

later still: staring harder at a new brother
a book opens, your father leans over your shoulder

the jolly sun at noon
ambuscades in the blackberry bushes
sneak attacks with Frankie
and his pretty sister
duels with their angry turkey
or tossing a beach ball high till it hides the sun
dribbling gothic sand into castles and digging down to China
then dashing (“Last one in . . .!”) toward the summer sea
or a sleepy hot blanket on the backyard grass
the giggling the bee sting the quarrels the first weeping

then evening into puberty: the scarlet sun
lashing through deepening woods
shadows of music and whispering
that chased you like a band of devils
under stars stark as glass
like the mocking spectres of desire
and the mystery of the sadness of the moon . . .

then one morning the move to the big city
from the country where everything, even death, is alive
to a slippery plinth of stone and so much flashing
(the last look back at the house: don’t! it’ll turn you . . .)
and one learned what salt is really made up of
and what the thing is that is called “real life”

but is it: past the monotonous class bells of school
it is only a long Saturday night
of sexndrugsnrocknroll
writhing forests of arms phantom light shows dexies pot
psychedelia and unending screaming of what it shot for
and never was able to reach
then dead to the world Sundays forgetting what
you had never actually known in the riots of the night

followed (followed!) by a week
of bull sessions would-be revolutionaries aspiring poets and profs
pompously envious of the young
and marches and cramming war paranoia, man! and fists
held high black as ashes as they burned across the sun

defy defy!

defy defy!

till Saturday night in the Saturday night came around again
and around and around and around and

till an almost accidental loss of virginity

at a party

on a sofa

or was it under a TV screen finally this is real life

(but is it) smeared with ads for Ivory soap,

revolution and assassinations

it lasted (but who was counting?)

in a smog of bad drugs marches informants bombings crazy girlfriends and dancing

for a notorious decade

then silence and collapse . . .

a thousand years of manhood pass across the ruined choirs

the crowds in the streets seething like tides

on an earth the size of a dark bottle

every moment a prospect of shattering

into a bitter solitude

mobbed in a homeless city

in a war between your will and the world

endless as an afternoon naked with light

fueled by anger crazy desire and pride

(money? no money

less money more money

more money less money

then no money again)

real life at last

a climb up a rock face to all appearance without end

cries of the falling everywhere around you

(the grim look across the desk the imploding market)

or security and a long hike over a desert of glass

(hurrahs fading in the distance)

toward the clouds the clouds massing in the west

where lightning (war, revolution – but not here) cracks the sky

into tribes dressed in gold and blood

in a burning film of triumph and defeat triumph and defeat triumph and

and a chaos of battle is at least a relief from the boredom

till, drenched with sweat, you watch it slink back into your lap

where it twitches, back and forth, like a snake in a trap
the life you have, the life you had
till the first gray hair
and the roughening skin
till the little wrinkles at the edges of the eyes
till the abrupt chill of the iron in the soul
for monotonous decades you assumed would last
at least forever

then twilight sudden as a curtain . . .

the stunning peacefulness as the sun dissolves
reluctantly into the horizon
and a warm wind breathes out
from the inland
toward the scattering clouds and the sea
and shades cluster around you
like memories in the batting of an eye
(so soon? but I had just begun . . . so soon)
and you reach out but the railing is gone
and where there was always certainty now there is only uncertainty
and a silence outside you opens to a silence within
memories crumbling like a kaleidoscope its brightly colored stones
and friends begin to disappear one by one . . .

and you begin to learn the reason for the sadness of the moon
as it rides the sky
white as your hair
singing a farewell
that seems never to end
to the night

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