

marfa Lights

setting

night, near marfa

characters

marfa. female, capricorn, late 20s.

mercy. male, scorpio, late 20s; engaged to marfa.

diane. female, cancer, early 30s.

rip. male, sagittarius, early 30s; married to diane.

puke. male, aquarius, indeterminable age.

---- I. *darkness, the sound of a radio tuning...*

now inhuman sounds in the darkness...

mercy. o. ahh. ob.

rip. hoo-hoo!

mercy. owaowaowaowo.

rip. hoo-hoo! hoo-hoo!

mercy. o. ahh. ob.

silence; a radio tunes, static.

mercy. waowaowao.

diane. sssshhhh!

rip. hoo-hoo! hoo-hoo!

mercy. oh god oh god oh god oh-

diane. sssshhhh!

rip. hoo-hoo! hoo-hoo! hoo-hoo!

mercy. no more, never again, god, agh-

diane. sssshhhh! sssshhhhhhhh!

mercy. ow. ow. ah. dim. damn. crickets...

crickets chirp.

more radio tunes, static.

music rises, swells. swells. suddenly-

Lights. *colors dance, balloon in patterns, not in patterns, deflate, reveal now for the first time-*

a Tent, *campsite. or rather, a parody of a campsite- liquor bottles, broken, empty, half-empty, strewn twigs, newspapers- bungled attempts at a campfire. as if some poor bastard, after failing miserably in life, got it in his head to get good and decadent in the wilderness, and couldn't even manage that. the Tent itself should seem to exude a droning sound.*

crickets again.

puke. *(lurches in with a great porcelain jug) and i. and i. and i. and i. yes. and i. by all means. and i. oh, monstrous! oh... strange! circles, arcs, pink ellipsoids in the distance- see? far-off mountains turned into towers! what? how now? night and silence- who's there? are we all met? yes, well, pardon the altitude. it has all the appearance of a rooftop, does it not? oh? you think you're still in brooklyn? yes, well that's what they want you to believe. no, no, no, no- it's an alien portal actually- quite a job of a disguise they've pulled, don't worry, they fooled me too. no, you're not in brooklyn anymore. where then? ah. well. yes. west texas, as it happens. the high desert*

the symphony hall of my head like little paganinis.
 understand, there are four varieties of cricket song.
 rising now in darkness is the first- a clarion
 crescendo meant to attract females and repel
 males...

----- II. *darkness; crickets intensify, a fever pitch.*

again, the Tent, and scattered around it-

(rip *sits indian-style on the ground, makes irritating yet highly elaborate owl calls)*

(diane *paces in the background, her ear to a portable radio)*

(mercy *lies near an overturned bucket, a nervous wreck)*

rip. hoo-hoo!

rip. hoo-hoo! hoo-hoo!

rip. hoo-hoo! hoo-hoo! hoo-hoo!

rip. hoo! hoo! hoo! hoo! hoo! hoo! hoo! hoo!

mercy. oh god oh god oh god oh god oh-

rip. hoo! hoo! hoo! hoo! hoo! hoo! hoo! hoo!

mercy. god oh god oh god no god i think-

diane. sssshhhh!

rip. hoo! hoo! hoo! hoo! hoo! hoo!

mercy. yeah, i think i'm gonna throw up please fuck-

diane. sssshhhh! sssshhhh!

rip. hoo! hoo! hoo! hoo!

mercy. jesus, will you shut the hell up? don't you start again with them owl sounds, you'll give me a heart attack. what's that supposed to be anyway, some kinda mating call?

rip. it attracts them.

diane. they're here.

mercy. only thing that's likely to attract is a strait jacket-

rip. it attracted diane.

mercy. well, it didn't attract me none. i just came out here to piss, or throw up- whichever comes first.

rip. so piss already.

diane. where?

mercy. i don't have to anymore.

rip. over there, on the other side of that hill. you see them?

mercy. (*stands, looks down*) fuck.

mercy. did i?

mercy. is that?

mercy. honest to god, rip, i think i-

mercy. yeah, i think i pissed my pants.

mercy. (*walks over to him*) here, smell my crotch. go on, smell it.

mercy. that smell like piss or whiskey to you?

rip. (*to diane*) any reception?

diane. no, but i think-

mercy. (*walks away*) i think it's whiskey.

rip. low frequency.

diane. yes, i think i can feel them.

rip. turn the dial.

mercy. feel like i got bugs all over me. (*swats himself*) marfa, she wouldn't ever let me use any bug spray. used to say she liked the feel of nature- you believe that shit? here i was getting chewed alive by every ant, fly, tick, flea and fairy under the sun and she'd

go on about the *feel of nature* like she was in ‘a midsummer night’s dream’ -

rip. ‘the fierce vexations of a dream’.

mercy. funny thing. now that marfa’s gone, i don’t want any bug spray. no, i welcome them. because in all their torment, those little fuckers still remind me of the euphoria, the absolute bliss of sleeping next to that woman.

diane. (*walks over with radio*) what are you boys talking about?

rip. owls.

mercy. bugs.

rip. fleas.

mercy. fairies.

diane. sssshhhhh!

mercy. what?

rip. i hear things.

diane. your hear that?

mercy. music?-

diane. SSSHH!

mercy. crickets?-

diane. SSSHHH! SSSHHHH!

mercy. what?

rip. there’s no explanation for it.

mercy. they’re not real, you know.

diane. i can feel them.

mercy. where?

rip. (*stands*) they’re migrating.

diane. in my chest.

mercy. they're optical illusions.

rip. mirages.

diane. in the pit of my stomach.

mercy. in my head.

rip. the owls.

diane. the stars.

mercy. the Lights.

rip. you never see the Lights anymore.

diane. you never sleep anymore.

mercy. hell, what do you expect?

rip. hallucinations.

diane. not with me.

mercy. not when he's up all night making those stupid owl calls.

rip. migrating birds never sleep, you know.

diane. migraines never sleep?

mercy. no.

rip. yes.

diane. sorry.

mercy. no, it's me. fuck almighty, i'm hungover. my head's racing- it's like everybody's talking a mile a minute and i can't keep up. guess i shoulda known this was coming, soon as i ran outta liquor up here. alcohol withdrawal. what do they call it? DT? delirium tremens, the shakes, the fits, pink elephants, goddamn jitterbugs?

rip. can't sleep?

mercy. shit, who can? with all your hoo-hoos and hollers and hellsounds?

diane. maybe you should lie down.

rip. she can.

mercy. (*swats himself*) no, bugs, fairies, fireflies- all over me! groaning- croaking- dim- damn- crickets- god- no- mawing- never again- jesus fucking MAGGOTS!

diane. who?

rip. marfa.

mercy. marfa's dead.

diane. sssshhhhh! she's sleeping.

rip. may she rest in peace.

mercy. it's all my fucking fault. the Lights. i could see them, but-

diane. feel them.

rip. see them.

mercy. fuck em. strange how you can lust for the dead. if i saw her now, i'd wanna have my merry way with her, no kidding, her very ghost, i'd pull up the shadows of her blood-stained blouse and surrender everything to that great, scarlet, paranormal cunt of hers. after all, pussy's still pussy, even if it's ghost pussy. you know, they say this high desert air, it works wonders for the sex drive.

diane. watch the road.

rip. patches here and there.

mercy. where'd you say you got her again?

diane. my husband.

rip. my wife?

mercy. your station wagon.

diane. it was a new year's eve party.

rip. it was a used car lot.

mercy. me? i bought the land-rover for marfa as an engagement gift. shoulda known i'd wreck that just like i wreck every other goddamn precious thing in life. at the accident, i-

mercy. agh, god-

mercy. i took the ring off her finger.

diane. the rings of Saturn.

rip. do i have rings under my eyes?

mercy. wings under your thighs?

diane. you know what it is?

rip. the hangover?

mercy. the heartbreak?

diane. it's the influence of Mercury. can you feel it? it's Mercury retrograde- and the sun opposing Jupiter- that doesn't help, no, that doesn't help at all. mr. Sun and mr. Jupiter don't like each other very much. as a rule when Mercury's in retrograde it affects perception, communication, electronics, use of transportation, travel-

rip. migration.

diane. then there's also the (*grimaces, puts her hands on mercy's shoulders*) square between the moon and neptune in your sixth house. not good. what you need, scorpio, is to let this little camping trip of yours, um, what's the word, honey?

rip. turn the dial?

diane. yes! curtail, your natural capacity for, well i don't really need to say it because you already know what your natural capacities are but what the hell i'll go ahead and say it- obsession, suspicion, self-loathing, guilt, verbal aggression, regret, and habitual self-destruction usually expressed, per custom, (*picks up empty bottle*) through a bottle of whiskey.

rip. jameson! (*takes bottle*) special reserve. she's right, mercy. drinking dulls the senses. what you need is a good old-fashioned solid pre-dawn game of tennis followed by an ice cold bath scrub some salt under your armpits throw in a plate of chopped liver and a coupla piping hot pots of gun-powder coffee black as the rings under my eyes set you going like a meteor know what i mean?

mercy. (*stares at him, pause, looks away*) what time is it?

diane. just before dawn.

rip. hard to tell.

mercy. ain't you got a watch or something?

diane. only my wedding ring.

rip. you know owls have perfect sense of time.

mercy. everything speeds up.

diane. faster-faster-faster.

rip. hoo-hoo! hoo-hoo!

mercy. everything slows down.

diane. slower. slower...

rip. plenty lizards out here.

mercy. no, lizards, snakes, scorpions- all over me! glow-worms-

diane. sssshhhhh! slower...

rip. and rats. not much conifer growth though- just patches here and there. here a patch. there a patch. everywhere a patch-patch. no semblance at all to the preferred habitat of the mexican spotted owl, the great spruces and pines of the rio grande valley. that perennial oasis. but atleast there's rats out here. and bugs. now see that over there?

mercy. that other hill there?

diane. where?

rip. there- that strand of oaks, withered as all hell. now see that dense stand just to the left of it? see? all brown on the top? that's a cypress. an evergreen. now if you follow all along the horizon

with your finger and count as many of those cypresses you see, and circle around yourself like an owl, and say you even had mystical eyes that could see through to the other side of that hill, and if you were to keep following that horizon with those mystical eyes all the way back to your starting place, i'd bet all the planets in the sky for two kids and a kidney you wouldn't count more than a handful of trees.

mercy. roadsigns to the left-

diane. planets-

rip. a single owl for each tree.

mercy. roadside trees to the right-

diane. to the naked eye.

rip. so do the math.

mercy. how many?

diane. Mercury, Venus, Mars-

rip. the mystical eye.

mercy. let me think.

diane. Jupiter, Saturn.

rip. how many would that total?

mercy. five.

diane. five.

rip. no more than five. now i'll ask you something else. if there's only enough conifer for five of those owls in all of these barren hills, how is it that we're standing in the very epicenter of the largest ever overland owl migration in recorded history? Hell- you know in the past six months alone, over half a million of those things, birds of prey that they are, have flown hundreds, thousands of miles outta their way to come here- to these godforsaken hills to die. now what in god's name are they all coming *here*, for?

mercy. oh god oh god oh god oh god oh god oh-

diane. there! you see that?

rip. what?

mercy. headlights!

diane. that! there! look! you see it? you see it? do you see it?

rip. there's no explanation for it.

mercy. everything speeds up.

diane. faster-faster-faster.

rip. hoo-hoo! hoo-hoo!

mercy. over a hundred miles per hour!

diane. sssshhhhh!

rip. the owls.

mercy. the Lights. i can see them, but-

diane. the stars.

rip. hoo-hoo!

mercy. she's screaming!

diane. sssshhhhh!

rip. she's dreaming?

mercy. no, marfa!

diane. everything slows down.

rip. low frequency.

mercy. marfa's screaming!

rip. hoo! hoo! hoo! hoo! hoo! hoo!

mercy. (*gulps*) i think i'll take that piss now.

-----first interlude. *darkness.*

puke. (*enters opposite, singing*)

'if you piss upon a star, / makes no difference who you are, / anyway your sharts transpire / will come back onto you-'

silence, then a wild fluttering of birdwing.

puke. (*as if relieving himself*) ah, yes. by all means. and, ah.. and, ah... and, ah... there. yes? inhale the high desert. the northern star. the star of kings. (*inhales deeply*) and now... and, now... and, now... (*exhales*) exhale. yes? lung the air. the northern Lights. aurora borilungus. what does it mean? (*sits*) a blue note, here a purple note. after all is said and done, maybe, with a little luck, a lackluster hue of satellite brown. these sounds after all are only colors that i see in the night. and for every note, a separate color and saturation-

a note raises, sustained, like in the music hermann nitsch.

puke. there- a fuzzy fuschia. and now, just barely, perhaps a mooncalf-husband-gray, but viscous as a toothless nanny's milk.

another note gradually overtakes the first.

puke. it's called synesthesia. oh, you've heard of it? noun. a neurocomical feloni-nonsense, also an involuntary inability to distinguish colors from sounds and vice-versa. i was born into it, see. my father had it. and his father before him. and his father. and his father. and his father. and his. and his father. and his mother. and her dog. the sensations and cognitive portals are thus scrambled,

do

re

mi

fa

so, into eachother, a rainbow of chords, a symphony of colors, the stars trembling to their own luminous music. forms and shapes come freely to hand of their own accord. aurora synesthesia. aurora tra-la-la. perchance, this condition of mine is the deep why and what-for which prompted the alien bastards, remember, the Uranuses, to yearn to probe my... no, no, no, no,

no. you're right. proceed we must, the hour ages
like a soft, albeit riotously rotting fruit. well, then?

crickets, slowly...

puke. *(smiles)* yes. the second song in the cricket's
repertoire is a courting song, sotto voce,
a plaintive melancholy-

----- III. *darkness. music, softly, quickly.*

Lights quickly up again, to reveal-

the Tent, and a rearrangement of the players-

(marfa *stands to the left in an immaculate blouse)*

(rip *gazes into the distance, bags under his eyes)*

(diane *paces in the background, her ear to a portable radio)*

marfa. *(whispers)* yesyesyesyesyesyesyesyes-

diane. sssshhhhhh.

marfa. yesyesyesyesyesyesyes-

diane. sssshhhhhh. sssshhhhhh.

rip. she's here.

marfa. yes, i'm awake.

diane. good morning.

rip. no, night.

marfa. i had the weirdest fucking dream. i was sleeping in the Tent and i heard this noise and i looked over- and it was a lamb! a fucking lamb in my Tent! like cloven-hoofed and bleating for it's mother or god knows what! i mean, yeah, i get it- it's a camping trip and it's supposed to be all bucolic, but we're not a couple of argonauts searching for the golden fleece, you know? so i turn to tell mercy to get this fucking baby bleating lamb out of our brand new Tent, but he's not there- it's just me and this lamb. it was so vivid, i can still hear the echoes of its bleating.

rip. its bleeding?

diane. no.

marfa. yes. it bleated for my milk, and it wouldn't stop and so, i- i nursed it. and after it'd nursed on my milk for a while, the lamb, it looked up into my eyes and it spoke to me. and its voice was not made of words, but of sand. a bridge of sand, and i began crossing its voice to the other side of the hill which was my dream, or rather the substrata where dream and death converge, and then i myself bleated. and i nursed on these great nipples of Light, these great lambent breasts which swirled like whirlpools over the dark sand. and after i nursed on the milk, i gazed into the stars which gazed back at me, and i spoke.

diane. sssshhhh.

rip. there's no explanation for it.

marfa. yes, but my speech was not a language, but a bridge of sand back to me.

diane. you wake up and you no longer know the names of things.

rip. hill. lizard. cypress. moon.

marfa. sex. bone. insect. station wagon.

diane. he bought it at a used car lot.

rip. it was a wedding gift.

marfa. mercy? he bought me the land-rover as an engagement gift.

diane. it was a piece of shit.

rip. but you loved it.

marfa. perfect for camping trips.

diane. but i loved it- just like i loved my wedding ring, even though it wasn't a nice ring. in fact, it wasn't a ring at all. it was the wire hood from the champagne bottle we shared on the night we met. remember? we made love...

rip. it was new year's eve.

marfa. it was like kissing a saint bernard.

diane. like a bad game of tennis.

rip. deuce.

marfa. forty-all.

diane. my serve?

marfa. yes.

rip. no, it's mine.

diane. sorry.

marfa. thirty.

diane. fifteen.

marfa. love.

rip. yeah, i pretty much wrote the book on shit-faced that night.

diane. he threw up all over me.

diane. then he rolled me off the bed.

diane. then he fell on top of me.

marfa. i'm worried about mercy.

rip. i never had the proper focus for love-making.

diane. you know what it is, sagittarius?

marfa. he's acting insane.

rip. insomnia?

diane. it's the influence of Jupiter. you're far-sighted like an centaur-

rip. you know owls are far-sighted.

diane. but you miss the details here and there...

rip. patches in the road.

marfa. he's got the shakes.

diane. who?

rip. mercy.

marfa. delirium tremens.

diane. sssshhhhh!

rip. hallucinations.

marfa. alcohol withdrawal.

diane. he's sleeping.

rip. thinks he's got scorpions-

marfa. pink elephants-

diane. bugs, needles-

marfa. all over him.

rip. in his head.

marfa. he thinks i'm dead.

diane. you know what it is?

rip. the hangover?

marfa. he keeps going on and on about some accident.

diane. it's the influence of Saturn.

rip. the shadow of Mercury.

marfa. the rings of Saturn.

diane. the planet of melancholy.

rip. the rings under my eyes?

marfa. our engagement rings.

diane. our wedding rings.

rip. the great migration.

marfa. the great migraine?

diane. it's Mercury retrograde.

marfa. the greater malefic.

rip. the marfa Lights.

diane. magnets.

marfa. mirages.

rip. maggots.

diane. maybe you should lie down.

marfa. when was the last time you slept?

rip. in the Tent?

diane. with my husband.

marfa. with your wife.

rip. hard to tell.

diane. we couldn't conceive.

marfa. mercy and i, we couldn't conceive.

rip. like these hills.

diane. i was barren.

marfa. i used all kinds of proceptive pills, and then finally-

rip. i see-

diane. i feel-

marfa. i use. i had a miscarriage.

rip. i had no idea.

diane. a kiss-marriage?

marfa. no.

rip. sorry.

diane. no, it's me.

marfa. yes. kiss-marriage is better. desolate word, the other. miss. misbear. mistake. mislife.
all of it reduced to the two just-same dates rounding a hyphen.

rip. did you just say pounding a hymen?

marfa. mercy and i never said miscarriage, we just called it the 'thing', for lack of a better word,
when really it wasn't a 'thing' at all but a not-'thing', a lack.

diane. and somehow afterwards she got it in her head that being a capricorn, she was, like, the embodiment of Saturn or something-
no, not the planet Saturn but the god Saturn, you know: the roman
god who devoured all of his children one by one, consumed them,
filicidal, tearing them limb by limb and digesting them, just
swallowing him whole unborn into the marrow of her bones.

marfa. and that's when he started drinking.

rip. he's sleeping.

diane. who?

marfa. my fiancée.

rip. good night.

diane. sssshhhhh!

marfa. she has something to tell you.

rip. who?

diane. it's a miracle.

marfa. your wife.

rip. what?

diane. i have something to tell you.

marfa. yes-

rip. no.

marfa. wake up.

rip. i know.

diane. i'm pregnant.

----- second interlude. *darkness again.*

puke. (*enters, turns, points to and fro*)

no, no, no, no, no, yes, and on this side, ladies and pricks, you'll see the wondrous marfa Lights, right here to your left no to your westward shoulder there as the owl flies over the mitchell flat here, the marfa 'ghost Lights' as they're also called, first seen in the late 1800s, great circles, arcs, pink ellipsoids in the distance, random sparks in the dark, usually in shapes of orbs, balls, basketball size, give or take, also diamonds, polygons, honeycombs, rhododendrons, never can tell, usually hover at shoulder height or maybe not and zip and move in patterns not in patterns or maybe stand still or move laterally at low speeds, high speeds, vanish or persist, slowly fade or slowly come in pairs in groups or all alone under any conditions only at night just before dawn on a sunday on a private ranch after a cow dies when it's been raining, see? now some people say it's the work of god almighty, say it's just headlights refracted from off highway 67 coming from presidio either that or ball lightning from the electric field, all gives the illusion, see, of some kinda 'mystical' phenomenon, when in fact these hills are full of quartz- and as those quartz crystals expand-

mercy. (*unseen*) OH. AHH. OB.

puke. and expand-

mercy. (*unseen*) OH. AHH. OB.

puke. and so forth during the day, and contract-

diane. (*unseen*) sssssssshhhhhhh!

puke. and so on throughout the night from a process called thermal expansion, what they do is develop an electric charge which builds, builds, builds, builds-

rip. (*unseen*) hoo! hoo! hoo! hoo!

marfa. (*unseen?*) yesyesyesyesyesyes!

puke. like a bottle rocket in the flat and goes POP!, gets discharged into little blue-green- orange-white embers in the atmosphere, just a simple electrical effect, lots of crystals have it, and ceramics and bones and magnets too, but if you ask me..... it's *them*. it's all Them. Uranuses. the alien bastards. illegal fairies of the skies. three-headed portal potty pilots of the-

crickets interrupt, roaring.

puke. quick! behowl the moon, they've come! there's no time to spell it out! mercury's headlights cut the clouds full fast! the cricket's third song is aggressive, trojan red and triggered by chemoreceptors in the insect's antennae that detect the near presence of another male cricket. and now, ladies and pricks, i depart!

----- IV. *darkness. crickets roar. Lights quickly up again, to reveal-*

the Tent, and a rearrangement of the players-

(**mercy** stands to the left w/ a bottle, beads of sweat, shaking)

(**marfa** stands in center, her blouse disturbed)

(**rip** gazes into the distance, bags under his eyes)

marfa. the male sex drive has often been described. the pygmalion myth. we all know the story. the desire to control a woman, to subdue her, break her in, put the breaks on her, to mold her into an object, carve her into ivory, into bone. what's often overlooked is that it's a two-way street.

mercy. the process is reversible.

marfa. the woman breaks down, and the man dismounts.

mercy. oh god oh god oh god oh god oh god oh-

marfa. now it isn't he but she who has the reins.

mercy. god oh god oh god no god please-

marfa. and she drives him.

mercy. don't you start again!

rip. but i haven't even said anything!

marfa. uses him.

mercy. no, but you were about to!

rip. what?

marfa. yes.

mercy. you were about to start again with those stupid owl calls!

rip. no, i hear things!

marfa. i use.

mercy. i desire.

rip. i see. owls, everywhere, birds of prey, panic attacks like talons digging into my skull.

mercy. they're not real, you know.

rip. they're nocturnal- migraines like meteors, been losing weight for weeks, weight scale in the bathroom like an airplane fuel gauge in the movies, emergency dials glowing, dropping, doesn't matter- i can gorge myself on chopped liver and chocolate til the cows come home, not to mention diane acting like a moonstruck prepubescent nymph under a full moon on a corrugated tin roof with a tennis racket up her ass all the time. 'so,' i said. 'let's go camping,'

marfa. 'okay.' we'd been together that night, our first time since the... kiss-marriage. it was like... the birth of Venus.

mercy. hell, are you kidding? it was like the god dim-damn fucking renaissance! we made mucked-up masterpieces in bed, me and marfa, painted and puked at the ceiling with our love, weaved tapestries of flesh and pincers and pubic hair like goats, built great exorcist pyramids of sex, held banquets with boiled sweets, figs, saps, cunts, juices, labia, nipples- our bed a fucking trampoline, ourselves the seven seas, so that now, no, never again, if i laid my ear inside a conch shell i'd still hear behind those echoes of echoes of waves of waves and waowaowaowao the end-all-be-all ecstasy of us.

rip. we made love for the first time in- what was it? weeks? months? di and i, that very night before. we planned the trip for the coming weekend. then i see doc bottom, coupla days after that. he tells me, tells me i got this 'thing' which is this rare godforsaken thing that's like some dog almost a hellhound or a saint bernard dog with a three-headed name- 'fatal.' 'familial.' 'insomnia.' a desolate name. 'supposed to be genetic', he says, special reserve, some genetic mutation for the chosen few, but damned if anybody in my family ever heard the hell of it. basically i can't sleep a wink and that's all there is to it. a fucking night owl. hell, that's why i've been sleeping on the couch or outside on the roof bird-watching drinking coffee taking ice cold tub baths all the damn time, it's not the open air, it's just... this... always in a state of tension, as if the moonlight like the strings of a new bow with the arrow pulled forward, in reverse, aimed at yourself, and the bed your burning hell, patches of light so fickle i'm afraid to drive the station wagon anymore lest i, lest... ... anyway, after a while, that is, this 'thing', which is, this lack, whatever it is or it isn't, apparently it gives way to hallucinations, auditory, visual, random sparks in the dark. then eventually full blown dementia. after a while, you go mute and then you go into a coma or something. i don't have all the facts yet. but there's no cure. takes about a year and a half to die from it. i've been waiting for the right moment to tell her. diane. when we were alone, you know. out here under the stars.

marfa. she's sleeping!

mercy. she thinks i'm drunk.

marfa. she thinks i'm dead.

rip. she's dreaming.

mercy. she's screaming?

marfa. you know what it is?

rip. the moon?

mercy. her time of the month?

marfa. your wife.

rip. it's Mercury.

mercy. Mercury?

marfa. like the roman god?

rip. no, it's all Mercury's fucking fault.

marfa. like the element?

mercy. pink elephants?

marfa. like the planet.

rip. yes, it's Mercury retrograde.

marfa. the cosmic trickster.

mercy. the hell does that mean?

marfa. the trickster cosmic.

rip. the hell does what mean?

mercy. what she said.

marfa. the process is reversible.

mercy. she said what?

rip. it's an optical illusion just above the horizon- atleast that's what di was saying. three times a year it appears to slow down and stop- now see that's one station. think of it as a planetary pit stop. then for another three weeks it reverses its course in the night sky, migrates backward and stops again, which makes a second station. then, lo and behold, it finally resumes it's natural forward motion overhead, it's quicksilver trajectory in the cosmos, takes another few days for it to return and pass its original

position after which the whole celestial drama repeats itself, repeats itself, repeats itself, repeats, endlessly, until, yes, final... yes... the very final station.

marfa. yes. they're coming!

mercy. a station wagon?

rip. low frequency station.

marfa. the Lights.

mercy. they're optical illusions.

rip. there's no explanation for it.

puke. 'burung hantu.'

marfa. 'burung hantu.'

mercy. people will tell you they're any number of things, angels-

rip. who?

marfa. ghosts.

mercy. aliens.

rip. the headlights?

marfa. the ghost Lights.

mercy. the hell does that mean?

rip. the hell does what mean?

marfa. 'burung hantu.'

puke. 'burung hantu.'

mercy. what she said.

rip. the malaysian word for owls. 'ghost birds'. when an owl lights down on your shoulder it means you're marked for death.

marfa. yes.

rip. everything slows down.

marfa. slower. slower.

mercy. low frequency.

rip. forces of repulsion.

marfa. expands.

mercy. the process is reversible.

marfa. contracts.

rip. forces of attraction.

mercy. high frequency station.

(radio music plays)

marfa. faster-faster-faster.

rip. everything speeds up.

marfa. yes. yes.

mercy. over forty miles per hour.

marfa. forty-all.

rip. my swerve.

mercy. no, it's mine.

marfa. yes, love.

rip. roadsigns to the right!

mercy. sixty miles per hour!

marfa. faster-faster-faster!

rip. light of heel!

mercy. no, eighty!

marfa. mercy! yes!

rip. no, Mercury! like a bullet in the sky!

mercy. no, a hundred miles per hour!

marfa. watch the road!

rip. patches!

mercy. headlights!

marfa. here!

rip. there!

mercy. where?

marfa. over there, on the other side!

rip. of the road?

mercy. that other hill there?

marfa. no, there! just above the horizon!

rip. they're coming!

marfa. i'm coming!

mercy. the Lights! i can see them, but-

rip. she's dreaming!

mercy. she's screaming.

marfa. YES!

mercy. marfa's screaming!

marfa. 'YES! YES! YES!'

mercy. like a maniac!

marfa. 'YES! YES! YES! YES! YES!'

rip opens up the Tent, and hundreds of thousands of owls flutter out...

radio music subsides.

mercy. after that night, the night of our so-called 'renaissance', she was lit up like a firework. the morning we left, she was so excited she was swinging shit- sleeping bags, backpacks, liquor cases- literally, like pete sampras, *grand-slamming* shit into the land-rover like it was a fucking tennis court or an ark. then, on the drive out, god knows what was in her head. she was thinking all sorts of perversities, like animal kingdom shit, insects crawling up her orifices. and i'm drinking whiskey from the bottle, just trying to keep up with her, driving faster, then i look down and be damned if she isn't getting off on it!

marfa. faster-faster...

(rip recedes into the background, paces, the portable radio to his ear)

mercy. -she starts saying, whispering. then louder-

marfa. Faster-Faster-Faster...

mercy. then she screams-

marfa. YES! FASTER!

mercy. jesus, hell. you want faster, bitch? i take a drink. fine. i hit the fucking pedal. night folds over us, the invisible star-fall. windows down, gentle glowing dials of the dashboard. we're coming, coming down into the high desert now, over a hundred miles per hour, geometry of the highway almost smooth 'cept for maybe a few wet patches here and there, and then... the Lights. headlights. i can see them, but i don't swerve. i don't even hesitate. i just drive straight toward them, road-side trees to the right, the hood of the car like the deranged needle of a compass, roadsigns to the left, directly into them. that's right, it was a deliberate act. the child of whiskey and speed and the night mad with love. (*takes a long drink*) i tell you, it was deliberate.

----- third interlude. *darkness; a radio tunes, static.*

puke. (*enters slowly*) and i go, and i go, and i go, and look at how i go. up and down, round and round, westwards, underwards, fastwards, skywards, i've led them, two of both kinds, makes four, this is the woman, but not this the man, this the man, not this the woman. scorpion, crab, centaur goat. flying saucers? no. sighing flossers, more like it! and slicing faucets, all! but yonder sings the candy-colored dawn, and shines like new tobacco the morning lark. the desert birth....

the fourth call of the cricket is a copulatory call, a brief song after sex. and so... now is the time for me to bid you goodnight- but not yet! we have one more piece of music to hear- a coda, if you will. first, ahem, it appears that the roof-top follies of this alien portal have coiled like a thirsty throat beneath us, yes? thirsty. indeed. very thirsty. and now is the time for me to bid you goodnight. but not yet. and now. *(walks around with his great porcelain jug, pouring water or wine for everybody, saying-)* and now. but not yet. and now. and now is the time. but not yet. and now. but not quite yet! and... almost now. goodnight. yes, now is the time. but not very quite just yet. and now. and not yet. the time. but not yet. goodnight. just not yet. but now. and now. and now. but not quite yet! and... almost now. goodnight. yes, now is the time. but the time is not yet. and now. and now. but not yet! but wait...
(etc, etc, exits)

----- V. darkness; crickets softly; music.

*and finally, **the Tent**, and scattered around it-*

*(**diane** stands to the left, her wild hair strewn, transfixed by the Light)*

*(**mercy** stands in center, sweating torrentially)*

*(**marfa** stands to the right in a blood-stained blouse)*

diane. feel them.

mercy. fuck them.

marfa. use them.

diane. dream them. dream the world past the horizon of speech...

diane. and then wake. and forget the names of things. rip comes in from the bathroom after checking the weight scale. he looks up and says-

mercy. 'let's go camping.'

marfa. 'okay.'

diane. for a full month mute he's been until this moment. we have guests over- burgundy, boiled sweets, chocolate, a dime bag mixed with tobacco fruits which we smoke from a hooka in the bathroom because we don't want to share it. next thing i know i'm high in bed. floating in cold

sheets. i hear voices in the other room. then i look up- it's rip. threshold of our room. he's been sleeping outside, or on the couch for how many weeks. turns the dial of our bedroom Lights to dim, his eyes are comets coming at me. the brass lock of our door he claps shut. the very last word he speaks. now closer to me, somehow his shirt melts apart in our fingers without our touching a single button. between us the nervous music of our breath. i watch him follow me with his arms like walls of stars. fall toward him as if this was the first constellation the first humans ever named. the next morning, i was pregnant. it was a miracle, like some shower of gold in the obsidian night. and we, the three of us, he and i and ours, i wanted to carry gifts from us each like magi across and over to the other side where the gods of nativity rule, gold, frankincense, myrrh, to where dream and birth converge. but i decided then that i'd wait for the camping trip to tell him, when we were out under the stars. somehow, i think he always already knew. dreams broken by reality.

mercy. reality wrecked by dreams. and darkness in the rearview mirror. i shift the gear into reverse, try to back up, i don't know why, doesn't make any sense. as if i can take it all back if i just put it in reverse. i remember the horrible sound the engine made, waowaowaowao, like a wounded animal. but there's smoke everywhere. the land-rover's totaled, no doubt about it. still hear music on the radio, that's the funny thing. then i look past the still glowing dials, through the shards in the windshield, and i can see that the two people in the other car are dead. looks like a station wagon. i look over at marfa. she's got blood all over her, her blouse. her arm just hanging there like an apostrophe. i take the ring off her finger. crawl out the window. open the trunk. grab the Tent and a case of whiskey. and then i walk away, up. here. everything slows down.

marfa. slower. slower.

diane. sssshhhhh.

mercy. oh god-

marfa. slower.

diane. sssshhhhh.

mercy. god.

marfa. slower.

diane. sssshhhhh. sssshhhhh.

mercy. god...

marfa. yes... slower...

diane. look! it's stopped. there's Mercury- there! see it? just above the horizon, at it's second station, direct station, the peak of retrograde energy- when miscommunication, misperception, miss-everything is at its marvelous utmost! do you see it?

mercy. yes. do you see it?

marfa. yes. do you?

diane. yes.

sounds of wind-chimes, softly building.

diane. okay, full disclosure: i had a magnet collection in grade school. yeah, i know. i was a total geek. i can't say why but they always made me feel so serene. i started out with these five magnets, supposed to represent the five planets visible to the naked eye- Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn. i hung them from strings from my ceiling like wind chimes. did you ever have any of those little glow-in-the-dark stars all over your ceiling when you were a kid? yeah, me too. and i would invite my four best friends over and just really geek the fuck out about these magnets- i'd tell them all about the forces of attraction in the air between us, all around us, the gravitational pull yoking us together and then yanking us apart. but then i had my own big magnet which i'd always keep with me like a talisman, and i'd hold it up towards the string magnets so that they'd heave and coil and contort and spin mystically as if living, only sometimes one would break from the ceiling and fall and then- then i'd pull it towards me across the floor with my own big magnet like a tugboat pulling a ship with an invisible line, except for mine was bigger, and then i'd take it in my hands and i'd toss it up into the air for the four remaining planets to lunge forward alive together and catch the fallen one easy with their sleek metal skin like acrobats, and for a moment i was like a ringmaster in the greatest natural circus on earth, in my own little bedroom, and all my friends would applaud.

--

casey wimpee
july 2008