



Image from String Theory

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The Thief of Yellow Roses (excerpts)

Pre-poem Poem

You call yourself a poet, write poems and perform them in public, but now you don't want to write poems with the first person pronoun "I," which has turned into a straitjacket, even as the earth has turned into an oven, and so you now write parataxis poems to cool down, break the ties that bind you and seek roses everywhere.

The Thief of Yellow Roses

You, poet and thief, steal yellow roses in the shadow of St. Ignatius, careful not to be caught by the

Carmelite sisters, smuggle them
home, add them to the white bowl
and inhale the sacred scent.

Last Port of Call

At noon on the Barbary Coast
on the last day of the year,
the sky turns a true blue above
you,
the tattooed sailor, with
pierced earlobes who sails the
seven seas in storms and becalmed in
doldrums where you long
for the love you lost in your
last port of call.

Crossing Borders

Sailor,
you walk with her on the
beach, not as often as you'd
like, so you walk alone,
hover where water meets land,
gaze at the space where she
once stood, remember that
she offered you her hand to
steady your unsteady sea legs.

In the Poetry Room

She counts the minutes before
her flight to Halifax.
You have an afternoon to kill.
Paths cross at City Lights,
where you perch in the poetry
room, gaze at the laundry
flapping in the wind,
shake your head when she asks
“Are you a native San Franciscan?”
and read the look of regret in her eyes.

Amen, Amen
(For C.A.)

Hot sour soup spicy fish

eggplant cabbage, pal Charlie
across the table. Later, you
view art, stumble into a
meeting of the Businessmen's
Fellowship.

"Don't take yourself so
seriously,"
the Black minister says.
"If you can get out of bed
on your own in the morning,
you're blessed."
Amen, amen.

Blackberry Love

She misses her Blackberry,
and, though you have never
had one and don't know what
a Blackberry is,
you miss your Blackberry, too,
much as you miss Iceland and Brazil,
though you have never visited
either place, miss her, though you
have never had her and she has
never had you, except in your
Blackberry love.

Circulate in the Blue Sky

Maybe you will not vacate your
solitary room,
maybe you will become so
wrapped up in self that
you will forget the future,
or maybe you will evacuate
your space and look for her
in every face you see on
every street corner of the city,
breathe again while you can
still breathe, become a cloud
and circulate in the blue sky.

Your Triple Goddess

You write a poem about her,
though that isn't saying much

since she lurks behind almost
every poem you write at
Ocean Beach, Golden Gate Park
and at Dragon Beaux,
where she eats with chopsticks,
and where you sip green tea and
all in love with her, your
Triple Goddess all over again.

Nam Myoho Renge Kyo
(For H.C.)

She chants Tuesdays
with six other chanters,
all chanting at more or less
the same pace while you
listen and repeat the
Japanese words,
Nam Myoho Renge Kyo,
notice her voice rises
to the white ceiling,
while her dog wanders
freely and sniffs everywhere,
quieted only by
Nam Myoho Renge Kyo.

Aged Beautifully

She's more beautiful now than when you first met her, when she
was forty years younger than she is now. At the dining room table
you gaze into her eyes and devour the feast she has prepared, now
relieved that nothing serious happened between you forty years
ago, when sparks first flew.

The Red and White Pillow

She didn't have much to give
in return for the aid you gave
the refugees, but she gave you
what she had to give:
a red and white pillow, made
before the war began, conceived
in love and too beautiful to take
to the bed where you lay your head.

Reparations Department

You, the thief of yellow roses,
write a check, make it out
to the "Reparations Department,"
mail it to the White House;
it comes back stamped
"return to sender" and
"addressee unknown."

In the Pool

They survived surgery,
both now nearly deaf,
meet in the shallow end
of the pool; she is
Chinese and half his size
with short black hair
and a Ph.D. in child psychology.
You are an American and
twice her size with short
brown hair and a Ph.D.
in Philosophy.
Aerobic exercises heal old wounds.

The Purple Beret

Empty coffee cups
on the counter,
yellow roses in the vase,
and hiking shoes in the corner.
Her purple beret calls to
you now, the words
"goodbye forever" echoing in your head.

In the Men's Locker Room

One man with an enormous
belly and tiny ass, another
man with tattoos across his
chest, a third man navigates the
locker room with a walker.
Some with foreskins and
some without. All day
long, men getting
dressed and undressed.

Etiquette Demanded

You didn't look them in
the eye; none of the
men did. The women
were too young and too
beautiful; etiquette
demanded
no one look, touch or talk.
But on Monday nights
men and women
unrolled their mats and
practiced yoga together silently.

Angel at the Bridge

The winds from the west
blew so fiercely that every
time you saw the angel
extend her wings and
try to fly, she went nowhere.
A woman in Spandex
knelt down and prayed.
The angel rose above
the bridge,
extended her wings,
hovered above you, and
disappeared in the fog
that beat back the rays of the sun.

Umbrellas

"You won't need those,"
she tells you and points
to the four umbrellas—
two black and two red—
you carried to the city.
That season it rained
a river; the umbrellas
kept you both dry.

In Bed with Her Beloved Books.

(For M.T. & F.J.)

In another life,

she received one lover Mondays,
Wednesdays and Fridays,
the other lover Tuesdays
and Thursday. Now, in
bed with library books in Spanish,
she reads all day, turns
the pages slowly,
inhales the aroma
of the roses and
falls fast asleep.

Puts Himself in Harness

You want her to rescue
you
and are too proud to ask,
but when she begs
you to rescue her,
you put yourself in harness,
build a castle with a
moat, a drawbridge,
a tower and an internet
connection that frees her
from her feudal self.

Velcro Man

You are too tired and stiff
at the end of day to bend
over and tie shoelaces.
So you use footwear with
Velcro that makes life a tad
easier, remember the Spanish
you learned in school and
the time you ran from the Barcelona police
at the old port.

Be Patient, Patient

When will you arrive at
your next port of call?
When will you return
to the locus where land
meets sea, and when
will you
gather more rose buds?

Soon, very soon. Be
patient, old soul. Be patient.

The Holiest of Harbors

You arrive at the end
of your voyage in the
holiest of harbors
where you secure sails,
stow gear, amble down
gangplank, steady
sea legs and
kiss the parched earth
beneath bare feet.

Jonah Raskin is the author of eight poetry chapbooks and a book about Allen Ginsberg's "Howl," titled *American Scream*; he is also editor of nonfiction at *Caveat Lector*. He has been writing and performing poetry for more than forty years. He often performs his poetry at Black Bird Books in San Francisco and is available to perform at other events. He can be reached at jonah.raskin@sonoma.edu.