

Seth Howard

LATE SUMMER IN ASAKUSA

Drifting along the purple line of silk that floats into the tunnel. I sit quietly in the seat across from two Japanese women, one in her forties, the other somewhat older. & I sink down as I listen to their quiet speech, as a poem overhead, or a far-off radio, in which the words are not entirely mine, or theirs, but subject to that primordial in-between. A permeable membrane, where God resides, & double-speech is not simply an element of fiction... The younger woman wears a sick-mask, she gently pulls at on occasion, & I feel, for a moment at home. The rhythmic-pulsing of the train as it slips through the green darkness. & a feeling of rest, of release, that I now had nothing to fear... I recalled nights along Sumida river, fireworks with Toma-san. Cans of Asahi beer, or a glass from the local brewery... The austere look of a lovely girl in the crowd, & this sensation of being in love. There was a shell of darkness from which we made a breakthrough, the long hours in stillness along the pulsing river lights... Yes, it was said we had lived multiple lives, but where were they to be found? In silent memories, in the stirrings of a word that took one back to a place somehow still alive, a distant-flame that lifts in the last hours... & I wondered if she had remembered me, this new figure I had become, who somehow

encompassed those histories. A hope still
alive in the purple-filament, those orange-gates
that stood drawing me in.

How was it I was now
someone entirely different?
& yet, there was a ghost
of my former self, that breathed
in greenish-shadows, those
unsuspected moments that
arose, when a memory refused to die...

SOLITUDE AT TENJIN MATSURI

Paper lanterns line the darkened-pathways,
& you are held a moment in stasis.
It was late-summer, an event in which
you think of death.
A dream came to you
then, like the weightless wisp of a drake-fly at nightfall.
& you stood waiting for her
who seemed always to be near you.
You think of death
when boats float by with paper
torches, & young girls in *yukata* walk the
lanes with serious faces. A pale mask drops to the ground like a stone.
You light a cigarette, & the distant trees
move in darkness. The warm wind of late summer lifts,
& you return
to that place where you felt safe.
How will it end? Or perhaps it already had.
You hear a broken music
somewhere distant, & the Schizophrenic-movements
of your limbs seem almost
a dance, in this night-festival.
Had the gods known
something you had not, had they some
sense of how it all would
end? You think of death, & the dying-embers of her last words spoken to you.
You think of the crows perched
along the electric-lines.
Yes, you had arrived
late, & they had denied you
entrance. You who
embody a trinity, who encompass
a multitude in your solace.
& still they do not believe you.
A luminous-moth floats
in the air before you, & this
broken music returns, to guide you beyond what
is known.
Your mind slightly out
of balance, your days
roll on without consequence.

WAITING FOR HER ANSWER

Night fires aside the mountain's heart,
moments alone, or with a few
distant voices. I recalled what the world seemed to have forgotten.
I kept with me a few things of probably no importance.
There were days scattered with ash,
there were nights
on the lakeside in which
fish slipped past. I drank from the clear waters
of a well that no longer exists.
I walked the path
of crimson sorrow.
There were days that arose in the glimmer of a coin,
a castle from which the elms settle back.
I hunched down in search of something.
I rose from the red river that caressed the mist.
& there, a solitary soldier.
There moved in the motions
a question I
wished to answer.
O what was it the world had forgotten?
Liquid mystery, I must
ask of you once more. Luminous wheel that transcribes the residue
of sounds. I look, & a grey chrysalis floats before me.
I search, & the sun is a forgotten rose.
They had told us we had been
wrong all the while, they had spoke
of some loss we had never witnessed. A remnant
opened like a nocturnal flower.
& I returned to the locus that had no
name.
I opened the glass doors that
bore another chance.
There was no one listening when I woke on the other shore,
& the darkened tracks were silent when
she asked me who I was.
Greenish phantom I arose from in a daydream,
double figure that followed
me at dusk.
In what haze comes this question, what
night a flame that lifts at distant

shores? I long to see her, if but
one more trial will provide us with some hope.

WHEN TIME HAD RETURNED TO US

Held in the stasis of this pulse of the afternoon.
It seemed at last we were to burst
forth from the bindings that had kept us in stagnation...
Perhaps there are some things we must
realize on our own,
& having found a key, our
invocations become visible, to leave the
temple with its
orange leaves, the bluish light that swims across the steps.
& so, we seek a connection with the past,
those steam-room-chambers where we had dozed,
& a woman snatched crisp
bills from
your hand. You viewed
the screen as if half-drugged, those cycles
that return us to who we are...
Where is there a gate for us to enter?
& like a seagull's slow arc across the waves, we come to this place in our histories.
Dream-fragment, a broken night, when
you had stumbled into the bathroom stall...
Somehow, it seemed, you would find your way home.
The city lights that swim
in the motions that
move us through time, & the magnetism that held us together...
So, we begin once more where we left off,
& find that some things had been
out of place. You search for a foothold, a folded piece
of paper you had kept, as you entered the bluish-lights of a bar & grill...
Faint music,
a pulse of someone's latent
memory, as if they had
forgotten they had known you all the while.
White-wisp that drifts in the silence
surrounding, there is a faint, far off memory that calls.
A beacon that sings through the air like
a hawk, & turns
upon a moment's thought
that we may have some intimation of who
we are, as we observe a scroll unfolding in the shadows...

THE ONE PLACE I FELT WELCOME

Lined across the bar, shot glasses captured blue lights that shone from somewhere behind... There was a flash of orange ember, as someone lit a cigarette, their face a brief illumination of pale flame. & so, the cool release of a day's work done, they had followed you only so far, before they'd given up the insidious game, to leave you for a moment in your chair, a fixed presence, until the music began to pulse, & the faint fire seemed to awaken on her lips...

It was the cool blue behind the bottles of vodka, & a smooth line into the night... They had spoken amongst themselves, & you somehow had joined in, though not entirely trusted. They had known you only through rumor, or the words you had etched on the glass ceiling beneath smoke trails that drifted in the cool burn of vodka that slipped down her pinkish throat...

There was something perhaps frightening about one who had begun to speak, after years of remaining silent, in the shadows' pale reluctance. & so, at last you had found yourself, & still they had not known you... Was it then too late to emerge in the grey silences, the faint rouge of her lips, & the brightness of her open eyes.

I gazed upon her naked face, & she had seen me in my liquid movements, to place myself amidst the rhythms of translucent intimation... & the pale blue lights reflected off the bar.

That night in open acceptance of all that had come our way. On the back of her shorts, the letters written: C.R.E.A.M. as she had walked past, her slightly wavy blonde hair, cut so that it hung almost to her shoulders... In these beginnings of possibility, I was some solitary figure amidst this collective consciousness, with my blue cap, on which was sown the letter H... & I felt the air hum with an elliptic rhythm, that grew distant as I realized this lifestyle couldn't last...

A LIFE YOU HAD CREATED FOR YOURSELF

Within the confines of the afternoon, I found a place to exist.
A sharp pain in my side as I locate my breath,
time, vacant, stretched out before me as a gateway that would lead me
beyond the day's recurrence, past
gyūdon & *donburi* shops, in the cool
darkened-air of mid-summer,
where young girls stretched gracefully in the sun,
& smiled at me like they knew who I was...
We had met in the cafés, reading novels together, analyzing the lines, & trying not to flirt.
We would meet at the Starbucks not far from the station,
where I had written fictions.
My life tortured, but immersed in
symbol...
The slightly-dangerous-feeling of perhaps having gone too far your own
way, & yet a sense of release at the freedoms
I had experienced, creating a world for myself in which
to thrive, working to master the
foundations of Japanese... & yet now that
I had been away from the country for
so long, after listening to Japanese-Web-Radio for eight years, I came upon
a new fluency. So began my studies of French...
A new clarity of thought, & a mind free
of much of those discrepancies
which had deterred me in the past.
Perhaps we were not destined to live long, but I had seen
many drop off along the wayside...
& still that barrier between
me, & the rest of the world, who
was so eager to choose the other way, set on confinement rather than freedoms...
Was it because I
had known who I was?
& so, I scrounged around the basement of Ikebukuro's
Junkudo, for what *manga* may be of interest,
along with the eighth floor, where I'd found volumes of Franz Kafka,
Jorge Luis Borges, & Marcel Proust...
Such was the love-nest I had found for myself,
in the days gradually becoming
darker.
Had they not yet
known who I was? I who was so

controversial, who had barely
done anything wrong, & yet remained a rebel inside...

PROGRESS OR DECLINE

Rain in the city, grey of the windblown-buildings... & a figure
down below, I watch as he moves in silence. Perhaps
he had seen me above, huddled
under the overhang, as I search for
a moment to light my cigarette...
These late-afternoons, & yet this one
somehow different. I had sensed some quiet
beginnings in the texture
of the air, & still a subtle-nag
that I must press on, in my late-pursuits...
I had searched for a way to speak
with her, amid the walls that rose from a place of stasis. & somewhere
behind us, as if in the night,
a giant machine rolls by, moving slowly through
the back-streets
toward some unknown-destination...
We were putting in the work
they said, though the city was
gradually being overrun.
& so, we fought our quiet-battles, slipped back into
the intimacy of our solitudes.
There was an almost-imperceptible-hiss
emanating from somewhere
beyond the door, that only now had tapered off...
& so, we laid new plans, for this future
that had not always entirely supported us.
Had not always felt safe,
in the darkness of the late-afternoon, the hum of a fan, & the fragments
of speech that pool in the anticipation of progress
that arises, in a moment
of minutest change. A door closes in the
far-back-hall, someone's faint footsteps echo
behind a fuzzy-logic.
& we who work with primordial language, now recognize
the imprint of our lives, that breathe
in the stop & go of our fixed-routines,
those rituals to which we make
the slightest-adjustments... Let us enter this gate
that guides us in the lateness of our days,
& not forget the reason we came to these countries...