Ravish the Republic: The Archives of The Iron Garters
Crime/Art Collective

Michael L. Berger

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Letter one, Agent Q-76

Oakland docks: Never has obliteration & orgasm been so blended as in this struggle to keep dignified. I eat salted pineapple on scraped knees. Sun leaks bile thru the Pyramidal shipping containers. Someone keels over on the train-tracks. A force, from another, takes over my entire skin and I have no idea how I will live after. Dignity, the word is so attenuated I abhor its blithe abuses. Struggle too is defanged for whoever pays for it. I don’t struggle as much as my neighbor, nor is my dignity as transparent as a child’s. Words are no match for the writhing sensations that accompany them. Nothing involves us but the fragrant after burns.

Dignity, a word sells as candy, paired with news: technicality, decorum, armor. Nothing like mortar, or scabs has danced long with it. Right before I come, rampant in cayenne red, words inhere stranger entrails, I become a new kind of child. So I can handle dignity.
now having taken it into me, then out of, something shapeable to give away.

Stranger’s take on it is so pedantic as to be overheard in every office. We count the contraband feelings dignity refuses; then we refuse it. We are the smuggled.

True dignity, a lover said, is *nostalgia for the present*—which, around here, we trick ourselves into feeling our hands barbed from trying.

When we do feel it she is right. For now we drink blood oranges, newly inked pamphlets, pirate radio in sunken beds, cumin and lamb lard and rosemary shampoo rubbed in friend’s pits.

I will never believe I’m going to die today, get destroyed, but likely a lover, cherished or forgotten, will take the plunge for me, because of happenstance, which means this exactly: scaffolding, or ingrown fiascoes in how this game is rigged, but rigged more for some than others. *Fiasco* is Italian for broken bottle, which is what our house floats on, what our sloppy heels get sliced on, the word that enters us.

When I say lover I don’t only mean bed-wreckers. But I certainly imply THAT and mazes more. Nor is there just a profane &/or cinematic way to fuck.

Sky fucks thru this puissant glass, bathing its entities. News fucks my sense of perspective, if I ever even had one. When I come now, it is as violent as anything I’ve never seen in the movies. I am never as true or clean or clear as my neighbor; or as crystalline as a child, but I know this, my fragments announce me, well in advance of their shadows. And as such...

They are a gift I can breathe thru the trash and into you

Consider the implications, then make them work.
Dear Q,

Daily, I retreat further from the things that built me. I don’t escape them though, just the twine that connects us gets so tangled up and eaten by other lines. If the other eight stowaways aren’t already grumbling awake, they are after Henry makes his boisterous, Gene Kelly on angel dust entrance down the crumbling staircase. We start with nutmeg coffee out of a cracked French press and sticky buns that the bakery wanted to throw away. We complete our evenings with curry from the 99-cent store, honey-spiced ales and horror films, the combination conducive to nightmares that always hyperbolized some hysterical part of my trashcan adolescence.

By day, when we scamper around like work-dirtied bunnies, there are the delicious taco trucks and stealing from the pomegranate orchards of the slightly rich, down by Jack London. Or we splurge on Korean barbecue, which reduces us to vigilant catatonia, that pitch-perfect moment of Bachelardian day dreaming.

This last summer would get so stifling I took to sleeping outside on the concrete loading dock on a piece of factory-grade silk. Above me, an ochre moon hung like a pumice stone on the washboard of the Milky Way. My breasts were dirty and salt-crusted. My thighs scaled by unwashed tongues. And the whole of me was warm gold cooled by mortared dark. Cats, not as feral as the dogs would undulate out from the foliage as I slept, and keep me company, or else act threatening, when they were only having full-moon fevers. For this I forgave them, and we became inextricable on that exposed silk. Distant big-rigs, night police choppers, bleating of dogs, my own conjurations of future mayhem lulled me into a twisting and turning half-sleep among all that companionable fur and shard. Typically I find crum-
pled newspapers and a quiet park in the mornings. I read the names of the survivors on the plaque. The kids throw bottles at the lily-white joggers; the metal artists in their oil-stained Dickies score methadone behind the boarded-up church or liquor store. I try to adjust to the facts as they are given. Nothing moves how it is designed. But nobody can think of anything that works with everything there is. The whole of the Western part is industrial desert; all the buildings eroding back to their original scaffolding or jewel, the color of mildewed copper, tide pools, and rotting fruit. One word captures it: ambergris. Wednesdays, the parade of cement trucks broke the pre-dawn hush with the racket of churning and braking, backing-up and dumping. Evenings, we did our more daring runs. Rust was in. Old boat parts were in. Anything from a fire truck or an ambulance, a school bus or a golf cart. We didn’t touch chemicals except a cheap cocktail of hash and opium, called Muppet Rock. I learned the wiles and bounties of broken-down machinery. What I learned I often repeated to you: in the breakages of dependable things are opportune chasms. No choice but to penetrate them. A crowbar or a composition book rarely left my satchel. Coffee could you drag out deep into the day, I discovered, and with water, turn you into a camel that could cross these industrial latitudes without cramping up or going hungry.
Dearest Zuq,

I open my aches up, let them call out to the others and follow my nose down the crumbling stairs. Our kitchen is just a bombed-out living room with improvised appendages. Yet this will be a template, mark my words. I am always hungry here but I learn to temper it through the wisdom found in the aches of others. Chosen sores are spigots you get a taste for, and then eventually a pungent wisdom that cannot be had by other, more sanitized faucets. I speak willfully vaguely, but you catch the drift. These are the conditions that have resisted us, now are us.

Gulls go begging right after dawn & our vaulted ceilings ripple in egg-shell blue as gilded dust dances in the corners. Doves or pigeons fatten their chests against the crusting glass. Such exhaling of the elements feels sacramental, for we all struggle to breathe as one living mosaic, and have to step on each other’s sore or sharp points.

I always anticipate some explosive visitor from on high, an angelic paratrooper or a crash landing of a helicopter or guerrilla incubi. Instead I dream such visitations, almost nightly and experience their promised transformations between my legs.

Clouds in our home, slum-fecund, tinctured by the spirits of long-dead industry that never really dissipate, but only hibernate: oily dreams of cylinder merchants and tugboat conductors and peg-legged prostitutes, all of whom I’ve befriended just by walking towards them. In proximity is infrastructure.

I’ve watched old home movies of this neighborhood and our house-church still stands proudly in them, recalcitrant and dignified by brutality, amidst all the fallen buildings and collapsed freeways. But that earthquake should have obliterated us.
Multi-paneled cracked warehouse windows flood with sepia light as H. appears, like some punk-rock Liberace at the top of his own multi-colored, lopsided stairwell wearing polka-dot suspenders, shredded jeans dangling with army medals, and very little else. We are always half-naked around here, or our clothing increasingly takes on the tears, splotches, strands, gaping holes of action movie heroes and heroines. We consider the generic term “action,” and how we can salvage it here, on the sidewalk, or in the walk-in closet, amongst all these molecules waiting to be jostled into radiance.

If we wore clothing proper, we’d be itching and going redder more than usual. Not from illness, but from weather that has been trapped here like some rare, ruby-backed moth.

I have to do something about the fractured headboard. I need to sweep the butterflies and sawdust away and buy bright orange tools, even if I don’t use them. I made a note of all this on the back of a crumpled parking ticket as I slither into your underwear.
My Sweetest Corsair,

Thru gnats, sirens and vines, we slug down this frothing gorge, past plateaus of crocuses and oyster blue tombstones, where temples, festooned in candy paper lanterns, double as tombs, offices & altars, & Grasses coral, frond-tipped eat away rock faces; a cemetery crumbles upward into pines, just like the Civil War graves in Santa Cruz; on the summit sprawl unfinished construction sites of huge pipes, cinder blocks, half-lain foundations, calcified, sored in lichen, flapping with red, heraldic flags chewed up by Santa Anna winds....THIS breathless voyage! I am falling headlong into the conditions we invented. Alone & beset by words never once ever almost sufficient.

We don’t tolerate that dime-store phrase: ships in the night. We voyage askance but distance and strangeness propose no real barriers. Space is never as terminal as we portend. The flesh has handholds in a tempest. We are parallel vessels at all hours, always vibrating, forever relaying, pinging, volleying: piratical courtship across latitudes and narrows. Foam kicked up in your wake finds a way to my eyelids. It matters little in courtly love on the run if the courted is conscious of being pinged. The darts land below the gossip-churning mind, in the surface’s depths, where chatter grows encrypted, and thus fertile.

You fertilize me & I you: thru code, veiled in distance.

You boarded the Elsewhere, pariah vessel in Dogpatch sludge basins. The burly old Dodge was a versatile dry dock. But for you, all this earth flows, in smuggled tributaries under shopping malls. The hurried notes you sent left me euphoric. Even though I had grown mute and dispersed. For your work was nuancing, growing as spectral as the games of the sand mystics: you had carved portals all over the mainland, turned the kids into experimental cos-
monauts, and seeded the crypts with numinous and violet portents.

We must traverse these unendurable coordinates, you conclude—which is why I spit into paper, blabber at structures, lose trousers with no incentives. When I taste raw calcite, I feel your lashes pivot off a cypress-browed moon. You explain your cartographic methods as I melt away. The muddy night after crashing the canoe, we had nothing but macadamias to eat and only slick, sheer promontories to gorge ourselves on.

But this is why we boarded a ship in the first place: to know that distance is traversable and goes quite green, even with gathering darkness. I look forward to being disappointed because I’ll know then I’ll still be going. I’ve attached a totemic picture of our hinterlands.