



LEE PASSARELLA

Love's Lexicon

Love always teaches you new vocabularies.
Now, your local, onboard dictionaries
don't count for much; you need to download
custom ones, to cover the new meanings
you've conned for archaisms such as
mouth and *breast* and *leg*. Or to replace
the jadedsmirk of four-letter brush-offs
that used to adequately parse those nether
mysteries of which you're now an acolyte.

And when you happen to be in love
with a self-destroyer, you learn
the melodious Latinates of end-stage disease:
ascites—it's like swallowing a punching bag full of water—
cholelithiasis—the liver shutting up its shop, for good—
encephalopathy—brain sickness, as unlovely
a thing as its name is purest music,
honeyed stream of round
vowel sounds and
breezy aspirates.

The One-half World

How it was then: Lying there in the early-morning
midnight of the day after, wrestling over how
to bridge a rift that had spread so wide it finally

split the world into two unequal halves—His
and Hers. Or failing that (since there was only failing
now, in this new Not-Ours), how to graciously toe

the fault line here, on the night-plunged half
of the globe where the remembered whole,
turned incubus instead of memory, is less

than the sum of its broken parts:
It has been my chief study,
my half-life's entire work.

Ghosts and Illegals

Driving in the suburbs and the exurbs
of Atlanta, I watch for them this April,
the ectoplasmic denizens of ancient burial grounds.

They festoon the sweet gums and loblollies,
trailing their purple winding sheets in the wind,
the ghostly evidence of past habitation.

Some clapboard farmhouse and barn sheltered
under those pines, when all of them were young,
from the baleful Cyclops eye of August. But April,

August, January, cycling through the many years,
have killed all evidence of place except the strangling vines,
the ghostly racemes of wisteria. Here and there

along the interstate, I see them haunting a gaunt white oak
in dangling clusters, sometimes mirrored upward
by the engorged nipples of an empress tree in bud,

erect with the purple urge of equinox: beautiful invasives
both, far from their Asian home, where memory
holds on to more than April ghosts among the oaks.

Good Fences

A 62-year-old woman was stabbed. . .as she walked to a grocery store in Darby, Pa., but she didn't notice the knife sticking out of her back until after she had gone shopping and returned home. . . . No one in the store said anything to her. . . .

—from a news story

Our mugger's of the nervous sort that feel
content to only *cut the bitch and split*.
No flies on him—he leaves behind his meal
ticket, insurance policy, the wit
and repartee his kind spars with. Four inches
of same stick in her back, which she's misread
as lingering effects of cuffs and cinches
received in the attack. She isn't dead,
and dinner calls. So off to market fast
as shaky legs can take her. Neighbors shop
beside her. Cashiers, baggers watch her pass—
none shocked at sight of her spine's weird outcrop.
They don't look *at* her: seem to look right through.
In Philly's 'burbs, that's just *polite* to do!

Take Heart

Outside my window, the redbud proffers
a thousand hearts of weathered verdigris to me.

I know the gesture's empty. But on half a dozen stem ends
hangs one new young heart, a copper medallion

of a heart. A sometime wind twirls it side to side,
and then it catches fire, a red-gold amulet of Ra

or of his birthing: that's someone's mid-May Valentine
to me. Or one I give myself. But then, it's all the same.