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SWAN  
a love story

aleatory composition  
Simon DeDeo, 2004/5  
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To be read in random order

Of all the states, human perfection and wholeness is least understood, though it may also be one more possessed than any other. Consider the frame of a man in distress. Consider, also, that of a woman. The woman is old, she covers her breasts when that moment comes when she and her lover are naked together.

The man is as old or more. When it is cold, in the Winter, in his house, he presses his elbows to his side.

What a pair they make! The wooden floor creaks when one leaves the other for the kitchen. She brings water to share, in a single glass and put on the table.

How infinite are the expressions of the human face! In Grey's Anatomy, the disjointed muscles reveal themselves. It is all the same to the doctor that they visit, separately, that these muscles frown, that they group into anguish or confusion.

What does the pair want but to be one word to each other, as soon written as thrust into the expression of the other?

I have a great trouble in my mind. I cannot tear my clothes, I cannot tear myself.

I'll tear you.

I want that very much. There is nothing that can tear in me, I am the ends of a piece of string and if I tear I multiply.

The collection is on the far point of Manhattan. The desks are unmanned, the guards are stationary and sweltering in the heat that comes from the water and reflects off the sky.

To the woman, it feels as if the gardens were a lens, compressing them in the light together. She feels cool to the touch, she seems herself with him and both are transparent to the heat, like some perfected alloy.

I want to collect you, I want to assemble you. The desires I have for you have no end and no beginning.

I am your chemist. I bring you from solution to precipitate. I press you out. There is nothing there but you in the papers in my hands.

When I travel further in any direction than I have before, I feel as if I am dragging a curtain with me. When I flew to Brazil, I had this sensation, drawing a red curtain over the Americas with the point in the shape of my face, but when I returned there was you.

There is nothing new, nothing new for me under any sun but you are my sun, you are everything that is new and unchanging and what I see I see because of you and when you are asleep you are as beautiful as the moon.

It is here, in the collection, that they double and double themselves. The paintings rise above them and cascade. In every room it is the same, as they enter they feel the vertigo and then the terror as even to the pigments they are represented on the walls.

Who will ruin our fun, our delight, my joy? Where is the end of the museum, when will we exhaust it, when will we be finished with it?

The museum has no end, it a maze of twisty passages, all alike. They gain on the rooms each over and over, there is nothing to tell them where they have already been.

Who would leave a trail to find their way out?

There are never any letters. When you walk over the floors of my house we are like two creaks of the board, never apart, always one and then the other as the world crosses over us and you are the world to me.

There are photographs on the walls that I am trying to forget, there are letters in the basket for the mail, there are telephones for me ringing in the world but outside them is you all about.

Why is it cold in the world?

Why, is it cold?

She watches him drink from the glass she has brought for them, the water she has brought at the end of their lovemaking.

They are waiting for rain, because they have nothing else to wait for. Beyond the narrow window is the courtyard, and past that is the world, reflecting back at her, all surrounding.

He thinks with the mind of a child, of something being the case as actually in a case, a wooden one, like the museums he went to when he was a child, long rows in high cool halls, carefully spaced under thick glass: dim purple brooches, brass balancing balls, letters (face up), boxes of all kinds, tools to measure and weigh, fractional amounts of pure substance.

And elsewhere insects, petrified, fossilized or in amber; bones and rags frozen in decay; primitives of all kinds: primitive horns and bells, primitive designs, primitive knives and hammers and guns.

Cities, century by century: painted settlers and colonists, painted smoke from chimneys, tiny figures in the foreground of wide dioramas. Cities lit from above by house bulbs, and then cities fed light through tiny bulbs inside the houses, then fixed into streetlamps, spotlights, tail lights. Red masked lamps for the Blitz. Dials and knobs on a panel above to make it night and day.

From where you might stand as a child, the glass seems to go on forever to either side, but it finishes at the city of the future: wider highways, floating dirigibles and bladeless helicopters.

In a corner, a uniformed man sweeps lazily over the crowds. You remember being a child, shorter than this man even sitting. It is still light outside, you can go out.

His memory is a dream he enters without sleep.

She remembers looking through the atlas of galaxies taken by the telescope on Mount Wilson. Next to each photograph was listed the time of exposure: thirty minutes, eighty minutes, fifty minutes.

She remembers the telephone numbers: M51, M101, M81. And the New General Catalog numbers, the digits filing past the exposures towards the images, each galaxy in isolate.

On the catalog page, each galaxy preserved, utterly distinct. These worlds the size of a palm, pinwheel arms like the fingers splayed out on the table.

Grouped one or two or four to the page, with a paragraph of explanation: resolved, spiral, elliptical, flocculant, irregular, dust lane, deep exposure.

Her memory is a dream she enters without sleep.

She takes the fabric in her hand. She knows that the guards will come to take them away. She rolls it in her fingers. It is the oldest cloth in the world, the blanket for the aspect of all men that are angels.

She takes it up, she supports it with her palms. The tapestry sags like abstractions, perfectly balanced, perfectly unmoved. Its ancient weight fixes her in place, she turns to him and watches.

Neither waits for anybody to stop her. The halls are too large, they are lost, the echos that everyone else have left are dying.

I have my end at the lightswitch. I wear like a stair-step.

I am detectable by Security. I am a body in a museum. I am a subject.

I have the clothes I put on this morning.

I am by the junction of the Hudson and the East rivers. It is four in the afternoon. It is the twenty-first century.

It is the fourth century of America.

It is the twenty-first century.

It is the fifty-eighth century.

It is the fifteenth century.

It is the twenty-sixth century.

In 1970, the set theorist John Conway invented the game “Life.” It was described in a popular Scientific American column by Martin Gardner.

In the same year, Bill Gosper, an electrical engineer at the Artificial Intelligence lab at MIT coded Life on the PDP-6, and displayed the results on the 340 Terminal.

As described by Steven Levy, Bill Gosper did nothing else for eighteen months but experiment with the two-dimensional sequences generated by the game.

We couldn't stop watching it. We'd just sit there wondering if it was going to go on forever.

Life became an obsession.

Terms in “Life”: spacefiller, houndstooth, O-pentomino, squaredance, very long house, chicken wire, still life, Herschel receiver, Noah’s ark, replicator, soup, breeder, hive, Orion, pushalong, swan, turtle, wasp, spider, sparse, swan, swan, swan.

Images of swans: P9260007.jpg swano16  
P9260001-.jpg swanpurpsdrs P9260004.jpg  
swan.JPG mute-swan P9260003.jpg  
IM000254.jpg IM000259.jpg swan IM000260.jpg  
P8020005.jpg cygnus\_fig.gif swan-dco47.gif  
DSCN-1165swan

Images of you: homologous to the reeds, grey or green eyes that look at me and mine that look at you. The most refractive of skin, the least dangerous of nails.

The hair in sheets, tensioned like the cabling of a bridge.

There is one last hairpin curve before we enter the town where the second collection is housed. You are watching the ground disappear below the window of the VW.

He is driving, she is watching the stairwell into the valley, the quarry, the hillside of Western Massachusetts.

I saw a photograph, twice my height and four times as wide, of insects poisoning and consuming each other in the laboratory.

I wanted to recognize myself.

There was nothing there, nothing but a glossy reproduction.

I want you to lead me away.

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