

Alex Lang

SAKE SESTINA

in my secret damp dementia minstrels & long-  
shoremen line up in two rows & I fish  
my way through new streets not held by iron bars  
& prison guards, psych ward or seminary –  
so now I prop the room up without the old drugs  
I turn my teeth hollow, grin “No big deal”

& just this summer toned up, sped up, was dealing  
a Z a month, drank pints of lactone to stop the longings  
banging out rail by rail, I’d spread the tarot of drugs  
before me, or else slip slowly undone like a fish  
in the Red Sea stuck in my own sad seminary  
of lofty philosophies and inexpensive bars

in the morning I’d whistle a few bars  
of some happy anthem, a portrait of the super dealer,  
collars crisp, eyes red, the sky scented with semen, airy  
lunch in the sun, slip quietly into the long  
shadows of evening, circle the lake, fish  
for compliments in pants stuffed with loose drugs

the purple fire of August drags  
itself into September, double bolts & bars  
the door, makes every statesman a fish-  
monger, stops the watch until I deal  
out the cards, throw the yarrow, one long  
& two short & my room becomes a cemetery

and nothing works: not vein, not eyes, not seminal  
duct, my dick so frozen from the drugs  
periods between orgasm grew longer & long-  
er, while I imagined my cock a steel bar  
rigid in the wind, I say “Baby just can’t deal”

or “Baby gets the stank on her like dead fish”

but stank of fish or no fish  
it’s pump pump, & the mind retreats into a seminary  
of blood monastics, striking a deal  
with Li Po on the river – I give him new drugs:  
2 caps of lactone, a vial of 2C-B, bars  
& bars of white powders fat & long

together we fish through this drug-  
school seminary, through a stale sake bar,  
through this ritual ordeal that lasts all winter long

## RECOVERY

I've been places and through phases  
of madness & answered the macaw's  
calls with my own damp withdrawals

I've wandered the streets  
waiting for a door to knock upon  
listened to the howling of hounds  
who echo back my sorrowful tales

I saw an angeled helicopter  
flying through a broken sky  
so I pushed my way through  
town & the gates of the dog park  
to sit on a cement bench and let  
my new friends spin around me,  
climb into my lap and cover me  
with the dust of a simple Tuesday

It might be the drugs or a certain way  
I grind my teeth in my sleep but  
while my torso goes doughy, and my  
legs grow more bruised each morning,  
the corners of my face push against my  
skin, making my skull a visible  
phenomenon, and not some abstract idea  
or final stopping place for fists or bottles  
thrown awkwardly in rage; And I'll take  
them all on in a bar in some small town,  
making a stand for nothing in my torn  
blue shirt and a pint of gin

But then I loosen my grip on the sides  
of the bench, sew myself back into the  
here and now and try to face the late  
sun without squinting, try to let lilacs

and bouncing mongrels hold me down,  
sing stillness into my chest with a  
gentle evening scent on the air, a ball  
thrown and retrieved by an eager Irish  
Setter, coax quiet from my mind  
with a sound.

MALIBU 1

Shuggie unfuelled

go no g  
go no speed  
no baggies  
of weed  
or yay

my left leg drags

my right

across

the threshold of the dawn

30 times and back

I'm holding my head in a suitcase

of sand dollars

&

The mist rolls in

over the hills, the sun refuses

to speak

Her legs stretch

golden long and slick

from Catalina

to the fires in La Verne

my sobriety is the shallowest  
of rufefellows

makes everything magic dull

I even prefer

the withdrawal dementia

that had me spinning

in tongues of turpentine

telepathy

falsely fantastic,  
finally, fatal

Now everything  
is cold & unmoving  
I eat nothing but chocolate  
in the light

## MALIBU 2

It's like a constant and complete spasm  
Woke up, ate beans, chocolate and ice cream  
dozed for many hours and

A note on the floor  
warns that everyone is at the market  
& I swim through this then that sad  
san francisco like fishing for dimes  
at the laundromat.

some days I can't sit still  
others, like this, I can't stand  
and everything was easier when I measured my moods  
in caps in lines

& Berrigan's Wrong Train  
makes me weak in the knees;  
tears squirt uncomfortably over this portrait of you

You,  
who left & now never gonna see me no more

if drugs made the whole thing work  
what will the sober evening bring  
but another SNL rerun  
on comedy central

If anyone comes around  
looking for shuggie  
tell 'em he's done gone missing;  
presumed dead  
couldn't put up  
with the quiet no more