

Jeffery Donaldson

Over Head

1

I find myself, out of the highs
and lows, sifting love's
aimless uplifts endlessly,
wondering where they go

and what becomes of them.
Take January 1981,
the early dark, the light country
walk north of Newmarket,

when, going steady, we stood
a moment in the narrow lane,
blizzard ablaze, the whipped-up
snowfall feathered

into whirled-off cradled
stillnesses and holds,
its luring soft spots giving way
to fetching stirs and gustos,

the silent troves above us
hanging like a sense
of our impermanence,
almost outlasting in its stay.

2

Think of it like this.
The mind's body or the body's
mind, that half-turnedwrong-
way-round pirouette

is not the flame above
a wax candle, not gilt
crown propped akimbo
over the monarch's brow.

Your brain's offspring —
the I feeling a you
as an I to be with,
each other's awareness —

is the twirling vapour
over a simmering soup,
its fine-spun wisps jostled
by kindling underheats

just at low, a hovering-above,
the sultry dewed ethers
rising a time over the mess
of potage, our birthright.

Then the final time,
when the heat shuts down,
and the vapours, come
to a head, ease off,

and the stalling ethers'
unweights, letting up,
cool soupward, their fogs
wading back into the gels

and plumbed unguents less
quicken, the mists whisked
into the liquid's liquid liquids,
the very thought of it.

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3

Peace to you, dazzling blizzard.
Godspeed, hard northerlies,
your phantom hullabaloo
whirled off in new weathers.

You were something to behold.
But what fastened us spellbound
were your upheld wrap-rounds,
sashaying windwise, a buoyancy

in abeyance, waffling in hiatus,
intermission's maze so downy
in its lift, so like what love
is like that we stopped drifting,

until it must have settled surely —
the part I still can't bring to mind
to save my life — on fields of snow,
endless, as far as we could see.

Fountain Pen

I spread my blue privates
on the creaking line,
those aired unmentionables

showing wear. Scrawled
awkward tatters, so public,
so seen. The skid stains.

Higher up, an inky gloom
waiting in store will trickle
down, come evening,

turned like an hourglass,
and its obfuscations
will cover entire sheets.

Hang it all. Let the dark
empty. Come morning, I'll see
where the blues have run.

open a place in memory
for whatever abstract notion
captures its fall

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Found in an Essay by Max Beerbohm

*Only what mattered was changed.
Only what mattered was gone.*

Your old cottage was deserted.
I climbed over the gate,
walked through the long grass.

In the door-post, a small knob
of rusty iron was a mocking
reminder that to gain admission

to your house one rang the bell.
A rusty bell with no one
in sight to answer it leaves

one to go. Yet I did not go.
The movement that I made
was towards the knob itself.

I hesitated. Suppose I did
what I half meant to do
and there were no sound?

That would be ghastly.
And surely there *would* be
no sound. And if sound

there were, wouldn't that be
still worse? No footstep
of yours answering within,

making prints in the dust,
there in the dark recesses,
all your inner things lasting.

My hand drew back, misgave,
suddenly closed on the knob.
I heard the scrape of the wire

—and then, faintly somewhere
deep within the heart
of your shut house, a chime.