

Michael Levell

The Complete Letters of Jailbird Van Gogh
for John Patsynski

...

I've been a couple"
want to shoot the sun

happening
happening

the trees' subtle gesture
never tire of explaining blue

Dear Gawain,
You gave me your headache
in thick
brush strokes

sharpening
the year

Green tights
are funny on anyone
whether televised or headless

I'll see you when I get out

& we'll neck in the public library
with smuggled radios in our ears

I still smell you in water

There is barely
any room
in the pantry
with all the
sharpening wheels
I've stolen

Once saw
a man convert a bicycle
to sharpen holsters
of cutlery

turning his beard

into a celebration

like your shanks

this is hidden
beneath my pillow

back when
you searched
books

for the line
missing in my
nudity

I imagine that too

Remember
when we were
lost
in
the bike taxi

How
many
people we
found
in the seat
cracks

I want to write you about
the sidewalk paintings

But Gawain
you could be any
body

even the woman balancing this bench
not quite a novel

not every line
matters

like last night

I dreamed about the green knight

wet with pillow

I'm still a bit fucked
and not a good conversationalist

Ask any happy telephone
trading doves for cups
that can't fit

any mouth
not made of palpable wood

“come fast or not at all”

without that spit-polished crown

not every line matters

I’m blood-shot editing you
Jealous

He rode across traffic
on a green horse
as big as the sky
you housed in your throat
that I’d sail
my liquid kites through

I hate messages

All I could do was paint
with tufts of eyebrow

Behind the picket teeth of enormity

The tv doesn’t help
It doesn’t even dictate
anymore
like you made it used to

“It takes a long time but it’s fast”

I met you
in Smuggler’s Grove
Vermont

Because of that woman
(& me)
you moved to the north

Why do we need stories

Your paper-back back

I lied

I never met
You

I was too busy
eating mothballs
in grandma’s
closet

snorting rusty shag

“Shut up and smoke me”

Gawain dear
you are an impossible flamingo

“I don't know what's happening in my pants”

It's raining
kinda

All the magic powers
our parents had
were paranoia

By St. Julian
What kind of
Christian are you
!?

I pray
to
you

passing clouds
on pause

I know
she was a novel
at every moment

and fulfilled
your librarian
fetish

but every cake
wants to be made
then
eaten

like every notebook
wants to be written
then
remembered

Not every line is matter

“Good sir
would you carry my
words”

and take them to your virgin

These words
that
have existed
as long as we
with lines in tow
try(d) to catch

each
other

“If Gawain
were Gawain
he'd settle
his debt”

Instead
of leaving me

to feed his smoking fish
and talk to water

At last
something
must be
said

Arrangements are made
with blooms in mind

You are off to find her

a Christmas present
without

a bow on its
shoulders

In the North

Sleeping above her
near the green chapel

just beneath the snow

In the North

you will find us

Root & Stem

I
the petal
freshly
plucked
without a
shovel

removed from her soiled sleep

Put me in your mouth
that I may grow again

Before
I wither in the Spring
of your distance

Of course

you cannot
hear
me

I forgot

I shouted your ears off
Right before
you Left

The Right I put on my book shelf
to replace that notebook you ate

The Left I gave to her
months ago

When I painted her portrait
in your favorite wine glass

Everything that day was stained with devotion

“a knight’s good name rests most on his
loyalty to Love, learning in it’s weaponry”

“Is your heart unlettered
Despite your fame?”

I am no longer planted

No one knows
the author of this work

Dearest Gawain
If I only knew who you were
All this work
might make sense

“This is what ambivalence buys”

No one used you so badly

Always reminding me my zipper is down

I know nothing about physics
or opera houses

Realizing there is a now
still puts it behind glass
on the same wall
you put your shield

with secret paintings
of the virgin
on its underbelly)

That summer three shared mouths
like place settings
of soggy heat

She was never our wadded mothers

No matter
how many times
we climbed in & out

abandoning our brittle leaves

not taking root

A close reading

early tuesday morning
watching Dr. Who
and that episode

of TJ Hooker
where Shatner
saves the Beach Boys

I made you both egg sandwiches
and marijuana tea at 4:12am

"It has to be someone's birthday"

In the North
without reach
in the snow

I rust

On a green horse
as tiny as the sky

I'm not in charge of this anymore

Imagining her too

Painting a bath of both of you

Smoking all my fingers

Her name was like an organ

"Let's get lost"

I remember her
like I would
any lover

a broken narrative
soaked in that tart
of too much licking

How many times she passed
without eyes

until you gave them to her

I was jealous of the
way she napped
in your sideburns

Maybe if I stop writing this
you wont exist

the white water
of your night breath
will stop

“You’re as melodramatic as college theatre”

I promise

I wanted to be a boy

Wanted to play her vintage

She was the desire of a wild-patch
where boys fight dragons
and forget about dinner

I imagine
I was touching
Two of you

“You are so photogenic when your not being photographed”

This is the best illusion I've ever had

The time of day where clouds are left
on the skillet with a bit too much butter

I love you Gawain

If love is
the action of

Counting every kiss
You gave me
when I asked

By the way

When the horse's mouth closed

he chewed me
green

swallowed
me awake

to find your note:

Dear Jailbird,

Invent an imagined absence.

*Love,
Gawain*

(As often as I notice color

or the letters she sends you every week

I can't turn you
into something
to let go of

Not knowing
you

means I can
make up

anything

I imagine your distance on a fold

not to be
opened
till morning

But now
the snow is here

and I cannot reach the Spring
of your distance

I imagine I wrote this

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