

Duet for Two Instruments of Indefinite Pitch

by DJ Young

I have filled innumerable notebooks with phrases to be used when I have found the true story, the one story to which all these phrases refer. But I have never yet found that story. And I begin to ask, Are there stories?

- Virginia Woolf, *The Waves*

Introduction: Seasonal Disorders

I sat on the lawn, back and forth from storm clouds to blue sky and back again, most of the morning, watching my breath hang in the air, mostly speechless, just out of words for a bit, picking leaves off the ground, some were yellow and brown and some were red, mostly maple leaves, I love all things deciduous, things that fall, but there was one leaf I found that was too young, almost white, stood out like a sore thumb and I thought, this one went early. This one fell too soon.

I really don't know where it comes from, these early mornings of damp futility, when all I want is to start over, say something new, something right, but no one to say it to. I've been rehearsing for something that will never happen. If you don't believe, if you stop believing, if things have grown so silent, you don't hear voices anymore, like the idea of god fading fast, someone was just having you on, so you gave up hoping and you gave up and you thought, what has all this been for? I can understand why some people choose to believe, no matter the evidence, because it's the loveliest thing ever and I find you beautiful, in so many ways, no one would know, no one sees the way I do, or wants to see, and it's all hidden,

but that's where faith comes in. I've lost mine. I want to find it again.

Maybe it's out there, sorting through leaves like me, looking for the right one. Or, at least the one they missed.

Interlude: A Map of the World

A full moon in the morning sky, the sun hasn't bothered to rise and why should it, see how unnecessary it is, left over from a sleepless night, it stayed there, in suspense, waiting to see what you could possibly get up to next. A patron saint for lost causes. There is no comfort in its cold, dusty gleam, only the ongoing expectation of futility. You could almost be there, like a broken aviator, waiting rescue when something strange happens. Out of nowhere, the little something or other, wanting a story, wanting answers and all you have are questions, ignored. But you were tamed and now the fields have burned black.

Exposition: As We Were, So We Can Be

Autumn and I got up a little early yesterday. We went for a walk. Summer is almost surreal with outgoing exhibitionists, everyone in a state of desperate hesitation, not sure which way they are going, but it is hard to confuse yourself in autumn. The skies are gray, the leaves are falling, clogging drains, so satisfying underfoot, and the breeze is smirking something chilly at your neck; it's going to rain soon. Maybe tomorrow.

But this morning I managed to have a little quiet, found a pile of leaves big enough to fall in without touching ground, felt tempted, felt like playing seven or eight and just kick my way through it, shamelessly, triumphant. But it's not as much fun without your friends and knowing my luck, there'd be a pitchfork lying underneath.

The mountain is bare; it is a bit strange to see him without his usual year-round winter coat. It melted fast this year; we watched it fade in June. This summer has been so warm it was a sport watching lawns grow blond. I don't like the dry, high humidity, the long days of diesel haze and the transient buzz of bees or the rhythmic *spish spish* of a sprinkler. The rivers look as inviting as septic tanks. The smell is somewhat similar too. The girls dress like they have all year, and it's the boy's turn to show off their tanned hides. Their skin like ink wet tablets, just doodled all over. Everyone wants to be naked and noisy; there's another smell too. Maybe the bees caught it.

I wait for the sun to go down. I want to lay out on the lawn, growing green again, spread my blanket under the stars and fall asleep to the crickets shaving their legs and the far off hum of an engine. Gentle, woody smoke curling through the air: it's a season of brick and stone, apple and harvest. Any excuse for a stroll. Any excuse to be alone.

Development: An Idea — Or Not

There is a man and he is lighting a cigarette in his living room. His wife is watching him, concerned; she has annoyed him somehow and isn't sure what to say. He will not look her, but picks up the newspaper and begins reading the comics section. He is not ignoring her, she is simply no longer in the room. She was never in the room. She doesn't exist.

He imagined her. Simple as that. He made up a wife so he could justify the living room and the cigarettes and the newspaper and the whole house around it. He likes to make things up. When he was a boy he'd wander around his grandmother's home, see the picture of his grandfather, an old man he never met. He used to make up ghosts then. His grandfather haunted his head, so he haunted the house too. He kept company that way.

When he imagines her now, she is wearing a long overcoat and carrying a bag over one shoulder. She is always in the process of leaving. Someone else is on her mind, someone not him, and she isn't strong enough to tell him. She knows he knows. That is good enough. Or bad enough. He imagines what a broken heart looks like. It looks like a fist, it's fingers bloody.

He visits the zoo on rainy days. There is no competition to see the monkeys or the snakes. No pushing past noisy children and their sticky hands. He can smell the tiger long before he sees it. He can smell the birds. He smells the grass and the coffee from the vendor's cart and something he cannot describe. It might be the sky. What does a cloud smell like? Is it like smoke or salty like the sea?

Something tells him the whole world is haunted; an imaginary place someone made up, just for fun or because it was lonely. Nothing he thinks or feels is quite real because of it. He knows everyone agrees on things from time to time, just to make life easy. He knows everyone wants something from time to time, just to make time easy. He can imagine anything, and it works. He can even imagine someone loves him. This is what we do. This is what he does.

Interlude: Ourorboros

What lives on its own substance and dies when it devours itself?

Transition: Last Tango

Marlon Brando is calling everything bullshit; no names here. Nothing matters here. He's watching a half-naked woman rant at him.

Why don't you go back to America? She asks.

It isn't there anymore, is what he should have said.

Nothing is there anymore.

I walked up the hill this morning, and I could see Mt. Hood, it must have been around 6 or so and the sky was turning blue (longing for air?), and the volcano was just painted in like, whitish brush strokes, not even there, not yet, maybe an hour later, come back and see and there was a ribbon of cloud just before it, and a bank of fog settled over the valley and frost on the lawns and its the moment, if you are paying attention, when everything is absolutely real. Wait two hours and its gone.

The trouble is, it's hard to see past the power lines and the phone lines and the cell phone towers and the road signs and the traffic and the planes and all the noise. You can see noise you know, it's just vibration, vibrations can be seen and measured and no, I don't want to know anything about you.

He's talking again in that absolutely-certain-he's-right way. She just doesn't get it. No names here. They play childish adult games together. She's going to kill him in the end, of course.

That's the story. That's how it ends.

Retransition: A Letter, Unsent

I wanted to tell you about this book I've been reading, been reading for years now. I wanted to know if you had read it too and what sort of conversation could we have about it. What did you think of the plot, the relationship of the main characters, why they did what they did, did it make sense? Can you live in it? Not just the book, but all things. What can we do together? What have you never done before? There are too many things on my list to mention. I'd like to know what sort of things you daydream about, what happens when your mind wanders.

I wanted to tell you about the clouds yesterday. I have no ability to describe clouds effectively. Cotton buds, hairy, yet insubstantial: common things yet enigmatic, too. How they take color, how they always remind me of something else.

Modulating transition: Morning of a Philophobist

Did you know that in 1961, Matisse's *Le Bateau* (The Boat) hung upside-down for two months in the Museum of Modern Art, New York - none of the 116,000 visitors had noticed. Polar bears are left-handed and sharks are immune to all known diseases (who found THAT out, I wonder). In 644 A new religion called *Tokoyonomushi* was introduced in Japan, promoting worship of a worm, drinking sake, dancing in the streets, and giving away money. By 2008, this practice is known as 'Drunk in Mexico at 3 in the morning.' In 1900, Max Karl Ernst Ludwig Planck, in a lecture to the German Physical Society, announces that matter absorbs heat energy and emits light energy discontinuously, giving birth to quantum mechanics.

Kakorrhaphiophobia is the fear of failure. Keraunothnetophobia is the fear of falling man-made satellites.

Philophobia is the fear of being or falling in love.

Coda: Inner Weather

Calamities are best seen as a spiral; they start out as something small, ordinary even. It's their invisibility that makes them powerful. They weave through the lives they will affect, spinning up and outward, higher and higher, with greater speed, churning up everything in its path. Until it takes over the sky: until it becomes the sky.

