

Central Park

IT WAS EARLY MAY, and I had time to kill before getting on a plane to Green Bay, Wisconsin, and from there to the lakefront cabin on Lily Bay where I was finishing up a self-imposed year-long exile from my job. I wanted “time to write,” I said. But there I sat on a park bench in the city of my birth, not writing, just rejoicing in the springtime warmth and thinking about you.

I’ve searched my journal for an in-the-moment account of that moment and found nothing. Other moments are faithfully recorded there—our reading at the Medicine Show, when Eric, my college roommate back in the day, said, “You always seem to have beautiful women around you,” and I said, “I would like to surround myself with just one of them.” And the afternoon, returning on foot from the Metropolitan, when you and I—not yet “we”—saw an enormous yellow python, someone’s pet, being taken for a walk in the park. And our trip to Ground Zero on the subway, when you asked for my address in Wisconsin and, trying to seem casual, I said, “Why? Are you going to write me a letter?” But nothing about that particular, crucial moment when I sat alone on a bench in Central Park, feeling almost unreservedly happy. Let’s say there were tulips, and a wink of mica in an outcrop of Manhattan schist, and parents herding their children past the lone man sitting on a bench, lost in springtime reveries.

None of *this* was imaginable then: you and I living together in this house, writing this correspondence. It had yet to be imagined.

TI

An Almost Autumn Light

THE LIGHT OF THE MOUNTAINS holds the light of the sky as we drive home from El Rito. The land is translucent, saturated with color, the way it looks before autumn lays down a softer light. Over lunch Renée asked if we'd ever thought about writing something collaborative. We've felt the rustle of each other's minds casting about in another room of the house; we've read drafts of each other's work and offered suggestions; we've talked a lot, in words and with our bodies, but not until now did we have the notion to write back and forth, tracing the ruminations of the muse of the house. I've known myself as a poet for decades, but just now I'm imagining broader strokes, since precision of image and feeling are not everything in prose: the narrative line gets its moment. You tell me that early on in our partnership I said I'd still love you if you lost your teeth, but not if you stopped writing. I don't remember making this remark, but I know why I made it: writing is a solitary craft, and how fortuitous, at last, to find companionship in it. Now there's this verging conversation, an almost autumn light pouring over our landscape.

AVF

Traffic Noise

COOL BREEZES IN THE MORNING, which I'd like to think means the earth has not forgotten how fall follows summer. Then winter. Remember?

The house is silent, more or less, except for the dull thrum of traffic that has become an inextricable part of consciousness over the past thirty years, since I first came here, since the real estate agent told me that in no time at all I wouldn't even hear it, the noise. She was right; I never hear it anymore unless I measure the silence against it, at times like this. The traffic came with the house and is a useful way of appreciating its silence. More traffic noise means more silence. If we ever have to sell, this could be one of our selling points: "Four-bedroom, three-bath home convenient to everything. Covered deck, greenhouse, garden, tool shed, traffic noise."

Certainly this conversation will be about us, since we occupy the house. But it's also about the house itself. Maybe the house will be the central character in the narrative, or the god who presides over the house, a god without a name. What will we call it?

TI

Mrs. Sprat Considers Jack

IT'S POSSIBLE FOR US TO BE TOGETHER in our house, me in my study and you in yours, coming and going through different doors, without exchanging a word until day's end. This domestic quietude is soothing for me, and a boon for my writing life, but it took some getting used to. On our first extended date, when we drove to Pagosa Springs and hiked in Gunnison Canyon the next day, I didn't know whether to laugh or to cry to find that you could drive a hundred miles without saying a word. I also found your appetite alarms slow to sound—"Oh, this is so good!" you'd say, digging into a plate of food, "I didn't realize I was hungry." A few months later, I wrote this about us in my journal:

Mrs. Sprat Considers Jack

If he would add on so that I might be calm—
I could go slow, so that
he steals the show.

If he could acquire and let me admire—
I could relax, let him
pay the tax.

By now our personal energies have mostly come into balance, the way they will when time builds on affection. There's no need to put on weight or lose it; I *can* relax; you *do* pay the tax. Which is not to say that our personalities—the protective suits we all assume at an early age—always align. When your inclination to minimize and mine to pile it on butt heads, my ego, ever fearful of disappearing in oneness, harps on our differences. What the hell does it matter, I grumble to myself, whether I put my water glass *on* the cutting board or *beside* it?

AVF

Peach Pie

SPRAT AND THE MISSUS have a perfect arrangement, the kind that doesn't exist anywhere outside of nursery rhymes. But I couldn't have guessed that your riff was about us. I took it as an ironic view of female ambition, à la Lady Macbeth: a woman whose great ambition is to inspire ambition in her man. Surely, on that first road trip, you must have already known that I was largely innocent of ambition of the ordinary kind. Surely you surmised as much, after riding a hundred miles without a word out of me, or the next morning, when I cried uncontrollably throughout breakfast at that little hippy joint in Pagosa Springs, not because of unfulfilled hopes, but because those hopes had come so close to being fulfilled, with you. I cried out of astonishment at my good luck, and because of the high probability that I would blow it, or had blown it already, by crying over breakfast. I cried because, before the trip, you had baked a peach pie for my birthday, which we shared by the side of the road with a couple of strangers.

TI