

*Ob!*

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In December 2021 I had dinner at a bistro in Paris.  
A calf's head was on the menu.  
I wondered what had become of its neck.

\*

Oh! Purpose

-built Paris, done with compliance

in mind – look! broad streets prohibiting  
dissent, consideration's divot off somewhere,

spinning. Girls and boys turning starchy  
in Montmartre, plugging gaps in mis

-understanding with bobby nods. Grimy  
little crocuses!

\*

Nearby, young things are methodically being  
divested of humanity. Divested further, great

history! agricultural immanitas! And oh! So!  
Listen: all that distinguishes an act of great

wisdom from butchery or stage  
magic is a timely interruption

by a mother. All that distinguishes  
stage magic from butchery is speciesism.

Across these disk-y arrondissements  
palisades embrace to form stockades

around luxury and nearby, luxating  
patellas are boiled to beef

stock. The rate! some! have been able  
to flourish! can be understood

in the language of cherry  
trees bound over underground power

-lines. Their blossoms too early but too  
beautiful! Too crinoline a sickness

for conscientious diagnosis!

*Calf's head*

11,80€

(on a bistro menu in Paris)

The calf's neck was like the footstool of the plate's floor, so I took the foot that my clasped hands

had become off the calf's head and looked up at the ceiling's urine-yellow sky, then back. And the neck

was like Versailles, then. If Versailles was synecdoche for obelus of water, and sexy, monk-y tonsure

of shrub. And if that strip of water was a neck, severed from shrub, or head, by a small guillotine,

then the blade of that guillotine was a rectangle of nondescript, well-trimmed terrain.

And the calf's neck was like that! Not like water or shrub or place between, but all three.

Or like the hoe that might have been used in their arrangement. And so, I guess,

the neck was like metonymy! Oh! What a you can hold!

\*

And in a country park a lake's surface decapitated  
two swans, and the stopped Ferris wheel was right

twice a day, and the branches shielding from impromptu  
spring were replete with piggy blossoms! Somewhere

between myself, and the fleeing worms, was the seeing  
self, and I watched a man put on red shirt, blue shirt,

yellow, and we sought togetherness. We watched the pale  
light scry then limp through gaps in the sky, gaps in the sky

-light, gaps in the amniotic sacs of solipsism, gaps  
in the burlap sack of personal accountability.

Time, go back in your nut! Time, go sleep in your shell!  
Time, if you have the inclination, take my old worm with.

\*

And the calf's neck was like 'Petrarch', written  
down, but with the letters 'T and R and R scored

out, and then, accompanying the word, a portrait  
of Petrarch with his face swapped for a peach.

And the calf's neck was like that, like a peach placed  
in the porthole of Petrarch's face in a portrait

where he's wearing a 14<sup>th</sup>-century Italian snood,  
or in any portrait where an arc of bay leaves seasons

his head, for the calf's head had that too: anarchic  
leafage! In such portraits Petrarch has no neck, is ovoid

face in aperture, ripe for peach and perhaps  
the calf's neck was like the hope of a neck.

Perhaps calf's neck was like my neck,  
in that I will never see my neck.

\*

I'm brought each smelly instant, bored by past  
action. Every day I eat a world's worth!

of limescale. Oh! milky parentheses  
of action's sediment. I carry calcified

minds to the tennis courts and ask  
that someone keeps an eye

on them while I thwip world around  
ball. I meet my friends in the kitchen and light

hits the scrim – the baubles, then buboes, of late  
market capitalism! If I ate me, I wouldn't know

me, you know? The world can't be mine  
and also the world.



\*

And the calf's neck was like the schnapps of the Marsy  
fountain – nucleic from above, like a sunlit, too-many

-legged spider, so not a spider, and I took the rested  
conch of my clasped hands off the calf's head,

and the head was like a nodule of spider atop  
another spider, or a spider with an extra

percentage of its own torso fused to its torso.  
And the calf's neck was like body with unresected

teratoma. And the calf's neck was like  
an ecclesiastical relic! a foreskin in a reliquary! a fereter

on the back of a wagon of a travelling theatre company  
in 2014 (a time when relics, *and* travelling

theatre companies, now I think about it,  
were at the nadir of their popularity) so the calf's neck

was like that, jarring! And the relic was the sacred  
bit, the escutcheon on canonical

masculinity, maybe. But to know truly what the neck  
was like, you need to imagine the actors in the wagon

are so derided by their director for clumsiness that the  
shrine goes untouched, unopened by everyone

but him, so the veracity of its contents go forever  
uncontested. The paradox of quantum

superposition! of petal of skin present  
and absent, box of matter and no matter,

its myth symptomatic of myth of collateral  
damage arising from independent

thought. And that, that was what the neck was like,  
like a false idea corroborated by rumoured apotrope,

a coping mechanism, a deodand complicit in restricting  
freedoms, trapping the disabused in narratives

of no cogency, a hypothetical scenario making  
little sense in a contemporary context, because, like,

when's the last time you saw a travelling  
theatre company, or a functional wagon, for that

matter? But the apocrypha of the idea,  
now *that's* what the neck was like!

\*

Nothing makes more meat  
of me than morning breasts, you know?

The stresses of impermanence don't touch  
these awful compost bags!

Chest like wagyu beef, face  
like battery hen. Intent gets eaten

by result, gets eaten like everything  
gets eaten.

\*

I contemplate the countryside, decamping  
to bluebells, becoming extradited. The wheeze

of aspirated vomit gets drowned out by the breeze  
aerating the mulch, the buzz of wired gulch dug

for better connectivity.

The messes of new industry exert a grip  
that conscience lacks!

But, oh, what a crutch! Guilt stems  
from a fetish for the new

futurelessness, but life won't live to read  
the words! we try! to trap it in. Summoned

up from the unquantified place  
to proscenium. Oh! quasi-sensing space!

It'll squall to nobody, or to nobody  
who cares. The project is a crock

of shit but I suppose it's easier  
than —

I don't want to die  
but stasis is no great shakes, either.

\*

Imagine being in the light, on a path  
between two buildings. Of then being

actual, then actually being on a path  
between two buildings! Imagine

a beloved's face before you, being  
red, then turning blue then yellow;

of their neck below their face,  
of their chest below their neck being red

then blue then yellow. This is not  
the light of pre-industry, it's the light

of new outside. The neck was like that!  
like the tube of infrastructure

challenging my long-held, long-chewed  
imagination. But the neck was also

like how you forget that eeriness  
so soon, like how to be you need to forget

forgetting. Oh! Sweet amnesia! Sourced  
from paltry (writ) description.

\*

I want a piggy seraph to hold me  
to account – to grant me union of man

-made and mystic. Figgy sheriff, don't give up  
your oleaginous insides to keep me

right! How awful to think of floricanes, trained  
to mend engines! Of blackberries gurning

in the corporate diaphragm!

\*

And the calf's neck was like the Mandelbrot  
set of my conceptions of my personality,

of finding below my epidermal-most patterns  
of behaviour reiterative *mes*, reiterative patterns,

increasingly meagre but no less larval! Neotenic  
habits! Needing to look closer each time to retrieve

the substance, a bulb no longer germinable, just  
interminable me, in the tantalus of my

neoliberalisms, if you know what I mean.

If anyone knows what I mean! Can anyone yoke

me? Anyway, interred humanity, asbestos booties!

\*

Oh, pulchritudinous you. I once thought  
we might make more of each other. Make gloria

mundi maybe! abundance of subsumption!  
Alas, sic transit, parasitic inveigling. Oh, tiny

blessèd cow, the things you'd do, blessé mooling,  
had you never been made to live. Made low,

not kissed, never lowing to a metronome  
of good youth. 'Try to love me,' I hear you say,

in my voice, 'in a manner unrecognisable  
if possible; if not, your way will do.'

\*

And the calf's neck was like raw flesh, proffered  
under a pseudo-Tuscan sun, not knowingly seeking

confrontation (teeth and fingers).

And so, the neck was like what leaves fleshy

fingers to make greasy filigree on keyboards  
– the understory of conurbation, the leafy residue

that slippies up what floats between thought  
and expression – what undergoes alchemy!

to then go uncontrollable! The calf's neck  
was what we don't know exists pre-extraction

from blastocysts! The neck was Sycorax or no,  
it was the gaps between Sycorax and no, or no,

it was the gaps inside stanzas. 10, by my count,  
since I mentioned them. 7 more since! Each

gap was the neck or the seconds lapsed between  
the synapses dictating movement, then movement,

then, finally, decision to move. Imagine! thinking  
we're different from what's dying behind doors!

Thinking we hold what we hold in thought!  
So largely, largely other, *this* is getting beyond

me. The neck was like what the calf's mother's  
neck was like at one stage, presumably. Ready

to graduate. Popcorn! Amaryllis! Metaphor!



\*

Soft bellies of allotments swell up with what's  
to come. Dunce hat buddleias contain all Scotus'

cone knowledge and above, oh! The glass-bottomed  
blimps carry clouds along! Is the falafel tree

in blossom too? I'll accrue no new knowledge  
but I'll know better the unknowable beyond

plosive. Poetry devours itself, ouroboros  
-like. That's its worth. Suppose the calf's neck

could do that too, call moratorium on being,  
on there being more of it. The problem is not

thinking hard enough. Or the problem is  
thinking, as we think thinking is.

\*

And, finally, the calf's neck was like the neck of a lamp  
which offshoots at its tip into floricanes, the buds

curating the narrow light of intimacy in a Parisian  
bistro, where I ordered the neck

to reveal itself, having ordered the head, having  
ordered. And the calf's neck was everything

or nothing like the calf's head, that I ate in a Parisian  
bistro, that had had its eyes removed and its scalp

prised open like a reservoir. And the neck, presumably,  
was once like a reservoir: impossible panoply

of living! But like I said before: I never saw the neck.  
I saw the calf's head, that I ordered without

thinking, thinking only of what of it might serve  
to serve me, then and subsequent. But when I saw

the calf's head on the plate, on the softened  
tablecloth, it was like a rococo pinecone on a plinth

on moulding. And maybe the neck was like that,  
some baroque adornment of possibility,

but probably not, because what got bred out? The cow  
of my dream bled out, and there was only the cut

glass of Côtes du Rhône, the basket of bread brought

out, and the thought of a neck. Like I said, I never saw  
the calf's neck. I only saw the calf's head, that I ate

in a Parisian bistro with winter berries. The neck,  
if there was a neck, was gone. The calf was gone,

and its neck was like the increasingly elaborate means  
of linguistic misdirection, of absolution through

convolution. No proteinaceous body, no code  
of warning. Only a violence I never had to witness.

And I? I was like Saturn, except holding Saturn.

I was like Saturn, holding Saturn.

I was like Saturn, eating Saturn.