

Scott Penney

A Dollar General Will Arrive in Bradford Soon

In the Dollar Store they will build, the knock-off GI Joes
Have deformed faces die-stamped on the clay in China
Their arms move too awkwardly in their sockets for use
Their combat uniforms are melted to the skin they wear
Their stubby fingers cannot locate the trigger or barrel
of the rifle, all their heads are smothered in cellophane,
the service firearm at their hip is glued beside them,
like mittens sewed to sleeves of hooded winter coats

The combs you buy for a dollar cannot be run
Through the blonde hair daubed upon the soft skulls
The GI Joe knock-offs you can buy at the Dollar Store
Are shipped in a single piece except for the arms
That can be broken off at will, except for the head
Without expression that can be pried off, unscrewed
From the rest of the body of vulcanized rubber or latex

Also the Dollar Store sells videos of fishermen
Advertised as broadcast on a major TV network
Although at three in the morning never on prime-time
And although the fishermen cast their lines in a stream
Out west in Wyoming or somewhere (the sun is out)
and the rapids agitate to a foam that flashes

with all the intensity of a blinding heat blast
as if your TV connections were completely fried
They never catch a fish on the pirated DVD transfer
and once unsealed the disc cannot be returned
The sleeveless and muscular arms gripping the fly-rods
fail them— the fishermen are just a bad dream

And then another item you can get in the store
are these porcelain and enameled creations
Of pink *mädchen* who crane from flower-bells
The excitement of Hummel figurines in their grins
And blazing in their long sequestered dusty eyes
beside the piles of clay pots and pocket calculators.

On (or The Anvil Song)

You hear his hand slide down the guitar neck as Julian Bream plays a fugue,
and you can see and hear the machinations of the stage,
hear the turning of the music sheets readjustment of the stands
and the positioning of the viols between the knees
and after witness the lowering of the lights.

You see and hear the black mike booms locked in place
the manual repositioning of snake-like wiring on the stage floor,
see the raising of the painted sets on the desert film-lot
hear the hammer and the saw behind the facade.

You see the painted desert but not the paint-by-numbers
see the stencils on the canvas-backed chairs and equipment lockers
and the wardrobes suddenly cast onto the floor.

You hear commands to raise the boom or put the lights out
you see the painted scenery and hear the grunt of a pianist
which in proportion to the harmony of the piece is atonal
you see the constellations and the scaffolding
the printing of luminescent images of morning hung on the passenger bus
and the gears behind the facade of the clock hanging over City Hall
as the moon hung over the trees and the sun in the west hung over the hill
you can hear the hand creak as the web between thumb and forefinger
rubs the neck of the guitar as the fugue is plucked

You hear the foot loudly as the pedal and the string hit by the velvet plectrum.

You see the plywood sets raised on the edge of the desert,
the highway behind the Roman slave revolt
hear the engines of the junked cars in the deserts idle as clearly
as the operations it takes to make the constellations appear on a clear night.

You see the day set raised and the set for night wheeled down
As final as the hand that turns the *Open* sign to *Closed* or *Occupied* to *Vacant*.

You see the oily flash of the gears behind the clock-face
and the idling of the engine in the desert.

You hear the intangible become as palpable as a navel orange,
an acorn's ridges or a beer-can crushed and tossed in a cow-pond.

Hear the clink of the anvil over the Atwater-Kent and the steam of bean sprouts
and the thousand-strong sound of mites chewing into ears of corn
or Chinese cabbage in the kitchen-garden, or the unctuous squish of red slugs
as they consume the translucently pale green leaves of lettuce
into skeletal remains, like denuded boundaries of lights on amusement rides.
The kitchen garden seethes with broken tares and blonde wings and black eggs.
When you close your eyes you envisage worms orbiting pebbles in clods of earth
and you falsely suspect the order of things beneath to be concentric.
The opera music between the clinks of the anvil could lull you to sleep.
Could there be many anvils hit by hammers or is there only one hammer.
And you know that after the breaking of hammers, only the anvil remains.

Blurred

While reading *Jude* my glasses blurred.
And when I shut the lights I saw the Milky Way.
Space, all scattered with pinpricks, wasn't black yet.
And when I closed my eyes, a storm erupted on the sun.
Without the light on earth, you could see by stars alone
Only it would be cold, and without light, so'd go the heat.
We'd have to burn the woods much faster to get warm.

Jude's situation in the book was only getting worse.
I wondered whether Hardy just moved his characters
Around like puppets by which children play out dead-men's scenes.
Yes, things could get bad, but is it usually so bad?
That late at night there wasn't light enough to read,
Half the world darker, but the other half bright,
As a water glass is either half empty, half full.

People rose bright and shiny, as others settled down,
A wave of people rose to the dawn or lied down to rest.
The harvesters churned in the field, and a tower blinked.
Night after night, I wondered how flawed my vision was.
Could I learn Braille, learn to read the world by touch?
As pages blurred, lights were going out for Jude and me.

It might be said, with Gnostics, bright skies lie behind the dark--
why Heaven's Gate boarded their Hale-Bopp comet-space-ship,
Leaving their baggage behind, their orcheotomies half-healed,
Their life-paths terminated in some heiress-donated bungalow,
Among the clean sheets, eyes in ascetically cropped and tilted heads
still glazed and serene.

Spring

Ducts moved air from beneath or moved air from above,
or from the sides of buildings, or from beneath the awnings.
Rail-cars roared beneath the buildings, stopped and roared again.
The awnings of the shops bellied with wind as if they were sails,
and the banners that drooped from the sides of the buildings
were floodlit and also bellied from the winds underneath them.

And the winds were compressed to an even greater pressure
by the narrowness of the mazes through which they passed
on their way to the sea -- or were they coming from the open sea?
Were the ducts pushing air underground, or from the ground?
And in which directions were the banners bellying with wind?

How was the traffic? Traffic roared later that evening.
The winds from the air-ducts roared along with the traffic.
The underground was made of money, the cost of location
passed to the customer. The gold necklace on the velvet collar
is from the underground too. The maze between the buildings
straightens until the wind gains greater pressure, and howls.