

POETICKLE PIECES ON MEN

By Richard Balthazar

1.

MESSAGE FROM ALPHA CENTAURI

I want to have come unto your world
Like a comet, or better,
A wandering sun,
Spark of invisible systems,
Flashing a solar radiance
On the night sides of your eyes.

I want to burst through your bonds
Like a bullet, or rather,
A vagrant ion,
Quark of divisible atoms,
Leading fission's chain dance
Out the rare earths of your arms.

1969

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2.

FRAGMENT OF AN IDYLL

A carhorn honks at the corner
As you stand in a short too short.
You click the plastic switch and late rays
Stay mystic on your tunic.
The draped cloth drops in soft folds to fade
On the carpet, and our arms weave us,
Tremulous strands in a taut chord, strained,
As the bow strokes a low drone from our chests.

Tromps in the hall
Stomp a hollow flamenco
And slam the castanet next door.

In the silence, our legs braid us, resonant,
In lyric curves, and our tongues
Play Telemann in the courts of our brains.

1969

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3.

A SIXTEENTH NOTE

Anniversaries
 make the lapse seem imaginary.
We should still be whispering
 spherical words
 in voluted ears.
But years are directionless distance.
 A step away
 we kiss still, suspended,
 a constellation in my mind.
If poetry could stop the motionless flight,
I'd write dimensionless lines
 in mnemonic knots
 to tangle you
In cheap hotel sheets with me.
I'd rig up a morningless rhyme
 to fight off five o'clock.
 1970

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4.

WE RAN INTO WEATHER

The car sped along the canal
Into strobe lightning in the Glades.
Strange pines lined the bank
In ranks toward the beaches,
 into the morning
 when we walked
 not fearing snakes.
Behind their palisades,
The dark waters lay,
 deep and inky beyond
 the suspended corpse
 of a rope swing.
Then the rains began to stream
On the windshield, obliterating the road.
 So I listened to the sound
 of drops from banyan canopies,
 once more, before
 trying to leave.
 1971

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5.
MARDI GRAS 1972

Perhaps it's only natural to wonder
If you really love me,
If that moment of Cesare and Chaucer
In doublets, capes and caps,
The brick corner of a carnival street,
Were true.

The high priest of Ra approached
In fans of feathers and standing in the gutter,
He pronounced us beautiful.

It's part of love to wonder
If the gentlewoman in her gown
Who seized me from the throng
And hailed me as Prince Charming
Were true.

And I led you gently away
Through clowns and beggars.

And to wonder if your whisper passing secret
From the peasants behind a sleeve,
Midst a crowd in beads and bladders,
Were true.

1972

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6.
APRIL IN MICHIGAN

Two days now the winter
Has been broken.
Today there is no chill
But instead
 Bikers in shorts,
 Hitchhikers in tanktops
 Bargaining for a ride
 With a bare shoulder.

A day or two and the track team
Will be training
And showering afternoons.

There will be lean back

After my swim,
And tumblers' legs
In the gym.

Long months now our bodies
Have been hidden
In sweaters and scarves,
Ripening in the warmth.

The time now is stirring
Them to motion
And like all new-fledged,
To hunger.

1972

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7.

LINES FOR LOU

In the early morning the light
Strikes the wall at my window
And spreads gilded over the bed
Where you lay with leaves
In the evening.

While I slept where we were,
The night cooled, and the sultry
Dampness of our shoulders
Would have dried.

On the streets the day is rising
Brightly over iron fences,
Among branches and flowers,
Creeping into bays and bedrooms.

This warmth on my arm must be
Your breath,
This glow on the wind,
Your eyes awakening.

1973

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8.
COLUMBUS DAY

This noon I walked in the park
With October underfoot again,
Going a way of cobbles,
Of ivy on rock walls,
And among these bright maples
It could so easily have been you
 With me
 Walking up a fall hill
 And lying on sweet leaves,
 Instead of no one.

1975

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9.
ASH

All your touches at the start
I tucked away in the wooden
Box of my head, used to rationing,
And packed them in fine tissue
With evening shadows of lamps,
Polished them with the spicy
Smoke of benediction.
Special stones found on a beach.
My frugality is comic now,
Hoarding in the mongst of plenty.
Your body like a boulder
Has rolled on me,
Splintering my thrifty chest.
There are pebbles and pictures now
Too many to count.
No, loving is not meant to be spent
Licking little black corners
To glue a kiss in an album.
And what souvenirs I might save
From our walk through berry vines and soy
Will only be fine ash
In the wind
When
You've gone.

1970

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12.
ANOTHER CROSSING

Sunday afternoon and Sunday morning,
Waiting with my truck for the ferry:
The beginning and end
 of a passion play
On gray-speckled cobbles
Warm in the West Bank sun.
As I lean on the rail,
Watching my shadow rise and fall
On the brown water,
I seem frozen in motion,
 in mid-stride,
 about to close my arms
 around you.

These great steel ships
Steam downriver with sailors
I'd have been among,
But they leave me
In their sprawling wake.
There is nothing left
But to force the plot:
By this rush of the river and wind,
 I'll not have the last
 time I held you
 be the last.

This drama of shell-strewn drives
And late night waitings
Will stagger into one more act
So you'll know
 you don't go to him,
 but are sent.

#

1972

13.
CLIFFWALK

On a scattered beach of gilded leaves
We incline the whorled
Conches of ears
To open mouths
And hear waves.

With the ungainly grace of waterweeds
We drift fro and swirling back,
Washed in the slow eddying,
Tangled lapping,
Of that sea.

1970

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14.
JOYRIDE

So you mistake the sudden
Weakness in our mad careen
For creeping death.
You dread the race of streaking manes,
The pace of razor hooves in the air.
You fear the slant, the lurch and pitch,
The cant and slide of our chariot.
My love mistakes the roaring rush
Of the wind round his glorious ears
For goodbyes.

1970

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15.
FLASH OF RAIN

By the mere and very fact that here
Among the morning's faces,
Beneath my lop-ribbed umbrella,
While sappy clouds dribble
And pock misshapen puddles,
While the bulge-veined brown leaves
Are plastered flat and turn
Up their stems like toes –
By the plain and simple fact that here
I see wet-feathered houses
Scratching about in muddy yards –

By the almost senseless fact that here
I am squishing along alone –
It's absolutely clear
That you and I have
Only found the other for a time.

1970

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16.
SOON SNOW

Something Indian in the autumn
Shuffles among the near-bare birches,
Striped white like the bark of a canoe.
It's more October without you here with me.
Softly rustling, my moccasins
Brush through the yellow-brown
Litter of fall, and the moments
Of your love drift to the ground.
Almost the smell of wood
Smoke on the still morning
Makes me balk at sharing you.

1970

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17.
NOW SNOW

Days have blown through my arms
Like the bare limbs of elms,
And I have groaned with laughing
Like the creaking of wind.
Now snow curls round my fingers,
And trees grow hoary leaves.
We walk in the scrunching night
Of a close soundless street.
Secret as rabbits nuzzled up,
Huddled under a cottony bush,
And even with a spray of flakes
Speckling your back a block away,
The warm smell of your fur stays.

1970

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18.
WINDOW PAIN

Green fleurs de lys on blue,
My drapes blur into folds.

On the glass those waterlilies
Hang in the air of darkness.
Wet ivy creeps in, turning
Red, sneaky on the sill.
My round, ruffled head
Rests its nose on the frame.
Out there is the night where you
And I will pass together.
The time after your dancing.
Our touches in the rain.

But tonight

I need rest—I'm weary.
I'm love-logged—
Let me breathe a moment before again.
But the rain's breath is soothing.
It's near time for again.

1970

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19.

POSSIBLE CHANGE OF PLANS

In the morning you ring the springy bell,
And I stumble to the door in a sheet.
You step into the dim-lit hall and say:

Go fishing?

But your eyes follow my folds
Back into my dawn-lit room.
I crawl into the flowered bed,
Pretending not to watch you
Step out of shoes and jeans.
Then I meet your embracing eyes.

1970

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20.
WE WERE TO SKI TODAY

The afternoon has gone all white.
It's bright with dents from old footprints,
But fresh—as fine as one wants for skis.
The jovial cold seeps
Through my pants at the knees.
Shuffling at the busstop
I smile into the glitter
That filters out of the sky,
As though from branches not there.
It's on the edge of melt.
Trickles run through grates,
And a girl chips ice away
 That we have tramped
Again black cracks in the gutters,
As I turn toward sun and street,
Mutter with their watery tongues
 How it's soon you'll be gone.

1971

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21.
LATE SNOWFALL

Early calm December somehow sat
This morning on the rooftops,
Puffing at the scattering snow.
So late it's come, though spring hovers nearby.
The cracked and dingy ice
Is draped again in white.
Bushes wear freshly washed caps.
And footprints straggle off across the lawn.
Through the newly traced limbs,
The clean gray clouds
Are peaceful,
 Even without you.

1971

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