



ARMEN ABALIAN

SELECTED POEMS

2016-2019

VAPOR TRAIL

Originally published in Ghost City Press, May 5, 2017

I woke up to a beautiful vapor trail

Unexpected and orange
Across the silence of the daybreak
Its hue a kind gift from the waking sun

Straight and persistent
Blazing bravely into the dark blue canvas

Most people, still in the midst of some incomprehensible
rem sequence, or caught up in the rituals of an anti-
daydream existence, will miss this

But I saw it
And despite my best efforts to conjure up a boarding pass, I
had to just let it disappear into the horizon

A.S.

Some nights I woke up next to you and saw you looking at me

Or vice versa

Which areas of your mostly hidden, hard to decipher inner world were you wandering around?

Lush mountain landscapes of green and purple?

Deep desert valleys of red and broken beige?

Or were you lost in some nondescript, fragmented reality, looking at me, trying to tell me you couldn't find a way out?

I never asked, I was just happy to have you there, next to me

OLOMOUC

Invisible rifts in comfortable rooms, unspoken truths amidst
so many spoken ones that nothing seems missing
Touching, lips, grasping, thighs, tongues, the rest
The cold winter responsible for diminished hand holding,
briefly made possible again by cheap Chinese gloves

Something absent is calling you beyond the borders of the
bed, beyond the walls of this room

You are running away, my love
But you are still my love

Fuck this city

BALLOON

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There once was a girl who filled a balloon with helium.

She was a pretty girl, and filled the balloon just right.

She held it for a while, then let it fly.

As it flew, against its will, the distance grew between it and her and the rest of the world below it

Until it popped, somewhere in the atmosphere.

FIGMENT

I came up to her and was brave
A bravery born without a hitch
My nerves too preoccupied with voices from the past
I nudged her and then just floated away
A brief flash before fading into the flood of darkness
Another figment of her imagination
An unsuccessful attempt to materialize again in this city, on
this planet
In a painless reality that smells of freshly brewed coffee and
a lover's neck

LUNCH DATE

They spoke of her for days and days.
When she appeared, she wore a dress that made me want to
stop time and make love to her
Both in the moment and in timelessness.

She ordered Thai, I ordered Vietnamese.

We sat across from each other, with an insurmountable
distance between us.

3:30 AM

Night is for sleeping
And for feeding cats and obsessions
And for filling holes with invisible cement
And for involuntary tourism to the no man's land along the
border with the sad subconscious

AUGUSTÓW

Birds chirp
The sun shines

The chirping echoes memories
Misguided thoughts, as many as there are bird sounds on
this crisp, sunny morning

These thoughts, like everything else this morning, are
illuminated by the sun, not overpowered by it.

NIL

Invasive memories

Like the random blowing of bullhorns by boorish drunks
coming home at 3:00 AM

On a calm, manageable day

On a calm, manageable lake

Ripples made by our feet

And hands

No one who was there

Will ever know how truly perfect that moment was

Not even you

IN BETWEEN STATIONS

She checks and rechecks for a cyber half-truth that will
drown out the drone of the subway

Stoic, unidirectional, persistent

Where is the sudden, exciting promise?

The babble of the lonely, cynical, desperate, filtered
through an electrical box, made fake, robotic, digitized,
redistributed

Her pills spill out on the floor, and she looks around,
slightly embarrassed, slightly pissed off

Half-way between the server and the false hope of a digital
feeling, no one notices

I KNOW YOU

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for Ania

I know you
Misread, misfired
A missile, muddy, not malevolent

Sleepwalking, I throw daggers that convert to flowers in
mid air
And land at your feet
Some dead, some still alive

Somnambulant in some nebula

We are fluid and separate, fragile and failed
Lost unkind kindred spiritless oneness and fondness
Soul fondue of grease, love, and falling into bad habits
Observing each other from different dimensions

Distant, dim

I know you can cause concussions, conundrums,
consternation
That you convulse gently, smiling eyes closed to the rough
water
I know you don't want to be constantly callous

Cats, catatonia

I know that you hurt me
On the plains of Mongolia
And in the northernmost reaches of the harsh Norwegian
landscape
Beyond the prayers of all the Armenian grandmothers
praying in all the small-town Armenian churches

I know you
Malleable
Marble
And I wonder what you know
What you really know
About me
About someone you ultimately couldn't understand

RED LIGHT

Anonymous, standing to my right
Flustered by the heat/outfit/waiting time
A week of thunderstorms ruins the straightness of her hair
and brings out that hideous hint of curls
Restless at the red light
The thunder must be disheartening, every rumble, lightning
bolt
Lightning bolts are best consumed proverbially
A promise of shock, cohesion, power, change
Peace
So absent now
Just the nothingness of strangers like me

GHOST

A weak impulse, and even weaker knees, eating, drinking,
sleeping, swoosh, ugh, reaching, folding, stacking, rituals,
dreaming, singing, quiet first, progressively louder, trying
to scare, this ghost, does not bang doors, or make the floors
creak, or appear, human, or otherwise, just moves through
me, like I wasn't even there, such ease, like there's some
kind of determined resolve, behind it, but there isn't, it's just
chance, boredom, in that other realm, not really playful or
pitiful, one day, some day, she'll get used to it, she'll know,
she can't connect, only haunt, until then, swoosh, there she
goes again, maybe, she knows, already.

HOBO

Bumps on the rails

Trails of tired lives traversing plains, mountains

Three and thirty hours, days, dazed, weeks, months

Chronic hobo syndrome, imagined briefly, a sunbeam
through a crack

Freedom to breathe darkness with black lungs, freedom to
roll around in filth without being called dirty, freedom to
embrace the harshness of failure until it fades into the
distance

Freedom to laugh loudly, or to be silent

I am all this, and none of it is convincing

CONNECTED

High speed through low country
Connections connectors few contacts or contentment
Countless scenarios
Simultaneously stifling
Inflamed stomach demons surfing on waves of acid and
bitterness
Last times lingering longer than lost lives look at their locks
Platforms checked off checked out in mirrors still look like
a choke-hold
Back to cyber-sifting through serial superficiality
That cold hand again
Trying to build up my ego with it stupidly
Connecting vacuums with other vacuums
Hearts with heat neither of which exist
Haphazard lap dancers in soul chasms
Limited squiggly half-truths written by addicts
I am in that parade
Pandering to promises of a schism break
Eyes wide open, marching

NOTHING TO SEE HERE

I will keep it in my pocket
Despite my itchy fingers
This beautiful disaster I found on the road to nowhere in
particular

I will no longer show it
Half ashamed
Half proud
Like a sideshow attraction of unnatural poignancy

I will no longer bore, linger, force the issue ever so gently
My lips happy in the moment before the sorry saga begins
to exit them once again
Sharing the addiction like an old junkie who sees ghosts by
the railway tracks

Denying, scheming, all leading to nausea
Naive nurturing, nonsense

I will fall in line
Listen to old advice both harsh and heartfelt
Heresy and hearsay
But no more new advice as I am full
Full from my mouth opening and my ears absorbing
Not absorbing
Absorbing
Not absorbing

Full from gorging on saccharine to quell my hypoglycemia

I will remember and bandage it, air it out, lock it up, feed it,
water it with rancid digital water, starve it while crying over
it, laugh about it, feel superior to it, screw it, discard it,
brush it off, compare it
Kiss it in my dreams
But I will no longer share it

I've crossed the city spreading the word like a confused
intellectual maniac preacher from some unscrupulous
church, and now I stand at the city limits, exhausted,
looking at the suburbs
A million thoughts still in my head

LAST

A last secret
One final breach
Gently moving your hair behind your ear to whisper
To reveal a new intolerance

"Come here"

You can avoid the house
Avoid the neighborhood
Avoid the city
Avoid our history
Mute, muffle, or murder the memory
But if you want access to any of this
"Come here"
Is your only gateway

I am deaf to any other preamble
No more words, warped and wounded
Washed out or wistful
No more wishes, birthday or bogus
Friendly or furious
It has all been said
It has all been felt
Like a store sample phone, all the buttons pressed a million
times without actually making a single connection

No

"Come here"

So easy to save someone from the soliloquy of a summer
solitude

Don't try the back doors

Despite my weakness, I've managed to bolt them all

I have also closed all the windows

To avoid an accidental whiff of your perfume

Or an accidental chorus of a song that reminds me of you
blasting from some car for three seconds as it drives by

No

"Come here"

Say this, or don't say anything to me ever again

NOW HERE

Hooked

Falling, falling, failing

Faded frantically, asymmetrically

And surrounded with simulated symmetry

These little bits of cartoon life

Conditioned to think it's deep

Wading, waiting

Like a late train at a new station in an old city

Deceptive

Down

Down to a level that's below concrete, brick

Handheld unhappiness, heaving sighs

Handicapped emotions

No crutch

No elevator

No escalator

No train

Still no train

WOULD WE HAVE BEEN

Would we have been the one
Where, still in a sleepy daze, she rests her head against his
chest
Every inch of him, good enough
Every touch of him, warm
Where her messy hair through his fingertips like a bountiful
harvest after a long awaited rainfall
Wanting, wonder

Or would we have been the one
Where she sits next to him
Looks away, then at him
Soft words, sporadic, not stifling
Calm but not cold
Silence the rule, not an exception
A misread incongruence corrected with a smile
Steady, towards some specified or unspecified goal

Or would we have been the one
Poisoned but persistent
Puttering along
A love purple, disfigured, broken pedestal
Still held on to
Amidst arguments, dreams of escape
An alternative to drabness
Hidden chains, hooks, scars breaking through the smooth,
dry skin
Of something we are too ashamed to name

Maybe

Maybe

Maybe

But maybes all die because we are two

WAR

Battles with a sad Britpop song echoing on repeat inside my head

Dropped into delirium

Muted blasts, murderous swords, no surrender

Ready, not ready, the end, then a beginning

Frantic, futile

Statues, solemn, steady

Guns, and more guns amongst chest-beating declarations of pacifism

Frantic, futile

Hands not steady, feet faltering and dreaming of freedom

Freedom like a plane through the clouds, like a silence that carries no promise of sabotage

Ready, not ready

Diplomacy, corrupt, unconvincing

Hands shaken with spirits that slide off into the subconscious

Subs con, shift

A foreign landscape that has become familiar in its ability to cause pain, frustration

Fear, doubled, gnawing, tripled

A different light

Someone whispering "sleep", "rest", "give in"

Another song, another daybreak, one with a promise

One that destroys pretexts

I open my eyes

The war rages on

PATH

If you are the cold path uphill through the snow
Then I am the grey winter sky above you
With its sporadic breaks of sunshine

If you are the trees on this mountain, seemingly frozen solid
above a certain altitude
Branches covered with beautiful frost patterns
Then I am the mountain itself
I want to speak to you, but your roots have grown over my
ability to do so

If you are the animals trying to survive in the winter months
Then I am their last-minute luck in finding food or shelter
On an unlucky day of an unlucky week of an unlucky life

If you are the fatigue formed from the fear of failure
From staring at the February horizon still too far in the
distance
Then I am faith
The kind that you look for, and realize that you might just
be all out of

YOU WROTE BACK

You wrote back
Because it's rude and mean not to
Your words safe not sultry

You never write
But you always write back
Except for when I remind you of when I sent you my
perfect heart in an imperfect package

Then, and only then, you are silent

POST POST

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DARTS

Music

Magical muddled muck

Masticating melodies move slow like mucous

Make me miss

I've never been very good at darts or hearts

POST

At home feeling homeless

Between pillow screams and post-drought streams

I harness energy

Or lack thereof

Like outlines of horses

Running through torn landscapes

Silent, determined galloping

IOWA

Some people remind me of trees in autumn

Outside a town long forgotten

By those whose cradles were in bigger, better places
Maybe someday the town's name will pop up in their mind
Like a surprise relapse
And then maybe they'll recall
That you were my radar

TOAST

Here's to the mundane
Metered
Mess
Ticking so perfectly
The universe in control
Always burning toast
The right amount
Every time

ON THE PLUS SIDE

Positivity
Sporadically sensed
Lost in the increasingly impenetrable wilderness of my
experience
Stuck behind the iceberg that's lodged in my throat

There it is now, wincing

ACCESS

In this train bathroom
With its window, faded, though
Easily mistaken for dirty
Moving
Landscapes shifting and haphazard
Graffiti, trees, unfinished construction
Posturing, reaching, interacting
Out there
All access to this world denied by the window
Firm enough to relegate
Any passenger to the role of spectator

BEAUTY

My hand in yours
With you behind me
Briefly invisible
Warm energy mixed with alcohol, clumsy
Dance moves and plastic disguises
Your beauty expands and
Pops out of its container
Uncontrollable
I have my net out but I prefer to just observe
Admire

PULL

Morning

Refreshed and ready

Some time ago

The rally cut short

The buzzer-beater bested without

Even trying

By silence

Looking back only when an echo of a voice is heard

Briefly, and then on to

Another day when I feel the season

And then another morning

How alike are they?

How alike are we?

DUD

Words said feel like denotations

Underlined but underwhelming

Faraway and forever forming something formless

Dreaming

Of the time when they

Shoot out of our hearts to inspire our mouths, eyes, fingers

Then each word would become

A precursor to something beautiful

Or even its substitute

Not just a dud

MIRACLES

There are moments when I believe in miracles
Before mundane molecules muffle my mirth
And take things down a level
Down to the ground
Fingers in the earth
Feeling it out
Searching for the eternal
Stuck with the suddenness of soil

ANOTHER DUD

How do you overcome
The similarities that lead you to the differences
The diffusion that intensifies the dullness
The drab copies that feed the dissonance
The smiles slingshotting you
Into walls
Into a field
Into a flood

In this flat land
Yelling at the distance
Dreaming of cliffs

POST POST POST

Up, up

But your horizon is not my horizon

The faded orange sunrise or sunset

Somewhere in the distance

To one side

Up, down

Stuck in this machine

Fatigue brings on a memory of mist

I close my eyes

Down, down

My landing is not your landing

You are still up there somewhere

Holding hands against your will

A sonic boom that the atmosphere will remember

Long after it has settled back into silence

CELLULITE

Small town boys get together with small town girls
To build big town futures
In a small town way

I smirk, but smirking oversimplifies
Like a smudge
I think
I sink

These days
I eat peanut butter and jam
Often without bread
Often almost to the point of being sick
To avoid sadness
Gorging on sweetness
A sweetness that's real, but might as well be saccharine
Like an eye-rolling social media post
Or a sultry woman walking in a windy passage

I look at her legs
Thin, shapely
But her shorts reveal
Thighs
Full of cellulite

LOVE

Sometimes

Amidst the constant low-volume buzz in my head
And the sporadic clanking and wave-like ebb and flow of
street noise

I catch a glimpse of how little we owe each other

Almost paradoxically it is then I can feel

Love

Beyond lust

Beyond motherly smothering

And fatherly smattering

Beyond description

Beyond poetry