

Neil Arditi

Noir Parenting

for Mohini

As I push baby's carriage in circles through the playground,
Bouncing over woodchips,
Past bigger babies with food on their faces,
I imagine how different it might have been.
What if I were driving a 1947 Ford Super Deluxe
Down a dark, dirt road?
What if baby were a hardened criminal, or worse,
A cop? What if I hadn't pulled
The red canopy of the carriage over baby's eyes,
To protect them from the sun,
But tied instead a white handkerchief around his
grizzled head,
So he wouldn't know where we were going,
Where we hid the loot we had stolen?
One last job, you said,
Then we could quietly disappear.
Settle down somewhere like normal folks.
And it might still work,
If we can keep our heads,
Not panic,
Not break down like this
Big baby blubbing in the backseat.
("You're not going anywhere, pal,
So you might as well sit back and relax.")
I wish I could relax.
I haven't slept in days.
I could use a shave.
I could use a drink.
But I keep my eyes on the road in front of me,

Except to steal, from time to time,
A glance at you,
Painting your nails,
Turning the pages of your magazines.
“How’d we ever get into this racket, anyway?”
You ask, without looking up,
Because you know I won’t answer.
Because it’s pointless to ask.
Because the answer’s written all over my face:
We’re in too deep to turn back now.

Pantoum

Once you measured loss
inside a dream,
yourself a dream,
you found your own dreams beautiful.

Inside a dream,
you piled them high like clouds.
You found your own dreams beautiful
enough for waking and you woke.

You piled them high. Like clouds,
they would not stay put.
Enough for waking: you slept
more soundly, dreaming without words.

They would not stay put.
How could you sleep
more soundly, dreaming without words?
The words, the dream were one.

How could you sleep
once you measured loss?
The words, the dream were one,
yourself a dream.