

Peter Junker

LOVESICK

In Starbucks

A whale-sized cup of coffee is my excuse
to keep sitting in a hard chair,

looking toward the glass door because
of a feeling that you are looking for me,

that you will guess where I am, because
your desire to find me is so strong.

When you find me, when I see your eyes,
I'll be afraid to speak.

Professional help calls this transference,
fantasy, delusion, obsession.

But God is said to do just this for us:
Find us out in our desire and fear.

My cup of excuses is empty. I am caught
in my idolatry of you like a hooked fish

with no heart left to fight.

Be With Me

at one hour before sunrise in the heart
of Tokyo, in the hotel where radio
snooze alarms offer birdsong for those guests
whose memories of countryside linger.

Be with me on that low bed I recall
as lonely at dusk, when the radio
offered crickets and owlsong for my soul,
a restless foreigner there on business.

Be where the curtain can't avert the glow
of Shinagawa's searchlights from our eyes.

Muse

If I forget you, who will make me choose
my words with such care? I'm driving from work,
working the brake and the gas like a loom
treadle: weaving nowhere, fearing someday

I'll wake to find myself arrayed in shroud.
The stitch of a memory of beauty
is all the hint I have that in your arms
I was laid slain. But now you're on the lam

and I'm wrapped up in myself in my car
in my necktie from Hermes of Paris.

Impeachment

My love, I echo what Majority
Leader Lott said when he said "I don't think
the circumstances now call for something
that anybody could interpret as

nothing . . . I think we have passed the point where
we might wish this thing away." The leader's
speech--the mildest of alarms--alarmed me
at my morning paper. I was chewing

on a bagel after failing to sleep,
wishing to interpret my cock away.

14 Years

The mugs, all put-upon inside their nook
are slowly losing their perfect edges.

The stovetop rarely but quickly gets hot.
Some dishwater stands fizzling in the sink.

The marriage in its adolescence looks
like something bigger than the both of us.
Our love leans on the laminate counter
near the cluster tomatoes, maturing

with the last green bananas in the bunch,
by this week's bag of bargain sandwich loaf.

The Cold Front

Listen, I need to say something about
love, and how it feels to break like a cloud
when pressure zones mix it up like brawlers,
pushing you around familiar landscapes

until at last you go spiraling up,
far out of sight of all your old gutters.
In the cold, you find yourself to cling to
and your self is too much to bear. You fall

drop by drop on whatever chance matter
cares or doesn't care to catch you. That's all.

Frosty the Snowman

A snow man's a vain thing. He's looking for
someplace to look--quick--to see his silk hat,
his aristocrat's nose, his artfully
sculpted body--quick--before it's all gone.

Where is that polished brook ice where he can
see himself? He's a sorry Narcissus,
without roots or guts, running
from the sun. Were he to pause for the pat

of your mittens, he might weep and not stop.
So he runs, teasing the thaw, drop by drop.

Unrequited One

My love is not a flower, but a tree
in flower, in spring, in Tallahassee
or Talladega: the magnolia, whose
thirsty, wandering roots suggest a tree

that ever wishes to be somewhere else,
whose evergreen leaves never lose their gloss,
who grows like a weed in neglected lots
yet in hothouses chokes with nonchalance,

whose snowy flowers beat all get out, whose
heady scent feeds me lemon and apple.

Unrequited Two

I can tell you what flower I am not:
Fritillaria imperialis
the emperor of the garden, taller
than the hyacinths or begonias,

orange with pride and rich with the legend
of its humiliation: When Christ hung
from the Roman tree, the flowers below
bowed in sorrow, all but the emperor,

who was thereafter doomed to hang its loud
bell-like blooms: limp, abased, and ennobled.

To the Moon

I was unnecessary to you, yet
still you allowed me to thrill as I watched
your moody rounds, radiant in blue mist.
I'm unnecessary to Christ, who was

and is and will be with or without me,
yet still plies poets. Thus beauty commands
its subjects. One night, in your glow,
something told me I'm unnecessary

to my love. This is hard, hard to repeat:
I've lost you moon oh Christ my love I've lost.

Withdrawal

Shakespeare wasn't afraid of the word, *lust*,
which to him meant an unsated craving
for love or revenge or power, animal
nature unleashed, soul shaken to its roots,

but I'm not Shakespeare, and if I lust for you
you won't hear it from me. I presume you
perceive my wit: for now, of course, you'll not
hear anything from me. You're just a pill

for my muse, a slight girl with brown eyes who'll
sing when love ends her nauseous, tremor'd hell.

But Then Again

Sometimes I wish the cruelty in me
could be purer, less imbued with virtues
like concern for you, caution, chastity
and amnesia. I would send you e-mails,

ten lines of vanity daily, to wit,

this fool poetry that rocks me sleepless:
rummage sales of tarnished jewelry, clothes
gone velvety with wear, and unwound clocks.

Sometimes I wish to make you ponder me
more than I ponder you. That's cruelty.

September, 1999

That was the summer of earthquakes. Turkey,
Armenia, Taiwan and Mexico
grew poorer in lives. Few wanted to see
their latest ruins--but the saints who did

proclaimed wonders. That was the summer
you found me again after I left you
for dead to my soul. The emotional
tectonics do their work: when our latest kiss

draws my lips over the vale of your throat,
ages pass in unspeakable beauty.

On My Commute

There is a sign for a watering hole
on Roswell Road: A golden face says "Smile
Is Our Motto." I ought not, but I smile
and drift lanes, wondering, could this be our

motto? And if so, could it make us laugh?
And if it did, would God's ears turn red,
still ringing with our more somber mottoes
picked up on roads whose signs we couldn't read?

I want to stop and lift a golden drink
for how the curves of your smile drive me so.

Love Matters

Does it matter? I don't know if it does.
It's like this: last night I prepared a feast,
grapes and apples, almonds, figs and olives,
bread and two cheeses picked for a marriage

in our mouths with the perfect sweet Riesling.
But you were too preoccupied--telling
me you are surely not in love with me
and lying on my chest, clasping my hand--

to enjoy it. Sometimes love's craved like the
chocolate rugalach I forgot to serve.

Love Matters, Finale

Our mandate has changed, my love. Your husband
even now is climbing into his truck,
his mind filled with thoughts of his turtledove
crouched above him, eyes squeezed tight. Isn't it

interesting, all the things that we share?
But facts being what they are, I am loath
to bond with the man beyond feeling your
touch in our respective waking dreams. Far

be it for me to linger in love's arms.
Do I matter? I don't know if I do.

Gentleman in Waiting

Does it hurt? Some. Does it hurt? Some. Does it
hurt? Yes, but no more than lazulite, a
blue gemstone with a vitreous luster--
meaning glassy looking--is made of glass

or hurts when the gemcutter's grinder makes
it less to make it more. I must believe

that your leaving me will have a kinder
purpose than to polish my forfeiture:

Only if I die first will it be hell.
Love me one hour before and I'll die well.