

Mark DeCarteret

The Year I Went Without Having a Hit

I lived to avoid things. To bedevil the universe. For isn't what is veiled on day one still veiled on day eleven? Those hurricane models only demonstrating that the models aren't working. Here's footage of me in a straw house. Me, wasting the talent I stole from the villagers. Atlantic City behind me. With its outbreaks. And gout. The lowly wool of its blackening sky. Hell, tell them. Hell, let them all in on. Why my arm stays this way. A "Haunting Maze of Injections." But still toast this drought with the gaudiest of tears. And this leathery squint. O my sweet diva-heart. Is that the cab that will take us to the missile site? Its yellow the yellow of a Grammy-less wall. Its red the red of foreclosure. There's no reason to feed you the lines anymore. Hum the melody. Though the internet swears they still delivered a "Bum Rush." And the "Mumbo Freed from the Jumbo." For the first time since "Old Doubts Abounding" went gold I'm digging your solo. Time was these were my worst looks. EVER. Falling into a segue towards an era of guess work and drum tracks. Along with some joint inflammation. The gut outgunned by parasites. It's plain to see I'm no longer a professional. No longer the tipped crown atop the Ritz crackers. Instead, joining programs to get early access to the newest releases. To get at the buffet I used to think was an afterthought. When my Muse is still bent on surviving. To be on okay terms with the universe. Merit mentioning. That and the other forty or so reasons why. I am leaving. I have already left.

The Year I Went Without Wearing a Suit

I tried to lower myself into anything wool. Find the right blend for my tastes. But I'd never had the words for this business. That drowsy look towards the lake. The mouthed startlement. Only the worried brow and the cocktail sword that I choke. So, listen up, you! A crickets' ticking off the summer. Some other Muse with their tipped face and assumptions. I feel more for the leaf blower. Its blue-stink and bellowing. Or the oil-slicked web trying to stay neutral between the mailbox and its flag. Than I do for these geese, segueing into their retro-geometry, clamor. Or the trees and their secretive artistry. O how I guest-star their slowest of deaths, feats! You yank that one thread and most worlds are quick to change course, grow sour on rousing the soul. It's always the fleas in my drawers that are self-taught, fluent in grace. Not the gnats staggering out into light. Best to table the decision. Take fewer stabs at the beast. Until that time I'm forced to choose the one hand. Where in one fist, there's the necktie. Rolled up like fake grass. And in the other, a tissue. Stiffened from tears. What we can't toast we eat. What we think we can we feast.

The Year I Went Without Winning a Grant

See there, where the space has been penciled in, recently opened up to the public. Where no attempt has been made to remodel. Or cleverly list. So that the shadows come and go as they please. Meeting up on occasion. Overlapping. And where a certain insect has been known to emphasize its significance, team. Along with their offspring. And those trees you had earlier missed. Where the shadows will take leave of you. And the light will peer through. You coming. So close to the sun you can taste it on your nose. And see it. Tiny crescents like dots. In your thoughts and in mine. Tiny dots they will later compile. And hire people to study. Look here, they will try always getting it right. Saying. How when the night cools into shadow. And the insects do loop-de-loops. It's more likely the colors will give in to rust. And the night that they pin-point will be dusted with something like star-light or stars. And this is how it will go on. Forever. Yes, they're actually hired. Figuring into every one of your desires. But see here. You must say it. When worse inevitably comes to worse. You can stretch out your fingers like this. Into crosses. Or something so sacred it'll stay with you. Laying into your tongue. But eventually yielding to song. How it could turn any second. With all of them laughing at you. And filing it away. How it is all turning. They are 73% sure of it now. It has turned.

The Year I Went Without Taking a Breath

*It's sick the price of medicine
Stand up, we'll put you on your feet again
Open up your eyes
Just to check that your asleep again
President gas is president gas again
--The Psychedelic Furs*

My color was back yet again. And they'd relocated my hip. What I had left for a tail. It's as if I didn't lack for anything. A moon yelling into the window. An EMT snipping my pants off with pins in his mouth. I keep trying to tell them. There are thousands more just like me. Starting a new life. Up there in the pines. That the wind is behind it all. Having figured out walls. What all this space will allow. And that it's not the only thing. My insurance plan covers. Besides all my lies. The work orders. Sad. We were all lovers once. Wed to the idea of decency. Intellectual tells-all. Now, you'll hear some laughter. And then you won't. This here may be the earliest I've ever read of snow. Its deep concern with light looking like pearls on the sill. I said to myself. No, I say to myself still. Such a fuss to make over the loss of a little flesh. And recall how it felt to have even more made of me. Leafed through like a cable series on the earliest recordings of farewells. A phone call caller's ID IDs as Mr. Victory. Asks if there will always be suffering. Because, if there is, he half-stutters. Because if there is. I write now like I did. When I was a kid. There is snow on my eyes and my shoe-ties. And so much work to be done when the wind finally dies. I don't know what I have here on my fingers. Or where it came from. Who's ever sure they're all here? Isn't this why there are so many cameras? And updates? Take it outside, Mr. Victory tells me. You are drawing a crowd. One thing is for sure. I've always been able to work a room. Ward off most evil-doers. You've lived one life. Well. So hell, what's another.

The Year I Went Without Using the Rapture App

Started with a rusty intonation. And ended with a star questioning its own density. Falling at a laughable rate. Me? I'm too tense to dust. To tsk tsk another study of squid ink, the effects of certain desk sets on our capacity to think. Scientists get trillions. Yet they give a poet an old adage badge. A recording of trees lovingly procreating. And they take to the streets. Spank us. Thankfully, there's a lot of disorders to be had. Enough dross on the sword blade. Instead, we'll opt to host our own game show. Where we worship ourselves through yet another lens. Sit silently in a pew. Paired with a saint. Or the sin of the day. Pining for a decent chiropractor. Our faces looking like a punch line. At least Nature gets it to go again. Only the rats eating in. Tearing into the Cheerios. The antidotes we thought well out of reach. Like any party one fills up on the peanuts. Then feels ill from the telling. An eternity tried on. And died for. Trees figuring on crests. In the secrets of the rich. I'm my shittiest thought. I'm my kitty sticking its head in its own litter. Till he comes out a cookie. A front man. A leper having healed himself. Jesus, say goodbye to your double. What the ghosts have tracked in. I'm not sure if we should go back to sleep or just boogie. Trees would if they could. Help us pick out which earrings go better. Or pee better streams. I miss underwear sales. Lasers vying for my soul. But still come out with my pop gun. New ash on my tongue. Assorted covenants ever ready to take to the wheel. All of it has me thinking. In a certain beguiling light. Out of context. Even I could be next.

The Year I Went Without Being Rejected

Back then we all faked our death one or two times. Either out in the shed or the back of a cab. And we said what we thought. Then were done with it. Afterwards, the fact checkers ate of our bodies. And then doubled for us. Bled out where the lasers found gold. But we never gave the facts trouble. Never fogged up the earth with our doubts. Even left to myself. With my can of fat and pajamas. My toy coyote. I had a head smiling back. A head that felt staffed by millions. Mornings, the sun would tunnel out the leaves and leave its skin for our breakfast. Clouds would turn into suds. Nature was good like that. If the light grew the slightest you couldn't taste peach. Or the cheapest of whiskey. Only sugar. Fake sugar. Facts growing facts in the heat. Facts nursing their own facts. The absence of God is just that. The word ordered out of the world. Instead, I have a kitten. Sticking its paw in my side. Licked free of time. If I was going to do it I'd have done it by now. Even then I'm only kidding myself. It's one thing to hear the voice reaching into your midst. To vacate the cave again. And another to look. Really cool doing it.