

The Moon in Winter

by Joshua Moses

Winter is a particle yet unknown to science. Someday it will be described in terms of spins and magnetism. It will be set in high school physics books and there contained: look, here is winter. Graduate students will split it into cold and melancholy and poets will lament its descent toward the taxonomy of the mundane. The blizzard banished, encased ironically in ice, we will no longer wonder but we will understand.

These were the first things I'd written in my journal in over a year, perched over the murmur of February traffic sipping gin. March was once the first month of the new year and I can believe it because February is the sorry carcass of the calendar, a dreary, bedraggled octogenarian wetting the bid linens. It's no wonder that we lose track of time — we're counting all wrong, starting with winter and holding our breaths until the robins burst from their cocoons or whatever it is that robins go as the bleak breaks upon November. There were flowers on the coffee table and they stood outside the scope of history, gently mocking presidents and slaves. Lincoln, they said, right here it's always April 1865. And they were right.

I'd seen the moon earlier that night rising in the distance over the far arc of the Kennedy Expressway and it was the sky. It was the whole sky, a beautiful rock that somebody had suspended from the heavens to mark the months, swollen and shining and silent. The sun was directly opposite it on the other side of the world, just stumbling over the horizon as his sister hoisted herself out of Lake Michigan and proclaimed a new order, even if just for this one night.

Up in the sky somewhere my wife was in a metal tube hurtling towards Florida, and inside of her was a baby. Inside where the baby slept it was always warm, always summer. I thought of how cruel it was to haul that baby out into the dark and cold of Chicago, and then how wondrous was that glimmering sphere, the phosphorescing orange. We had learned things about the moon, had visited it, knew there were no men upon it and it was not made of

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cheese. We knew its chemical composition, had brought back pieces, knew the rate at which she danced away from us and that one day she would be still. She was another chunk of space dust trapped in a gravity well, but tonight she was God's eye and Knew All.

This became my counterpoint: to know is not to master. Whether this was wise or trite I was in no place to judge, eyeing the roses as I was through a second martini. And as I wrote I was struck by the weakness of the words as compared to the thread of thought, and wondered whether this was the fault of words or, well, my words. How to express this thought, what seemed to me this great welling of inner knowledge, without resorting to cliché or metaphor. Yet those were my only weapons, two boxing gloves stuffed with concrete. Even as I set my fingers on my keyboard I could feel these ideas scattering, chasing down different and opposite paths. Fuck it, I said, and I made another martini.

These things I knew for sure: Traffic. Flowers. Alcohol. Words. I deleted cold though I was cold: it was relative. Everything else was beyond the span of my immediate comprehension. That is, my senses actively shocked my brain on account of these alone and anything else was implied, not unlike the coming check at the end of a mediocre but overpriced meal. To chain the metaphor, or simile, at the end of it all was Death, the chasm of eternity into which we must tumble, and Fuck if that wasn't a drag, but we couldn't know about it. All we could do was make assumptions, that given the clear and tangible death of everyone and everything it was out there at the misty end of supposition, slowly gaining form. Like the winter, though, like the moon, it was known but not mastered.

This was what it was to exist, to tread carefully through the bog of expectations *ex posteriori*. I wondered what the caveman thought, how he lived when he had no knowledge of the eventuality of death. How easy would it be to raise a baby without any knowledge of loss? Without fear? Without language? If we deprived our child of words, would that strike down misery?

If there was a God, I thought, if there was some all-knowing particle in the back room of the universe, this must have been His or Her

(Its?) process as It stumbled through creation. So It stuck the apple on the tree on the middle of the garden and told Adam and Eve, hey, hands off. Even though God should have known that nothing would make two morons curiouser than a big flashing sign that says No. And if God should have known, then God must have known. That makes God the serpent.

