

See Oh Oh Pee [that]

m kennedy v o l c o f s k y

I don't really know how deep you have to go. I'd have said 3 feet, but that it was me thought it I'm assuming it at least double that, since I based it wholly on imagination, and my imagination is generally about half as true as what is possible – probable – so I'm going 6 feet down, and assuming that should be enough but expecting no surprise it's not.

I'm intending on using steel – quarter inch steel plating, 6 feet x 3 feet sheets, set in vertical without overlap – the scrap yard had a mass of them from the demolished hospital – they said it was from the OR's but I'm pretty certain it was from the morgue – I'm going to stand them in beneath the structure's perimeter, so I'll use ten of them, three on the lengths, two on the widths.

In the dreammind this all started in I imagined I could just press them in, ten 18 ft² steel plates, press them straight into the ground like you can press a queen of hearts into sand on the beach and watch her portrait go down / past eyes and the crown / and finally the red Q itself. Buried. That it would be like that, pleasurable and effortless, down through the sod. Also like the way magicians drop those dough-cutters into the box that cuts the lady in-two. Exuberance of initial insertion, curious resistance which one assumes is bone, then *push*, the moment of truth, the satisfying *click* into place, meaning through her, she's apart, through her to the other side, the steel no longer visible, just the handle stoppered in place. Essential fantasy / of everything. Ease ... resistance ... struggle and standoff ... spilling satisfaction / the obstacle penetrated ... exhausted victory ... celestial echo. Halo. Triumph over shame / casualties without blood / without blame. So in the dreammind this is how first it was imagined, pressing these large sheets of steel into cold spring ground the way a

lady's cut in-two on stage. Both illusions. Because I knew it as soon as the imagined pleasure of it was felt – I'd have to dig a trench around the thing, see what cables and rocks and roots were in the way, stand the steel down in it and then fill it all in. Then would it make sense to pour cement too? But that was too much. Too much work, too much material ... too much mass ... I didn't want the extra mass around there ... I just wanted the metal in the dark protecting my structure from underground intruders.

I looked forward to the work. I loved the dirt. I love the dirt. I love the smell of it the feel of it the dirt of it. Pressing a hand onto soil, its give and moist coolness so much like skin, triggering the hand to squeeze, to knead, grip, like to breast or belly or thigh or ass. The feeling-sound tearing out the hair of the grass. The hunger of the hand awakening holding tight to the dirt. The smell ... when I was a boy, getting driven back and forth from clinics and home, my father would light his cigarette in the car – it had something to do with turning it on – we'd sit in the car, he'd wait for the dashboard lighter to pop, press his Pall Mall to its fading glow, inhale, blow and turn / the key. Blow *and* turn. And that first whiff of his smoke, that first whiff of tobacco before he exhaled – so he could turn the key – so succulent, so delicious in my smelling, it was something like chocolate or thirst, something that essential. Then – mixed with his breath – when he exhaled the engine turned on – revolting. I'd lay in back back back of the stationwagon back and see how few times I could breathe. How the smell could change so completely ... and it never was different, always that first whiff a pleasure that immediately turned wretched. It had to do with his insides. Mixing. With the smoke. That was my understanding. He poisoned the smoke, when it mixed with

his insides. I already knew that about him, that what was inside him was foul and dangerous for me. The smell of dirt is that moment, that first whiff of pleasure and deep need going deeper – but without the second, without that second part that undoes everything. The silence before the engine, the dirt. A heartbreaker, the dirt. Always. A homecoming and lovemaking with a body that crumbles to the touch. My touch.

I had most of what I needed, aside from the steel itself: a spade, a shovel, a mattock, an ax in case of severe roots; I'd get some sod too, to repair the cuts.

Back in the 90's when I buried my wife I insisted on being part of the gravedigger crew at Laurel Hill; they really did not want me there, a grieving husband with a shovel – but there was no way I was going to let others do that job experience the smell the touch of that ground see exactly what was in there going to be in there with her for all time and not me, there was no way and they soon realized that and since that was still time before the terror of deviation from the widely prescribed norm which certainly never really seemed that wide in the first place and which a decade later shrinking so severely made time before it seem like lawless utopia my demand to dig wasn't taken as some kind of militia sex-threat and so they didn't tase or mace or stun or bind or kill me *I wasn't tased or maced or stunned or bound or killed* they just looked in my face *they just looked at me* picked my cap up, handed it back to me and waved me with four fingers to join them. They mostly used a backhoe but let me dig a good while. That's the day I learned about mattocks. A guy with a bush of curly red hair and white-blond eyebrows told me it – the name – was related to rams horns, some old etymology based on what they're shaped like. I never looked it up. But a mattock

at rest does look like a horned animal with its head to the ground, genuflecting. So I believed he knew mattocks even if it was a fable. They wore their union-green gravedigger suits and workboots, I my mourning pants undershirt and formal shoes, of deerskin. The spring had been warm and they said the ground was soft for May. I draped my tie / jacket / shirt over the stone behind where her's was to be. I've read it everytime I've been there, I've never memorized that name. I know it has a rock – a picture of a rock – inscribed on it, and the names – two names, man and woman, a couple – are on either side of it. Only her name's on hers. I found a quartz, milk-yellow, the shape and size of a human heart in her grave. It's here, still, on my kitchen table, keeping my papers from flying in the wind. It sucks the sunset's reds into itself and glows like a dashboard lighter's inside it too. I've touched my tongue to it many times, to feel for fire / smell / smoke. Cold flatness always, licking the tip of winter. I bring a hope for saltiness too, and that too always returned blank. But the blank tasteless cold thrills my bones in a fixed way. Maybe because she died on bathroom tile. I touched my tongue to it, by her head, as I had lain with her. After too. Maybe I'd find its companion when I dug.

I'd have the top lip of the steel plate butt up against the base underground, so the cinderblock sits right on the edge of the steel so there's not even an inch of earth to bore through. I'd make the sod-bed around it high to hide the foundation. But perhaps the ground moves too much and I need to have the steel surround the cinders, extend a few inches above their base. That way any shifting won't expose the structure of invasion. I mean *to* invasion. In that case the sod will need be even higher, so I'll have to set the base a bit deeper. Attach

the steel to the cinderblock, all the way around, like an apron? But I'm not trying to block insects. So no. I think it's fine. As long as my food doesn't become *their* food.

I saw her in that morgue is why I make my hunch the steel is from there. It's nothing I could prove and nothing I can even really describe, but the moment at the scrap yard I saw the lights in the storage shed reflect in them I knew where I'd seen that metal walling before. I didn't even know I'd noticed when I'd gone to identify her before the funeral. You don't know what you see. Seeing is after. I'm happy they tore down Mt Zion. That place made people sicker than weller and it was an eyesore of elevation and design. The metal drawer she was in didn't slide smooth. I remember that. I remember that made me smolder inside. I walked down their drive feeling like I was tumbling end over end in a rage at the damned offense the way that human refrigerator drawer slid. Didn't slide. Had to be shoved and pulled and made itself heard. A place that can't even maintain that base level of etiquette deserves be knocked to pieces.

Old standards, that. A luxury deserved of the dead. By those standards now most of the world should be being demolished. And I suppose it is. Always.

Standards that probably never existed anyway.

Standards only money can buy.

But I am glad they ripped down that fucking Mt Zion.

And that I'm building my last stop out of its pieces.

Three hours from where Mt Zion used to be my father was left this tiny shack and dirt. His father's body and his mother's body are in the dirt here with a couple of cobblestones from the ghetto at their feet with their names carved on

them. In the old language and the new language. My father's body was turned to flyash and lime. Or something like that. He wanted to be sifted out like powdered sugar onto the water at the docks where he fished. *Don't put me in their dirt.* I knew that. I knew that long before he died and never realized it was partially why I'd always thought it was a sea in me, a sea inside me but underneath me, that I sensed as the terrain of my breaking away. I knew before I knew. He – whose assembly line hands looked permanently gloved – made weekend cookies and cakes. He'd sift sugar on them just before he served them. The multistoried screens in the can fascinated me. A day after Bastille day I scattered his canister making movements that – even to me – others said it I felt it – movements like swatting a swarm. His stuff – he – went all over, over my head, on my head and arms, out onto the water, back onto the dock, onto them, into my eyes, my mouth. On a mostly windless day. Fish came up to taste it. I threw the dust-smoking can at one of them. He would have known its name. The can bobbed upright on the water for a while, then fell to its side and was taken down. That was the moment I felt – seeing that can fall on its side fill and go down – that the only thing I cried for, that can – the way it was – swallowed – the hunger in the water –

The hook, shiny / industrially superb / hangs empty in the air.

For some reason he'd given his friend Mac – I don't know if that was his real name – the deed for this plot to hold. I suppose he was some sort of lawyer. Everyone was gone and had been gone for a while and it was certainly noon or a

little later and I was sitting on the anvil the boats tie to at the dock edge and looking out at the low bay and the ugly condos across it that ten years ago were new. The pussy willows and grass on the shoreline made them look fine from this side. But if you needed to turn around and used their cul de sacs you saw – remembered – they were moribund indecorous bunkers that interred all joy. Even their shore was morose, the pussy willow stalks topped by brown half-eaten abandoned dildos swaying in like-brown sludge. But over here, three hundred yards away there were fish still biting. They'd just eaten some of my father's cinders. Mac came over and put a finger on my shoulder. I looked at it – it was yellow with tobacco and the overlarge nail had flat pitted ridges running under the cuticle. I began to press myself to standing, but he weighed that whole hand on me to tell me not to, and more that he wouldn't let me. He put a regular white business envelope that was sealed and overfull into my right jacket pocket and said *Your father means this for you. Take care, son.* He squeezed and released my neck. *Means, not meant.* He walked away and I saw underarm sweat through his grey suit. His bald head and grey friar's ring on his always shockingly thick neck like some dray without a yoke. I'd always liked Mac. As a boy when I'd been around for dinners he came to at our house he talked in long storyform, everyone seeming entertained, and he'd curse in gravelly asides punctuating like he was summing up for an invisible friend who was right by his ear. *These fuhh-kin mokes.* The asides got the laughs. He walked the decayed planking, legs squat and bowed. His feet were bare. That seemed to be a kind of crying. He still clung to some old ways. Shoes hung from his right hand.

I took off my shoes and socks. The featherlight splintery grey cedar felt good. Soft.

I got married in these Italian deerskin shoes. Leather soled. I've worn them twice since. Two funerals.

Deer?

Deer are like rats on stilts. Fuh-king pests. Overrunning everything. They swarm the land at night like zombies eating everything in reach. You've seen them? Fuh-king deer. I hate deer. She bunched the sheet at her breasts and sat up in the dark. Her blond hair. Some of me still reflected on the corner of her mouth, in the street light. *Deer?* She wiped her mouth with her wrist. *You hate deer? Who hates deer? Are you evil? We've ruined their world.* I sat up. *Evil? 'Am I evil?' I am. I am evil. I am.* I stood up. Growing hard again. It couldn't not be noticed. Blood was stiffening me and turning into words. *I am evil. I've become evil, because there's nothing but simple sentimental cunts like you to fuck. Are you a child? Bambi's dead. We killed her when we killed the world. They're like us now. Rats. Rats with bushy tails and hooves and assholes with eyelashes and cartoon memories of when they were perfect little boys and perfect little girls in perfect little fuh-king perfect worlds.* She was pulling her panties on. Her back in the streetlight the handle of a cup filled with perfect flesh. A cup I'd just poured on the floor. *Cunts like you. Deer.* I closed the bathroom door left it dark sat on tile then lay on it listening to her

leave. Behind that door my hardness fell. There were things in there she wanted and needed and knocked for then kicked for but I remained still. And thus I'd lain til sunrise. 1.

The envelope bulging what was in it. A deed for the land of my ancestors, a quarter acre on unworked ground with their bones in the middle of it and off to the side a tool shed that functioned as a house. I'd been there as a boy once, trees and a green steel drum filled with water, on tiptoes I saw insects running on the surface, fruit peels around on the grassless dirt, work gloves with dirt-stains on them lying on a cinderblock, newspaper taped to fill a missing window pane, tree-latticed sun. The walls inside smelled like their mouths, sour and bed-like. Thick sleep in back driving home. I looked at the deed. *Indeed. The deed. Is done.* A tremor of celebration did palpitation inside. Inside I grabbed that empty drowned can full of sea and fatherash and toasted the dust and chunks I'd just flung and drunk the whole thing down. I stood up and put the unclosable envelope back in my pocket and wondered briefly at the currents. I found myself actually hoping they didn't take too much of him across the other side.

A French flag stuck out off one of the condos.

After her – everything is after her – other women were something like the weather.

Because I wanted *everything* I'd accepted nothing. My denial was extreme patience.

Their *feelings* were only their way of trying to get what they wanted. Blackmail, extortion, stickups, out and out rape and murder would be more honest. That's why these were against the law, on some level. Their *feelings* were techniques, tactics, a list of demands presented to agree to or find oneself violently evicted. Starved, homeless, unnamed, isolated.

Their *feelings*.

And what they wanted? – a swift extracted emptiness in place of *you* – and when achieved they'd be so *surprised*, so hurt, so *saddened* – while inside their *feelings* rubbed their hands in triumph of full belly and full cunt.

What was outside of them was material for ballast.

What was outside of me was obstacles.

Outside of me was not material but the signs of everything that was missing. And what wasn't missing was an obstacle.

So their *feelings* demanded: WORLD, COME INTO BEING. My *wanting* demanded: WORLD, ALWAYS AND FOREVER LOST.

Oddly these two things produced their opposite. Their *feelings* made a world that was constantly DISAPPEARING, while my *wanting* made a world of more and more blockages, mass, GARBAGE.

So they pretended to eat and crave garbage, to material want. And I pretended to want not at all.

And so we gained through mutual resignations simulacra of our original and true wants.

And so I was building my invasion structure, how odd to not yet be dead, how odd – she died first, he died first – and yes it would be a *thing* but it would

be a thing *against* things. Beneath the surface nothing would burrow and enter and steal my food. My steel queens of hearts would block. Inside the animals I'd collected were laying and growing. Inside along the glass walls boxes of soil would grow vegetables and greens. Animals would have their assigned nooks and food. My barrels would ferment, my copper-guides collect rain in glass jars. Sunlight – its latticing much less pronounced now that I'd have hewn down half the trees – I want light, *light*, sunlight and dry ground – sunlight would penetrate the glass walls and glass roof like a dream carried in two cupped hands from the other side of time. It was the breath of the bison of my childhood dreams, the tiny bison I'd see on the run moving through trouble and forests and ponds and hiding in the kitchen in crumby cabinet shadows where I'd find the opera silence of dead insects. The night before I drove up to claim my land that bison came to me the first time in decades. As I ate a sandwich, a pita sandwich, I noticed green mold on the bread's bottom edge, and realized I'd been eating rot, and I needed to see, so I peeled the face of the bread open and in the vegetables I saw the bison, tiny, pinkynail size, shaped first like a magnified flea, and it stood up and grew and grew to its old size, and I wasn't going to have it, I hacked its head off with a cocktail straw and it hung there from intestinal mucousy strands and it walked about with its head hung off and then disgorged its own insides, pressing them out the hold of itself the way a garbage truck vomits its day's contents, it vomited itself out of itself through the hole where its head once was, it was green hay, green hay vomited out in a living heap on the ground. The breath of the bison of my childhood dreams would flood the glass roof and glass walls of my invasion structure and feed the food I ate and the drink I drank. And what I

wanted would be halfway real. I think halfway is as far as you get. But the hands of the world, the cupped hands of the world would carry that breath from the other side of time, and as light it would fall like a sigh through the glass roof and fall upon and feed what fed me.

I had the rectangle of the structure traced with dowels in the ground and strung with bright pink nylon string. My mattock was impaled in the ground right in the middle, waiting to work. The plumbing in the shack was still functional, so I demolished everything but, and built a new shack so the toilet plumbing was closest to the invasion structure, my kitchen plumbing next close, and then my sleeping area was on the far side away. I kept the top third of the wall beyond my bed open so I could see the stars. I pruned the black walnut and the maple so they wouldn't block that view. I built a bed out of what I fell. I still have the four dishes I scavenged from the artist across the hall that fell to the virus not long after my wife, green- and blue-edged flatware. I have two soup bowls, a soup pot, a fry pan, a big boiler, a kettle. I took two mugs with me – hope or breakage – and oddly I found another in the dirt when I was rebuilding the shack. A white mug with a logo and acronym I don't recognize – C M S. The logo is just the letters decorated with wisteria. When I was sleeping in the sleeping bag when I was rebuilding the shack an animal's breath in my ear woke me. I didn't move or open my eyes. It was the breath of a big thing, humid and stinking of life. My heart was like a foot chained to a stake, kicking. The darkness in me kept going down. I don't know what it was. It never came back.

It's not clear why it was me that survived; eventually it won't have been. I'd once thought the meaning of it would clarify in time. As far as I can tell the

well is healthy, the septic tank emptier than what I'll top off in the time I have left. We shared everything, all our body's spit and blood, but it was she went. The steel walls I last saw her lie in lie in my truckbed. They'll protect my eggs.



On the other side of time / she sat across from me.

'Whose body is that?' I ask.

She shifts him to her other breast and doesn't answer.

'Not the one you wanted,' I observe.

'Me?' she answers, eyes me and looks away.

'Dying didn't change you,' I say. 'It just cut you in two.'