

Evelyn Lau / THREE POEMS

SAFE TRIPS

Not me, he says in the hallway, I'm not leaving you I promise.
you turn in the bathroom doorway a moth of feeling struggling in
your chest. your heart beats like you're high on some kind of
hope that jumps rope while your feet get tangled in the green
contour mat and he stands there with his hand in the air, Scouts
honour.

in bed your thighs ache your toenails are ten cinnamon hearts
burning the brass bars as your hands explore the terrain
of his face. his body is a group of hills you gather around
your own small body, his hands puppets performing magic.
with your arms you shape the wings of angels on his back,
encourage the leaky lift between his legs, the bite and
drawing suck of his teeth on your nipple drawing your breast
up in a surprised triangle. then he's inside you like a
branch with an eye at its tip testing roving a long bright
stare and then a wink a coy brush of lashes a withdrawn
look. when you open your eyes he flinches, he must adjust
slowly to you as if to a hundred watt bulb, all your silenced
thoughts concentrated in a collection of wishes in your
eyes.

you know when to leave but you can't help yourself, in the
hallway you babble Sex was good or well it wasn't bad I
sort of liked it I don't normally I...and he steps
behind you lifts your jacket you slip one arm and then the

other into blackness and tenderly he lifts your hair from
the base of your neck he lets it fall over the leather collar
and down your back he puts his hands on your shoulder pads
he says tenderly Shut up.

CITY OF MEN

coming around the corner past the sexshop with its anemic mannequin in the window, you are more naked walking down this street in daylight than you ever were stripping in the middle of a dance floor in seattle or pretending to masturbate in a stranger's living room or giving nude backrubs in a massage parlor on skid row. no one would think of calling you gorgeous the way they do at night, yelling it out of car windows past the hotels where you stand, blue light hovering around you like angels, your bare white back dipping to your waist in someone's rearview mirror.

sometimes they catch you coming out of the doctor's office, a valium prescription like a passport to a foreign country in your purse. it's too small a city to be surprised when men call the name that isn't your name and squeeze your elbow in the middle of the intersection as if you might float away if they didn't keep you anchored down. it is then you know that if you broke away and ran, you would be followed until you fell.

though you buy plane tickets to famous cities, though sometimes you are seen with girlfriends at movies or walking on the trails of a park on weekends, you always return to this city of men. you say you're going to leave for good one day, with the same look in your eyes you had five years ago when you first said those words. that

shiny look, your eyes turned slightly off-centre like you're looking at another world just a little to the side of this one. someday it'll appear, sharp as the picture on a new television. you'll be standing on this street corner when that happens, waiting for it to head straight towards you like a john who knows what he wants and has the money to make it real.

IT'S BOXING DAY

and cab drivers complain about a 43% drop in income over the past three years while we ride the glitter of city bridges, trees blazing triangles of electric light from the tops of buildings and cranes crooking over empty construction sites. something's different about your kiss tonight, about the angle of your body when the door opens inwards and we are narrow in a narrow space. when I try to give you my coat I see you have handcuffed yourself and the key surrendered to my palm is delicate as a clitoris. under the duvet the knots are already tied the cuffs like claws waiting to close on wrists and ankles.

that afternoon we sat in a restaurant eyeing the blank stare of the royal bank across the street the blink of lights at a wendy's drive-in the curve of the bridge like the curve of the moon. everyone watched each other cautiously the men in neto jackets the women with holiday-slim legs. the law says it's okay as long as you have the intent to eat as long as you have the intent, the waitress winked, and it was time for another round. spitting strawberry daiquiri seeds at you from across the table while gold christmas tinsel shimmered and shattered over the bar.

you take the chain for the nipple clamps between your teeth, silver runs waterfalls down either side of your mouth. this perfect balance between pleasure and pain the scale refusing to tip yet in one direction or the other. meanwhile

candles flame on the table, a stockingful of caramels
spills to the floor. a bruise the size of a gold-wrapped
chocolate coin melts under your hipbone. "D was at the
christmas party we danced all night we drank all night we
came back here and kissedandnecked but we didn't do anything
else. Why my friend asked expecting some noble reply but
in reality I didn't know how to explain the bruises the
scars I mean that was Saturday imagine how bad it was THEN?"
I listen crunching candy canes their red and green veins
slit and swirling through the hard white sugar, watching
your face confessional with pain. soon it's late the taxi
drivers again complaining about their shifts the economy
"anyone who says the recession's over should drive cab
they're not sitting in this seat twelve hours a day I got
a wife two kids" and downtown the hands of the
birks clock meet each other at midnight and part again.