



EXIT STRATEGIES {No. I-VI}/ GOLD WAKE PRESS, 2011/ David Tomaloff

{I} HOT KNIVES WILL MELT INTO THE EMPIRES OF FLESH ON THE CONTINENTS OF THEIR SOFT, SUPPLE THROATS. You can stay up all night burning powders in their names, but they will come for you all the same. The dawn, to them, it does not exist. You are never alone in the being alone, and the wolves will open up, show you the light if you let them. Let them, you will not. You will hold knives over flame and count beats between the calls of crickets. Hold fast. Steady now, and breathe. A circular motion. The turning of a screw. A radio going silent in the warehouse of a mind. A temple. A refinery. A steelhead. A trap. The judge and the judged, both waiting for the click.

{II} Maybe the trees will take us for granted. Maybe they already have. Maybe we will grow up to do the same, you and I. Or maybe we will dive into the lake, together, and never come up. Maybe the summer will forget our names. Maybe it already has. Maybe we will lose ourselves in the fall and do the same, you and I. Or maybe we will splinter across the canyon, together, and become a fine dust. I already blame the Staghorn Cholla. I already blame the wild Vesper Sparrows. The saints of Phoenix have come here calling for us again. I am radiant with things I will never understand, and you, you are charged with the same. We are always, and always the same, you and I. We are drawing now nearer to the edge of the forest. Maybe the wolves will forget what they have seen here. Or maybe they will use it against us. Maybe we will return with our weapons, together, and do the same, you and I. Maybe we will become the bullets that splinter apart their bones in the names of men. WE WILL REMOVE THE ONCE SHARP TEETH, YOU AND I, AND LEAVE OUR FORMER NAMES AS VESTIGES IN THEIR PLACE.

{III} I dream in killer question marks because there is a war outside. I'll stand in the rain to burn myself clean because I blister in the sun. City brakes squeal from thin-wearing pads, and the cabs continue on, all rickety and mean. I'm holding hands with saints in orange corridors, built from dead husks of abandoned subway cars. Their names are alive in aged hues on the walls, and they are bleeding into the cracks that have begun to form in the parietes of my heart. I'm sorry I haven't written in a while. I'm sorry about the anonymous picture postcards. I forget. I tore a note into my arm to remember. It healed, and I soon again forgot. The buildings are silver bullies in the daylight, hulking graveyards by night. Please send a flare, a map, or a compass. Send me a slingshot, or a prayer. I carry the old photographs, but what can be burned is sacrificed for heat when the giants falter to the dusk. The salt in the air is burning at our mouths. THE SEA IS RAVENOUS WITH REVENGE. There is a flood on the horizon tonight, and the guards have begun to desert their towers. THE WATER HAS REVEALED US IN WAYS WE COULD NEVER HAVE IMAGINED.

{IV} I come apart when the authorities arrive, spread across the room like an ocean doing the same. I am reaching behind me now. Every morning with them was cause for another string of misdemeanors. I talked on the phone then. I drew pictures of women and men doing their best to relate to one another, like lines drawing lines upon lines, over and over again, insecure. Dinner was the time of day reserved for crows and me. We gambled excuses in exchange for a minute more before turning out the light. It is well past dinner now, and the light has been out for days. The rafters are humming; bullhorns, relentless; the fields are dividing; they know me by this name: Penance. Vibrant lights scribble non sequiturs across cracked plaster. I am all lungs in here. IF THIS IS A BATTLE HYMN, I AM THE DRUM, THE WINTER, AND THE HAMMER WHICH BEATS THEM FORWARD. The men in plainclothes finish cigarettes while we wait.

{V} Picture. Petition. Wrecking ball. A filament. LOOSE FALLING SNOW DRIPPING AS STATIC, MY BALTIMORE, AND I AM AS IF I AM DAWN, AWAKE. Tiny radio, my pocket, a form of oxygen apparatus here. Its every verse a wandering, careening toward a suitable chorus. We get, in this way, what we deserve most. We give what we are, in this way, of ourselves. Microphone. Reject. Car alarm. A furnace. Some sort of perdition, some rules for the road. I tried. I tried again, and failed, where I could not remove your picture from the wall. Its face took me down instead, trembling me from basement to heavens. Where a crossing out of the minor. Where the burning of middle initial. A team of ghost prayer horses. A bloodletting. A home.

{VI} O SOLEMNLY STAY THIS, MY FILM PROJECTOR HEART. I WROTE THAT SENTENCE FOR A FIRE ONCE. I built a fire from a forgotten friend. I drew ghost water from a lover and took it to bed, a train. This is my machina, with its gears softly turning beneath the rolling of a forest floor. When night appears again, we are both friend plus enemy; the blood and the calm; menacing to some as Chinese New Year. Our manual of snow misses a page the way I miss pulse, and dark, and the borrowing for the sake of the borrowing alone. I covet this place, though I am summer's end. I am love song, the cross-fade, the badge, the brought in screaming. Wolves here know this as a baptism of war. WE KISS WITH CLASHING TEETH BEFORE THE RAIN, AND I FOLLOW YOU DOWN THE MOUNTAINSIDE, WE, BRINGING LIFE TO WHERE THE FIRE HAD GONE BEFORE US. Stay close and don't tell the lions your name. DEVISE A METHOD FOR TURNING THE NUMBERS INTO SAND. Inhale. A coming. Exhale. The ghosts.

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