

My Girlfriend The Night (Vigil, Rain, and the Round Beet Sun)

by Brian Michael Barbeito

The sun was a red beet and it waited low in the sky but I didn't know for what reason. You could look right at it and forget for an instant about tenement buildings and hydro lines, or the dirty city in general. I tied my shoes and got some water for a couple plants but when I looked up I noticed the sun had left. It began to rain then so I just dumped the water and got ready to go. When I thought back later on it, I figured I had known it was going to rain just about then, but I had been taken in by the strange sun. The day was dismissed and I walked through city parks to the old hospital.

Faded yellow walls unattended to.

Fast cabs make black markings on curb sides.

Newspaper boxes affixed with metal wires behind dirty glass.

A man I knew but did not like was waiting, and he wanted me to go with him to buy cigarettes. I went along and he spoke about things with a self-assuredness I found always suspect.

Short.

Funny eyes.

Car almost defunct.

I pick up anything around here within a half hour because of my life in the old days, he said.

I don't like the culture of picking anything up and don't need to pick anything up, I told him.

I am just letting you know. I know people still from a long time ago. Things change but they don't change that much.

We have to be fast, I told him.

I know. It is a vigil. But there is time.

There was an old mutual friend that was dying and that is why we were going to the hospital. I didn't say anything, but I didn't like how the man had just come out and said 'vigil.' Maybe it was the casualness or familiarity with which he said it. Maybe it was because I didn't like him to begin with.

Back at the hospital I saw various people that had come from near and far. I saw the dying one also, and he waited in the bed but would leave soon like the round and red beet sun had. I went downstairs shortly after to get some air and stood in the parking lot watching the traffic stream past on the road that was stationed just up the way. Beside me appeared a woman very pregnant and in a blue gown.

Kind.

Level.

Something ephemeral.

Something knowing.

Can I have one of those cigarettes? She asked.

Are you sure you should be smoking? And I handed them to her but she did not answer.

We stared at the traffic and it just went and went like a carnival ride. I looked back and up at the building, a ten or fifteen story tall affair. Though it had lights, quiet markers in the sky, it faded into the night, the thick air and the vast dark claiming it easily.

I am waiting for someone to pass away.

I am sorry, she said.

It will be soon. Any hour.

I am bringing life soon, if it is a consolation somehow.

The traffic there, I said, pointing at the road, never stops, not even at night...

No, she said, I live close by. It is always like that. Always been like that.

We watched it a couple seconds more and I remembered back to a time when I used to stare out back windows of Buicks and make a motion as if pulling on a truck horn and the truckers would sound their horns for a small boy whose CB handle was French Fry.

I gotta go, she called out. Thanks for the dart.

No problem. Good luck.

She disappeared behind doors and into the seemingly half—existing building that barely held its own now against the night. The night was my girlfriend, a dark and gracious one, even wanton, with its sights and sounds, its various charms and vastness somehow like fields of candy. It was sometimes selfish and only enveloped in its own goings-ons. At other times it had important business to attend to as having to take or give life, and during these long moments I stayed within a physical and psychic place that was not definite or defined, but more a kind of limbo.

I watched the traffic a little while longer and then went in and up.

More cars.

Lights and lights and lights.

None of them shows a real way.

Just going because that is where the asphalt was put.

An odd horn.

A call from a window miles and miles away.

Profanity or salutations or both. Hard to tell.

What did the man who stopped in the street say years and years ago? What did he say with the same gravity of the soothsayer who cautioned to beware the Ides of March? He said, *This is not a game...*

When I got the top floor someone met me and told me that the dying one was now deceased.

Willful visions but not real visions.

Coping mechanisms.

Strings of Saints.

Palm leaves. Palm leaves and shell necklaces in the brightest morning sun where the machines come to clean the seaweed and debris off of the sand. The newspaper boxes there are cleanest

orange and yellow and even powder blue. They wait strong and happily with the news of the world, and the news then is good. How could it not be? There are even boulevards of woodchips and palm trees by the well lit night malls where we skateboard or wait for girls, and there are not one hundred but maybe a thousand other things that burst with glee and a pulsing sort of benediction. Tall strong grasses where small lizards stay around perimeter hedges. White stucco walls that listen to the sound of the sea. Bits of shells left by the elderly or the young on aluminum railings. People swim. Lunch comes or goes and it doesn't matter which. Lawn chairs white and yellow. Even the dark colors of the green hallways seem somehow light or bright. Cargo ships pass under the naked sun and small planes fly banners back and forth once in a while, once in a while, once in a while, only once in a while. Nothing bad will ever happen. Death is so far away.

So far away.

So far away.

So far.

It is here.

Days and nights created too many years.

Salty is the sea.

And how well it feels as it burns our eyes.

We would be glad to have it for even a second.

Salty is the sea.

But the sea is not for us.

Or the funny Goodyear blimp that passes overhead watchful somehow of the earth.

So far and close.

We feel like we know it.

Salty is the sea.

But the sea is gone.

The spirit is gone.

Death is here.

My girlfriend the night is not even helping.

She has other things to do.

But she will come back sometime.

She always does.

I could hear thunder from somewhere outside and the rain began to spit against windows small but deliberate water sparks forming the prologue to a new storm. My dusk sun felt like it was an event from antiquity. It was so dark by those windows that I wondered a bit if that red beet glowing circle had even happened at all. The day and the dusk weren't for me anyhow.

I was where I belonged.

