

ROMANCE IN BARCELONA

Doble, Doble

At the Miró museum on Montjuic, synapse spark, amoeba burst; a carapace plus a perfect hand equals woman; a brass hoop plus a faucet equals a well-plumbed man. A coat hook can be a cap or penis, either way a crown. A star stands for a bird. I can never be you. The Lark's Wing Encircled with Golden Blue...The Hope of the Man Condemned to Death is larger than the room... Rejoins the Heart of the Poppy Sleeping on a Diamond-Studded Meadow. After such sensory savor, we were spent. In wire chairs we sat to eat hot sandwiches at a table of brushed aluminum. The bread was toasted between waffling irons, the cheese was the last degree Celsius before ooze. Ummming and laughing, we wondered, does a Bim Bim taste twice as good for being doubly named? Or was it being there with you?

132

In Cadaqués, across the traffic from our not nearly seaside hotel, in a thumbnail park, stood a less imposing Statue of Liberty. She raised her lamps, one in each arm, some blocks distant from the shore. In sidewalk trees, a tweet-ering firestorm. I walked to the cove before dawn. A not-quaint, not-old, in fact quite handsome sport fisherman named Joan (Juan, like Joan Miró, in Catalán) cast his line. Manic gulls gulped Har, Har, Har, Hee, Hee. Six vapor trails crossed the cove, seven—no ten—tiny suns rising horizontal, brilliant in the gathering day. Joan took off his coat. He, like me, wore fleece against the cold. Soon the city, a dog to walk, garbage to collect, a cough. A man sweeping the promenade called to the café man, conversed of days, weeks, and the coming afternoon. “*Bueno,*” he called out, “*bueno.*” Joan's friend collected from the goldening air the scent of baking bread and handed it warm to him in a bag. They ate. You slept in.

On the drive to Figueres, you read aloud how the first Salvador Dalí died as a child, so his parents christened a second. We spent the day at Dalí's “theater,” wandered through his fecund mind, up the stairs of the Mae West Room, past the couch of lips. We gasped at rubies set to beat in a mechanical heart. He wore an embroidered cowboy shirt, moustache flourish, lived to prove that he, Dalí, was the only one. They resembled each other like two drops of

water, he said, but with different reflections. We resemble each other not at all. To view the stereograph, we stepped up to where two panes of Plexiglas met to form a corner, to a spot marked by the oil of noses. I, our parents' first, pressed mine, and next you, daughter two, pressed yours to see the pair of paintings meld, to see the colors, which are only light after all, blend to form a portrait that was more dimensional. Gala's shirt was open and one breast was exposed. "Gratuitous," you heard an English woman charge. We disagreed. The beat of the ruby heart you recognized to be exactly true.

At the monastery, we stood in line forty minutes to see La Moreneta—the dark one, Our Lady of Montserrat. In the corridor, the mosaics on either side depicted the virgins and the mothers. We, each with only one, are the latter. In the Basilica she was encased in glass. Harsh light illuminated her black skin and burnished robes. The choir boys sang and we hiked to the Holy Cove. On the way we passed a monument to Pablo Casals (Pau in Catalán). He moved his unmoving bow across bronze as if to play the Spanish Rhapsody or an archipelago, the spires of native stone. Along the cemented trail we were joined for awhile by a cat whose balls the artists would approve. At Santa Cova, a smaller Señora sat unscreened in a niche in the rock with her happy child in lap. Here, we knelt and prayed and made her our own. But we had the 3:15 funicular to catch. Like girls, we ran the mountain path. We ran as if the towers we skirted were the crinoline tides of our childhood beach. Why did we never walk together then? When now we must run.

133

To Rochelle, Recalling Excursions

Evenings, at the verge of town we passed inhabitants elegant in trouser pleats and hats and dresses with sweaters and nationalistic resolve, interrupting our American and Aussie talk with deep-throated *Bon dia*. We ascended above the Mediterranean shrub and looked down from the naked shoulders of rock to where in so many ways we had come to where the clouds part. We looked upon our lives from afar and spoke of children raised and coming along, harm we have done, and native desires as hard as the acorns of the evergreen oaks. We were strangers becoming known. Talking was another form of walking as we sat before the hearth fire after returning from the whorls of snails underfoot and the slant of trails through serrated mountains at dusk.

Habla, habla, habla, Carlos said, but there was always more. Artisan objects from Sunday plazas, *oportunitats* in Barcelona, and skirts for trying on. We told our lives while buying stockings from shops, extravagant hosiery gifts, and licorice for our walks. We were to each other artists growing less and less apart until I departed and you rolled my suitcase, one of a pair, laden, to Plaza Catalunya, clacketing on the patterned pavement, where on other days we flowed with the current of continentals on autumn holiday. That last passage from Drassanes we were the only ones on the busiest stroll in the most engaging city in the world.

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Traffic swirled around Plaza Catalunya, around the singular onliness of him- and her-ness, the monumental oblivious hourless ourness of them, absent historical, powerful, ritual, only the architectural moderne-ness of their covalent twilight kiss I witnessed, wistful tourist. I conjectured you, husband, here pissed at my dazzlement, the city cost too much, no pillared kiss for us in the midst of the kinetic, exhausty fuminess.

134

At Museu Picasso, the artist's stabbing strokes painted himself as nude as Jacqueline, his final model, his beard a spear, smeared in musk, lines as thick as thighs, giving form to *cabrón-y toro*-ness. Her pubic hair he presented as nails, her eyes devolved to those of halibut. In seventy Jaquelines she became seventy Picassos. In lust he exalted the she of him, his wife, in seventy painted canvases.

My last night in Spain I spent in company with an artist who painted himself likewise nude, flaccid only barely after, asleep with orange lover, in showing me his art, perhaps inviting me to be another. We strolled the Ramblas after ten p.m., eating oysters, crusty bread, three soft cheeses, drinking Spanish wine. He was solicitous. From the harbor pier we fed the lunkers in waters luminous. I accepted his bed but did not share.

We breakfasted at Pinocchio's, sat side by side on stools, a plate of spicy garbanzos and an omelet for the pair of us. Heady moments these, but genuine affection would be ruinous. He took my picture; I was flattered as if my picture mattered. I bought a bag of licorice that I presented, thoughtful gesture of mal intent, to insinuate myself, recalcitrant odalisque, after I had

gone. Fidelity notwithstanding, I could not abide his nose. So unlovely next to yours.

I declared nothing as I boarded, Wyoming reporting early snow. From JFK to Atlanta, I conversed with Peggy, an older lady, who toured the coast of France by car while her husband stayed in Alabama. Her friend drove and she spoke the language and, like me, they ate well and drank coffee uncharacteristically. Husbands will be cross, she counseled, but do recover when you unpack. Her voice chimed like Samford Tower, whose clock was always accurate.