

Study for a Triptych

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Here in my soft-lit study, carpet and upholstery light,
warm against the drafts of forced air
that scale the wall of windows, peel back
like cresting breakers over this warm chair
that cradles me like a woolen nest—
here where morning sun is sliced by sharp white blinds,
undulating ladders suspended in the breeze,
I look out across the Mall, the reflecting pool,
off toward the Capitol, round stone pate rising
like a midday moon above the oaks.
It might be Paris, it might be St. James Park,
or the Thames-side walk that wavers in the sun,
that floats and shimmers in Turner's light.

Squirrels, lean and gray with frosted tails
that some Dutch master might have finished by lamplight,
hair by hair, with tiny yellow brushes:
these cull the tough green acorns
that bounce and rattle on inlaid walkways.
Lovers (for who is not a lover
in the late September sun?) pass here,
breathing in the warm southwestern breeze:
I watch and listen, imagine the sounds and smells
cut off, held out by double-paned reflecting glass.

Sirens intrude, blue line of cycling Visigoths,
motors screaming down the throat of Third Street:
the president of the Philippines,
smiling in her saffron dress, costume of renewal—
emblem to the masses who do not comprehend,
who find it merely pretty, and she but charming—
is passing in state motorcade,
coffined in a long, sleek bulletproof
that wraps her like a tight black glove.
Behind her, a blocky war-wagon
like a fat metallic armadillo
bristling with watchful dark-clad guardsmen
who con the rooftops, whisper into black devices,
gesticulate to the grotesque train that follows
like frantic jet-black ants in chain.

The squirrels race for trees, dive into cover;
the lovers look up, wonder at the unfamiliar flag
that studs the great black cruiser, look away
disinterested: acorns fall as they have for days.
From beneath the Japanese yew below my window
rats—five great sleek brown rats—emerge
as if to gape, as if to claim their share
of this, this harrowing loud cortege,
writhe in the stunning sunlight,
and are gone.