice?

Nostalgia for a Distant Future

When after many years I return to Mars
I find it foreign, like the taste of pineapple
or like myself in so many places
where the world shoots its bright sun
across a potato field. I didn't know
how to be alone, and so I was, like Kafka
in his early work, yearning after a woman
on a tram, a nearby flock of bats like a castle.
There was much wondering. Kafka
in his late work did this but how late
could it be, dying at 41? When you arrive
in the land of the Martians
do not worry, because they are gone now.
Likewise, Hussites who destroyed the churches
of the early Czech world – do not worry –
they are gone now. Burn all but these few,
Kafka said, and because his friends were traitors
we have his dreams. Here in 2525
the earth like Mars and air and what we drink
is red red red like some apples
when we had those. And when an asteroid
conquers your peace to offer you the best
opaque sunset, try hard to ignore it.

Dracula's Last Day

Parliament is a dream that wakes Dracula at 3 PM.
A cold sweat, and at times like this,
the universe contracting like a universe,

we see him as a child, before the hunger for blood
became stronger than his will to innocence.
Awake—and in this version of the myth

he still sleeps when the sun
bakes the sand under your feet—he stares at the ceiling.
His heart flutters like 13 blackbirds.

He gets up and responds to some emails,
texts a girl or two he's been after, now that he's too shy
to approach them in person. But why parliament?

In his dream he imagined the tribunal
that would finally figure him out,
that would make him pay for his crimes,

his jaywalking, his riding the metro without a ticket,
his neck biting, his not showering
before using the thermal bath at Szechenyi,

his neck biting. I have been alive for so long, he says
out loud and to no one. *So long*. And then,
on his door, stake in hand, the woman knocks.

The Italians Have It Right

Drink wine

then drink espresso

then drink wine

In the intermission

art

pasta

sex beneath the chandelier and in the curved nape of the gondola

We let it move like night through its lights

the moon a scimitar

the stars too many

Four thousand miles away potential love awaits

so our hero texts with near-deranged calculation

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In a bout of naiveté one could say the universe is a cocoon or husk of impermanence

minus you

the adventurer

in a despair state throttling

So thank God in Heaven such bouts don't last

Everything that is ungood can be drowned via purchase of haute couture Milano knockoffs cast by distant Chinese hands

or in a canal

There are churches everywhere

The eyes of Christ are upon you

like those of Texas

and from these truths there is no escape

because at the Last Supper Judas was either made aware of the knowledge of his own deceit

or made aware he was all along part of the plan

Asshole as martyr

Innocent as the punished

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Before long it has been long and hope became like the Roman amphitheater on which our hero spit to
make some point about capital

A bunch of rocks

a cistern

idealism dogged by greed or belief and it so happens the girl didn't work out as that earlier night
when our hero cried with joy like he didn't know possible decayed

a memory now

a Roman amphitheater at which he ate an olive before it was ready

This is the shape of regret

this is a black cat in the alleyway of black cats

black cats

black cats

This is the struggle to find parking

This is no worries if the biggest museum is missed

as it's just full of brilliance anyway

“Brilliance” from Latin

It means “to shine like a precious stone”

God

My dear

I thought you'd be someone

but I guess instead you are a colosseum of despair

Let me hold you just one more time

let me feed you to the lions

Where You Are Going Is What You Are

Inside this making

is the maker,

inside this miracle

is the miracle,

the billions of stars

who give light

to automobiles at night,

the moon a bowl of milk a cat stalks after—

where you are going

is no mystery,

where you are going

is what you are.