

Loitering with Intent · Hooper Thorne

Disclaimer: Persons mentioned in these lines are not now, nor have they ever been, either living or dead. Does that narrow it down a bit for you?

—C. J. Cooley

LET US NOW CONSIDER AN IMPERFECT WORLD WHEREIN THE SKELETON IS TRUTH THE FLESH CONJECTURE

The celebration,
old as the first of all our days is old,
has begun.
A fragile woman,
with mindless concern,
walks her dog along the path.
Couples wander, arms about,
and some, good friends,
lie on the grass, obeying
the stern command of spring;
they are, or seem to be, in love—
nothing is certain
at this time of year.
It is a time for dreaming
and some, I know, dream of wolves
who stand erect like men
and howl at trifles.

Dear Grandfather:
Can it be a year?
It has been nearly three
since Kate left us;
we miss her, but otherwise
we're all fine.

My hands remind me of yours—
they show the stains of years.
I don't recognize them—
they belong to a stranger.

Oh, yes:
today your great-great-
granddaughter planted
a red geranium on your grave.

*

Custom asks for grief,
but I would grieve in any case,
dear Caesar.

This last brutish land
will be yours, I have no doubt,
but know this forever:
the dagger in your back
was always there—
what matter if poor Brutus
drove it home?

TUESDAY AT NINE

Set loose
the wild witches
we said
Smash the idols
we'll raise our own
And we danced
with much laughter
and the gin turned
nights into days
and months and years
Our lives
were pale as wind
Ah, how we sinned!

*

Street sounds
are not breakers
on the coast of Maine
nor is lunch at Guido's
a picnic on the sand—
and seventy
is not seventeen.
No matter: I held
a pretty girl's hand
last summer.

*

I asked
my grandfather
always laughing
why he never cried.
Same thing, he said,
weeping.

UNPROVOKED ASSAULTS ON OLD LOVES

ANTONIA

Recently I culled this
from the confusion: the
most we ever had in
common was the handicap
of innocence. Symphysis
was not likely.

CAMILLA

The unexpected sight of
you recalls my bondage
and the heavy golden
chains too fine to see.

EVALINA

Time, being fluid, leaks
away, drop by drop—
a few are sweet.

FORTUNATA

A small part of wisdom is
knowing that much of
what one expects to
happen happens only in
stories—and often not
even there.

LUDMILLA

Stand there, unmoving,
by the salt marsh, where,
unique but lost, are count-
less thousands of tears,
and, looking down, say
this (if you can): nothing
here—only grass.

HATE II: THE SEQUEL

This is the agreement:
I will place hers on her lips
and she mine on mine;
she will drink my wine
and I hers, and we will smile
and lie down side by side
holding hands
and wait.

*

If there is a plan, she wrote,
then this is the way it should be;
but if there is none, as I suspect
to be the case, then no rules
will have been broken.

*

Friend Gorshen, in his autobiography,
hoping it might be read by his enemies,
wrote at the end,
And then I died, with a kiss on my lips
so sweet it got me into heaven.

IN THE VALLEY OF NAGGING DOUBTS

MUSIC

Music is stuff that uses up
a lot of notes, and if you are good at it
you are a very special person,
but if you are not
you are just one of the guys.

SCIENCE IOI

The reason fish smell as they do is that
they are evening things up for their
dreadful dissatisfaction with their lot,
it being the belief among fishes
that *they* were supposed to be in charge
and what is it with these barbaric
fishhooks anyway? Similar beliefs are held
by a few human beings.

PARTY

The house bounced with music
loud enough to loosen your bolts
and people, too young to give a hoot,
danced like Primates in delirium.
After about two hours of it
Casey caved in. She scooped up
all my Oreos, stuffed them in her bag,
kissed me carelessly, and left.
It was not such great fun after that.

HILL SKETCHES

MRS. CULLEN

She watched her husband coming from the fields
and catalogued his tribute to the years:
the seasons spent in coaxing stunted yields
from rocky land had justified her fears.
His backward glance before he reached the door
was common reflex for the man who farms;
the weariness his stooping shoulders bore
would drive him to her bed but not her arms.
The lines which doubt had cast into his face
were chiseled deep from squinting at the sun.
She looked, and knew that time had won the race
for hope, for love, for labors yet undone;
she recognized the hunger in his eyes
as not for her but for her apple pies.

ALICE FOGGY

After it was over but before she told them
what she'd done, she sat beside the door
and thought the things she had to think,
still trembling. It took such strength to do—
What now? she said aloud, and breathed
deep down to still the uproar in her breast.
Inside he lay and he was dead for sure;
no need to verify that detail.
Brutally he'd lived and died as brutally.
Offenses to the body, mind and soul
were meat to him and she his feast.
Now, she said, pushed back her hair,
and started down the hill.
At least, what wanted doing had been done;
now he the wronged and she the brutal one.

OLIVER BUCKLES

He recognized the beauty of the plan
the seeds that struggled through
the rocky soil fought sun and drought
and frost and flood and perished
by the scythe. Design he saw in all he saw,
and understood the pattern as his own:
to birth in labor, live in pain and die in fear,
peace in resignation, acceptance of defeat,
unspoken and unspeakable knowing.

Faithful husbandman, inarticulate
philosopher, gasping out the last of life
in unaccustomed whiteness, air
heavy with isopropyl alcohol,
recall the good brown earth,
the flavor of the fields, the sweet spring air,
and go in peace.

LOITERING WITH INTENT

Love lies in that sad place
where junk words go to die.

It was an abused word,
beaten into inanity by the mindless.

It was born a beautiful and gracious word,
prized above all by the Keeper of Words,

A counterfeit, which sounds the same,
is tossed about a thousand times a day
by thieves and swindlers.

*

In that place
where Laura lives, just beyond
Obscurity,
her only duty is to gather
in her arms the black sheets of night
and spread them on the grass,
corner-to-corner,
to catch the dew
& brew her lover's tea.

LOVER, GO BACK TO HIM

This photograph is of the author
improbably in the arms
of another writer who seems not to mind,
but he is plainly terrified by this
baffling propinquity.

*

Heartbreakers pop into my head catching me unwarned:
a good love strayed or stolen;
an old and joyful dog when I was ten;
the long-legged Nob Hill girl
who might have stayed, but didn't.
They burn there for a moment and go,
leaving holes to store
uncertain wonders in.

*

My uncle,
in his later years,
played the saxophone.

Badly.

He was not a man
of complexities—
it was his view
that the experience
was more important
than the result.

His real talent
was simply this:
Enthusiasm for all things
on this earth.

He always looked as if
he had just walked through
a patch of sunlight
and enjoyed it.