

Ballad of a Traffic Light

by John Olson

I am a traffic light. I hang somewhere in the city. I hang above the intersection in stolid cogitation. I have a tendency, nay, call it a compulsion, to make people stop, make people go, or present people with the color yellow, and create confusion. Do I stop? Should I go? What do I risk? Oh, what the hell. These are my works. I hang in blissful languor. Languor is lovely. Languor is what everyone wants out of life. I also recommend swimming. Swimming is transcendental. Though perhaps not so much for a traffic light. How many traffic lights have you seen underwater? Or doing a breast stroke in the middle of an intersection? I smell a parenthesis (this parenthesis) which is the equivalent of a traffic light in the middle of a paragraph. I am blue at my core. No one knows this. But it's true. All traffic lights conceal a blue light at their core. If we were to display this wonderful blue color, no one would know what to do. They would gaze up at us and wonder what blue signaled. What does blue want me to do? What behavior goes with blue? What does blue expect of me? Tonight I attack Portugal. Just kidding. I'm a traffic light. Traffic lights do not declare wars or comb our hair or brush our teeth because we are traffic lights. We hang on wires and tell people to go. Or stop. Or linger in ambiguity. We are a cultural tradition on a golden chain of ideologies. We embrace our fate with equanimity. We expect equanimity from the people who wait. Who wait to see us turn green. Who wait to get on with their lives. Who wait for something larger than green. Who ride on a planet through space. Tonight I hang in aberration. Tonight I hang upside down. I do this to change perspective. I do this to consecrate the consonance of circulation. I house the leisure of a thousand moments. I house the lapping of water and the splatter of rain. I am a buttress against chaos. And now I am turning yellow. And you may wonder what next. You may wonder if you should stop here, or keep going. Keep going to the next sentence. Where the life may be green. Green forever. Never beige. Never brown. But always

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green. Green until I am retired and off the grid. And then I will be the angel walking past your car window. Blinking yellow. Blinking red. Blinking green.

