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Heat and Light, Small Hours

Elaine Terranova

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I can feel my composure crumbling, my voice starting to break
 apart again.
 I say goodbye though I know he can tell I am choking on my
 own tears.
 I think I could make a million dollars teaching people how to ruin
 A person's day with a phone call.

Elaine Terranova

Heat and Light

"I'd rather be a raindrop returned to the sea than a soul in hell."
 – Faustus

STRUCK

From the start, you find no rest. Traffic
 from a nearby turnpike. Birds rising
 to sing before dawn. Whereas the body
 takes so much concentration.

To be human is to be imperfect,
 so the soul is always
 trying to escape. It creates diversions
 such as illness. It leaves in increments.
 The body continues, adhering to
 its 248 commandments
 attached to every function.

Think: you're a child
 with a splinter, a sliver of the world
 enters the small precinct of the self
 and mother with a needle
 probes with fire your mistake.

Then fifty, sixty. Estrogen
 gives the illusion you still have a life.
 The hormones, little runners
 getting ready. Rabbit with a twitching
 hind leg. Moist sex, young skin.

Each year, the mammogram:
 silhouette of night. Something, mountain,
 something, sky.
 Stars break through the dark transparency.
 Calcifications, a trail

to cells the hormone feeds, not the usual, weak,
 with their life sentence. Others,
 fire-blackened trees death grows.

*I was not a martyr, I was not a saint,
 but they pierced my breast
 with a needle and cut the rot away.*

Visualize, someone says,
 the color of earth or sky.
 Green as water. Blue, like air.
 Let it enter you, fill the shape
 first of a foot, then leg, the torso.

THE TREATMENT

The elevator sinks to that half-life
beneath cement, beneath lead.

The treatment unit.

"You can go back now and change."

Oh, if you could.

In the waiting room, light and dark
clasp fingers like a Valesquez. You wait,
you contemplate your sins. On the table,
magazines thumbed back to pulp. Even the chair
beneath you, an evasion.

*Why I slumped where I sat: I was
bowing to the world. Why I read:
I would have been in anyone else's story.*

An odd bird, Valesquez. Solitary.
Some said, a hawk. The way
he swooped down
on the contents of a room.
Sunlit or torchlit. Warren
or dwelling place. Empty or filled
with bright bodies. Human finery,
burnished vessels.

The tv chef whips and whips
the whites, leaning into them
his high, pleated hat.

Now he lights the brandy.
Here in your chest,
heat so intense if you could touch inside
you would pull back your hand.

LIGHT

"Don't move.
We'll move you." A bounce. A child
on a horse.

You can't predict
how long it will take. Fifteen seconds.

Twenty-five.
The body gathers mass,
outside of time, outside of
Karmic advancement.

Salvage, they call it, saving you,
shining light through.
You are porcelain, you are
uncomplicated as a teacup.

Think: Addition Modulo Twelve,
you subtract to know the time.
The thirteenth hour, one.
If you forget,
it comes around again.

*I'd make a clock exactly backward, counter-
clockwise: the way if it were up to me,
it would go.*

HEAT

The sun at the edge. It falls.
Everyone advances, backlit red cutouts.

People walking dogs, a blood-red shadow
that runs along with them, upside down,
trying to get away.

*I am driving two cars, in two lanes
separated by boxwood. Each in turn
spontaneously combusts.*

The demon of light, the demon of thunder,
instruments of education,
like the fiery cart you ride on.

*I lowered and lowered myself
until I was flat,
until I had no past, cast no shadow.*

Small Hours

In the park there's always a crow, startled,
reaching a tree where a little girl
counts to 100 as everyone finds cover.
Time going, the small voice keeping track.
It could be me thinking of something, thinking
and thinking. Her arms around a tree,
the syllables arrived at so haltingly, cadence
of a drunken adult. A park that sunset
enriches like thick, golden cream.

At home with her brothers and sisters,
strangers, all, as they move through the house,
the bathroom, the only room the father
is sure to recognize. Once a squirrel
dropped through the chimney into the whole
ruined civilization of the basement – Here
I'm taking the squirrel's viewpoint.

It's better to live by a park than, say, in Bhutan
 where there are no chimneys, and the smoke
 escapes through every open window.
 There too, though, the body that has been opened
 is sealed again with a language of scars.
 At night I have the sense of being
 swept up and contained in my bed
 until the first of the world shows up, half
 the silver bike handle, ivy flapping in the yard.

Kyoko Uchida

At Thirty

At thirty my mother was seven months pregnant,
 thin as milk and luminous in blues and ivories,
 colors for grown, quiet women. She asks
 what I am mourning in my terrible black clothes
 at my age. Her daughter has grown into no one
 she knows, and she is the one in mourning now,
 for the daughter I am not, for the mother
 I am not.

This year, turning thirty myself, the simplest math
 surprises: my mother reaching twice that age.
 At sixty we Japanese celebrate coming full circle,
 returning our frail, shrinking bodies
 to the ritual crimson clothes of a newborn.
 For her birthday, someone else's daughter
 would send a maroon sweater or a coral scarf,
 but what I want to buy us both is
 a red, red dress.