

# NIGHTS I LET THE TIGER GET YOU

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Black  
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*for John*

*It would be possible to cite a considerable number of other 'typical' dreams . . . as, for example: dreams of passing through narrow alleys, of walking through a whole suite of rooms; dreams of the nocturnal burglar against whom nervous people direct precautionary measures before going to sleep; dreams of being chased by wild animals (bulls, horses), or of being threatened with knives, daggers, and lances. The last two are characteristic as the manifest dream content of persons suffering from anxiety, &c.*

—Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*.

\*

*And what shoulder, & what art,  
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?  
And when thy heart began to beat,  
What dread hand? & what dread feet?*

—William Blake, "The Tyger"

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## A HOT, CLOSE SUN TURNING YOUR TEMPLES INTO ASH

And in the space inside your head, between  
your eyes and your ears, an entire  
planet throbs. Oh sure, despite the clouds you can go

out into the meadow and walk around a bit  
but it's the same old story. Babies  
laughing. Fires on top of all the buildings. A man

in a tower with headphones on  
gesturing at something you can't see. Here's a trick  
the dream taught me: The things you never

thought you'd want to save you end up trying  
to pry  
out of his jaws. And when you think you've

won, it all starts up again: the sky, burning and  
heavy; the sound of the machines; this

day, and the next day, and  
the half-planet still in the dark.

## NIGHTS I LET THE TIGER GET YOU

(I)

Phone at the end  
of the bed. Voice on the end

of the phone. At the end of the bed I sit down,  
I am one eye of a whirlpool. Voice

with its phrases like

*There's been an*

anaerobic event. I know. The aquatic  
hug, the kelp around our ears, the voice filtering

through the surface: slow  
music

*thrown from the passenger's side at*  
down a snowy mountain. I've lost

our family album. Of course my mother  
needs me.

My legs, my legs, two lumbering  
jackasses that just can't get  
the job done.

When looking straight ahead,  
carrying a person feels almost the same  
as dragging a body along  
behind you.

But looking backwards—the empty  
stretch of river trumps  
the face

sliding across the concrete.  
Stupider every time,

but smoother. Those easy iron locks, that  
oiled machinery. The larded  
sides of bread grow slippery  
in hot hot hand.

The sound of the tiger  
no longer behind us but  
on top.

It's not like I didn't know  
what was about to happen. It's not like  
I didn't know that backyard,

that picnic blanket. What was about to  
happen was

not unlike you.

Was typical.

The thing about recurring dreams is

Cat licking  
a knuckle. Over and over. Cat

licking a knuckle. Joan Didion remembers  
Hawking talked  
about retrieving time from a black hole.

Fishing it out like a stellar  
tiger at the  
edge of

*information is encoded in the  
correlations between future and past*

I stop, I think “tiger” is too  
cliché but what isn’t and: I can’t change  
the way I see it.

Who wouldn’t need a year  
to beat the mirror  
into muddling out a face. Striped  
or bloody. Furred or gleaming. You are one

or the other. You are  
one or the other. You

are one or the other.

## AS IF TO SAY

Holding up traffic as if to say *darling, I miss you*. The cars chewing gas, jostling the people inside them. The chickens that have been waiting on the sidewalks take this opportunity. Nobody honks. They can see how serious I am. Except it wasn't traffic. A bank. Holding up a bank as if to say *darling, I miss you*, and the bank employees trembling behind their name tags. The people in line wonder if their transactions can be completed now before their lunch hour ends. No one shouts. They can see how serious I am. I'm sorry, it wasn't a bank. No. My clothes. Holding up my clothes, naked, on your front porch. It's night and your door is closed. Darling, I miss you.

## AND MANY MORE

You said, *it's you and me against the world, kid*, and the curtains in your room were still. We were in your bed, we were in something we had made with our own hands and tongues and stubborn gluesticks. The wrapping paper we'd put on the walls yelped *Happy Birthday!* and the cakes raised their candles and everywhere surfaces were metallic, they reflected the still things in front of them.

When I raised my hand up it came back at me covered in icing.

The door of your room was still shut. I thought someone outside was asking for you. But. It wouldn't let up, that crumbled sound. Those tines waiting for you to open wide.