All The Women Dancing

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Toutes les femmes dansant

Ce poème en prose tente de faire apparaître “l’essentiel” en chacun, chacune: la musique que l’on porte en soi, la façon dont notre corps bouge… Dans ces échanges sans paroles, une demande extravagante: “l’amour.” Le réel (où ce que nous prenons pour tel: le bar, les rues) nous coupe, nous met en éclats (le verre brisé) parce qu’il danse au rythme de la violence.

Don’t give me that.

push past the cracked
pane of glass and walk
right up to the bar.
don’t hesitate to squeeze
between bar stools,
keep pressing til you have
smooth wood under your hands,
a cocktail napkin
between your fingers.
there’ll be voices
coming at you – a woman
will tug at your sleeve,
a man will bellow in your ear.
don’t get pushed back. this
is a bar. listen.

He was seventeen
and the dimple was lopsided.
Not up and down – you know,
Left to right, right to left,
I don’t remember. Pass me your lighter.
Anyway, I said to him, “Forget it baby. You can’t come in here again.”

listen. because you can’t see anything except the high glass and carved wood of the bar, liquor bottles lined up like a mystery.
what will the gin say.
what will come in the course of the evening.

and you remember a woman once fell off her bicycle as she was riding by. she said she was listening to the music. the bicycle wheel revolved, slowly ticking.
a line of cloud across the moon.
then a guy smashed his hand on the glass paned door when she wouldn’t dance.

And she said to me, “That’s what I think of you. That’s what I think.”

the music comes from the speakers, just guitar and drums, no voice.
a long legged man extends the mike stands in the back corner, spot lit.

She’ll take my money, split it, like loaves, right? Split it hundreds of ways between the kids and her and her mom. Nothing’s coming back to me, that’s for sure.
Don’t kid yourself. They do it
for money. They always get 
what they want.

and down the street the flashing 
neon nipples above the 
sidewalk, men against store 
windows. an open door with 
red velvet walls dim inside, 
a sparkly lined showcase of 
photos. car horns in the street 
and the women in dressing 
rooms, waiting to strip, waiting 
to eat. the flip of a hand 
toward an ashtray, glass falling 
in shards on a stage, their skin 
dancing, eyes on the wall.

I don’t think about it, usually. 
I’d get too upset.

the singer steps out of the men’s room 
wearing a powder blue suit 
with torn lapels. his shirt strains 
over his belly, and a wispy 
pointed red beard draws his mouth 
down to a sneer. 
he squints in the light. 
Guitar. swings the strap 
over his head and settles 
the guitar across his chest. 
O.K. folks, start 
your drinking doubles 
and feeling single. Boys, 
lets talk. 
and he flashes his hand 
down to the guitar and rolls 
across a chord with the pitch 
of the drums behind, 
then leans into the sound
with the long legged man
on the bass beside him.

his mouth twists
words across the dance floor.
*Baby don't you go.*
the bass line rises
through your shoes and that guitar
cuts a line, it seems, from ear
to ear. all the women dancing
lift their heads, listen
to their bodies move.

listen. the sound is in
your head, it's in your glass
as you raise it and drain
the last of the gin.
it's in the rocking of bodies
on either side of you. she pushes
you, he pulls you back. this press
to the bar, gin flushing you –
you're hearing hurt, the
pain of leaving, being
left. his words and the crowd's
silent keening, twisting
by the wall. a man pulls
your hand, grabs your ass,
demands you dance with him.
his mouth splits when you
refuse, spits *Queer* and your
fury rises, glass smashes
on the wooden bar
and the guitar sound leaps
to the ceiling.

call the women dancing, listen.
*Baby, don't you go, 'cause
I love you so.* and a few
men stop and listen too.