

AARON TUCKER

CATALOGUE D'OISEAUX



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[TO COME]

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Book*hug Press acknowledges that the land on which is the traditional territory of many nations, including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples. We recognize the enduring presence of many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples, and we are grateful for the opportunity to work on this land.

on polished cobblestones, we wander past sheer buildings
lightsoff storefronts fragrant with Porto's famous soap
water lily & lavender in the layers of your dark hair
& your wild-ice eyes, vivid & frontier, a hawk's double fovea
plucks the view from vertical wind: Mosteiro de São Bento da Vitória
blocks & arcs of granite ornament & dimensions
we enter the thin yet cavernous labyrinth
you, high albedo, linger over the igreja goldwork
fine figures woven in arrangements of dance
around its famous singing monks
point to the foundation stone, its heft, *dom*
the weight around which all else was built & revolves
beyond, our circumpolar view of the city slopes to the Douro River
then the mismatched orange rooftops staggered upbank

bolide, you watch a slender boat slide downstream
& I think of Pessoa & Harvestwoman's opening line
"But no, she's abstract, is a bird"
& in this harbour city, I'm dependent on
you, the water moving through me
a rivervein carrying soaps, nourishment, materials for shelter

twisting strips of streets lead to a small candlelit table
wafts of fresh bacalhau your photosphere against the dark clamour
we order a bottle from Alentejo & bufala
the silty cream of the cheese melts into the light oil

we launch into the lunar night
fullsonged among the happy trill of strangers
the mosaic of São Bento Station
its clocktower hands meeting at midnight
the medieval Sé do Porto & its rose window
where eight petals nestle into intricate stonework
bloom stained glass across the church front

& just beyond is our shoreline-set room
its walls the rough camber of river rocks
& you wash your face, come to our bed, lilac & radiant
the lean of your neck, its texture under my lips
perfect tactility, the grain of slight goosebumps
& the Douro's melody in our pauses
you, afterfeather, you, small beckoning ripples
you, Harvestwoman, "the song's what makes you sing"
breathe, then breathing, a waterway under patient bridges

and we rest, holding each other, the movements of the day
underskin & shared, rounded by currents of near-sleep
your day's last words a sighing nearaudible poem
your head on my chest, my heartbeat in your ear

I dream of you & a tree
that flourishes serpentine
a labyrinth up through packed earth
through clay & quartz & mica, through surface soil
the trunk tapers, splits into Ys
that further divide, forking limbs of limbs
a bird on each, flashes of magpies
darting chickadees, a perching predatory eagle
pelicans & storks & herons & kingfishers & cranes
leaves & twigs, barely visible
a tree with feathers talons beaks
you, a hummingbird, delicate & light-boned
in torpor, fractional heart rate
central among the wings of the tree

sleepy hands find the cores of our bodies radiating attraction
we become each other's moon

this neap tide moment, a lunar-solar gap
in which we, aphelion & apogee to the outside world
are in rhythm with the other's orbit, the early morning
that coats the sheets & lights your forearm draped across my chest
we move closer, fingers between fingers, legs knotted
as sleep haze blurs the sunlight, burns off with the room's gravity
& leaves our bodies weightless
objects rotate around us, unhurried, peaceful

I revisit your talk weeks earlier, on Adrian Piper's *Merge*
& I revisit that moment, you, at once terrene & celestial
gliding downriver through your arguments
the waves of your intelligence, powerful & persistent
& you streamed her LED Times Square billboard
a pair of pixelated yellow faces, one background lined vertically
the other horizontally, & as the two momentarily combine
their thoughts overlap, pull apart, switch poles
horizontal becomes vertical becomes horizontal, repeats
& echoes our own candlelit bufala, branco, rose window
in which we share a mind, sync vocals
sync orbits sync rivers sync wingbeats, merge
& a residue of the other remains when we separate, repeat

lying in bed with you, heliocentric, opposite to public noise
indulging the memory of taking the L into Manhattan
Waits's cobblevoiced "Downtown Train," yellow moon
soundtracked Piper's two faces as we wandered Avenue B
north through Alphabet City, then west
past Tompkins Square Park autumn sycamores
delicate halos of the small lamps sparking
against the sunset peeking through the branches
German words rooted in the neighbourhood's subsoil
by immigrants who found textile work, sewed & lined jackets
words reverberating with the same frequency as our first day in Frankfurt
the sluggish barges slid by like the trains of my childhood
where we sat on the bank of the Main, a beer each
long drinks of each other while the sunset reddened

you & the Main & the Douro
& Times Square, flocks of voices
calling to each other from the shores of the sidewalks
we anchored ourselves against the riverine crowd
let the looping migratory current smooth us
above the East River's sway

we walked back across the Brooklyn Bridge
you told me P. T. Barnum marched 22 elephants
across it to prove it wouldn't collapse
laughed your laugh, you, saffron, imagining trunk to tail
while the moon, gold, expanded steadily
swelled to the size of the whole night

total moonlight that guided us to the other shore
becomes sunlight spilling through our window
down to the span of the Dom Luís, "In the country of bridges
the bridge is more real than the shores it doth unsever"
writes Pessoa & I know my dreams & memories all arc to you
bridges made possible by understanding
the compression of bedrock & how much the earth can bear
so that I might build myself toward you
the flow of your raven hair on the pillow
you, solarlunar, a night in the morning

when you are a sparrow
you are immortal in this layered city
rising rooftops sunned clayorange
medieval church spires above

skinny alleys to your bushhomes
you eat breadcrumbs while listening to glottal human haltings
without melody, a panorama of noise
you dot between benches in an open square
the black gravel of your eyes
your prayerful beak open
but when you are a raven
only you know your wingspan
you, Artemis, pressurized hunch, weight tensed
before lifting into flight, the far-below rooftops
the far-below spires, darting humans
bodies shrinking to crumbs, their voices lost
you live with the grit of sparrow bones
ground to powder in the grooves of your talons

a river, eternal & terrestrial
in its long path through continent to ocean
you pull the world around you
like the delicate folds of sheets encircling you now
your concentration working through a problem
a hummingbird's complete control, delicate & nimble
you, fastminded, choose flowers for symmetry & suckletaste

my lunula half & we are two crescents, arrondi

I am grateful for the unhurried drip of this contented morning
for cascading hair, Alice blue eyes, a summon into an embrace

for you resting against my collarbone, melodious

the opposite of our months apart

you in Mainz, where the Rhine & the Main collide

I in Toronto amid the chills off Lake Ontario

comforted only by those long flights to you

when I looked out the window at the clouds & the bent horizon

the sun rising above it & the ocean below

I imagined myself as a flying machine

metal feathers through cirrostratus steady beak & span

looking down to see jetties & harbours & docks along water edges

linking to Lucy Lippard at the Brickworks in Toronto

as you explained the scale & gestures of her land art slides

& her talk sifted like clay through her fingers into our cupped palms

I considered my bird's-eye view

before returning to the final psychedelic pages of Hesse

a Mozart out of time, a Magic Theatre, a declaration

the lonely protagonist whose attention lights upon a woman

who transforms him into a dancer, into hypnotic jazz

I read & anticipated landing on the other shore
making my way to your upstairs apartment, your treefort bed, you

my first visit, you took me to St. Stephen's Church, Schillerplatz
we climbed the hill as the streetcar roared by on that thin road up
& curved to the church, a millennium old, the large door
small cross window above its peak hinted at, azure tint barely visible
the choir windows, Chagall, stained glass, a bath in pigments
byzantine, tufts, royal, Marian, Klein, Alice, wild-ice
the metal organ coated sapphire, flickered by candlelight
& you, perfect vidimus, gestured toward your favourite window
vines ascended leaf-shaped triplepane, bloomed three florals
primary red & yellow & late afternoon
underneath, you awash in the light of the church's blues
that changed shade & texture with the rotation of earth & sunlight

I remember that spectrum, underwater, ethereal
then finishing Hesse, adjusting in my plane seat
& returning to the book cover's foxcoloured fur
a gift you purchased in Eliot's Bookshop on Yonge Street
one Sunday afternoon, that morning in our bed
the cedar smoke from the neighbouring Anishnawbe Health Toronto

mingled with late autumn rain running down the window
& the drums & chants from the ceremony next door
blended with the pecking of water against glass
its rhythms matched our breathing, the clouds
bent to our sleep & made themselves soothing for us
our hands like water over each other, like cirrus or silty dreams
where we dance in a loud bar, goofily singing
your hand on the back of my neck, our bodies close, improvisational
our waking from co-dream caused the rain to pause
then resume when we kissed good morning
you, soft sea mist, eventually cajoled us from our bed
with the promise of our favourite diner, Chew Chews
the runny yolks over potatoes, toast with strawberry jam
the server overexcited that Cher & Queen Latifa were
filming there next week, his hands clasped as he repeated this news
& we finished our breakfast, walked toward Cabbagetown
under umbrellas, soft patter, watery dance steps
bought lattes from Jet Fuel, milky & vapoursteam, continued east
the neighbourhood lined with Victorian houses
named for the poverty of its Irish settlers
who sowed their frontyards with vegetables
we admired large windows into living rooms