

Daniel Tobin

**To the Gentleman Watching Television on His Phone
in the Bathroom Stall at Charlotte Airport**

Even among the briefly intermittent gashes of water
brought to sink-life by telepathic hands,
even among the perpetually evanescent ebb and flow
of hurried men harried to bursting

by the summoning throb of wastage inside them,
as if their inner barometers were plunging
all at once to the impending center and its pent release,
water-plouts, slashings, these sonic waves

of nether breakages, and still like an enthroned Buddha
you remain composed — even amidst
the clinks of belt-buckles fumbling, scatterings of coins,
the flimsy ever-diminishing rolls,

all shuttles for the shuttlers sure of this necessity,
you will remain a long time, unflinching,
un-distractable from the fictive pageant on your screen
loudly lifted above these pliant walls

that have hidden and beheld so many, the brash or shy,
with the patient porters, numbly, needful,
obligingly enduring all until the changing of the guard:
like now, each hand towel folded, stacked

for the newcomer, as inside you stay poised, steadfast,
at the plush point of a turning world,
the stubbled chubby candles of your legs planted, fixed,
your dropped pants melted to the floor.

In the Greencroft

For Rondell
Virginia, 1986

Under the pan where the order simmers
low flames lap to the rhythm of your hand,
short orders only, your only command,
and up front the clubroom posh with diners.

You know your place, lot, the lay of land
that shuts your face behind two swinging doors.
Under the pot where the order simmers
low flames lap to the rhythm of your hand

and would leap to strike whoever strays
into your torrid zone. At the stove you stand
deferred, while orders rote inside your pan
sizzle like cravings to settle old scores.
Under the pan where the order simmers
low flames lap to the rhythm of your hand.

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The Calls

All the dead on the answering machine
live on in old technology, the now before
what called them culled them as it goes.

From where the blinking numbers shine
they speak, as from some taped eternity
where the past repeats, like sea whispers

out of an empty shell, their trace a hush.
You'd have them conjure each lost face.
A cousin from cancer's bottomless well

forever calls to say she's fine, that friend,
car crash, jokes from his unbroken sleep
until the gone are raised inerasable.

So the pinwheel makes its timely round
while the handset hangs on silently.
Replay, again, that lover's voice: *It's just me.*

Little Hallows

Door to door the costumed children come
to sweetly demonize the block
with their one demand, before they flock
en masse to the next, then head for home

where, later, the TV news will rage
with untrue believers, their latest prey
soaked alive in gas and set aflame.
They watched him flail and writhe inside his cage

until the flesh charred crisply into ash
and the bones crackled through. Eyes clear,
they filmed the screaming one, and cheered,
then carried out the body with the trash.

Above, the sky appears another skin,
pure blue, unmasked, where like a screen
closing over, the mackerel clouds descend
to bar us here where all souls are shut in

and a beech's coffer of fake doubloons,
blazing in declining sun,
showers its coinage one by one
to litter the pure effacement of the wind.

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From Below

Oklahoma, 1934

We watch him walk along the wing
who just before had caterwauled.
One thinks he might do anything —
Pirouette, barrel roll. He'll fall,

I'm sure, though he looks assured,
like an insect on its tipping leaf.
Down here, everything is hard.
Banks shut. Dustbowl. Just plain life

that sells panache and ends in pain,
ends squatting in some plot of earth.
Is he dazed, or desperate, to train
for such a dizzying, dire art —

to step out into air and dance,
or seem to dance? Below, the hive
gawks upward. I add my glance,
my glare. This weightless will to rise.

Death

After Rilke

Of this last going away we know nothing,
for it shares nothing across the vast divide,
and we are groundless in our love and hate
as in our shuddering. There is no revealing

death, not even this mask, tragic, lamentable,
with its disfiguring maw. Always the world
is full of players playing their roles — death too —
we are certain of it, but we say it's not for us.

Though when you went, a vein of all that is
broke across this stage through the very rent
where you disappeared: green, absolute green,
absolute sunlight, absolute bewilderment.

Still we keep playing, bearing up, all the time
repeating the hard things learned in dread.
But sometimes, from the farthest remove,
its quickening enshrouds our little theater

with its reality, as if something now known
had lowered itself to us. For a while then,
just being here, we begin to act our lives
rapturously, with no desire for applause.