

John Lofranco / from A TEMPORARY ETCHING

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Stuck in the city, I want to hit the road again, with one shoulder the way Coach taught,
and roll, down a grassy hill, mixing green and blue like a Wednesday-bland
salad spinner, end up, face up, sun looking sternly down like Dad when he caught

me hiding under a pile of crisp oak-leaf, rake in one yellowed hand,
cigarette in the other, and snarled: "Get to work!" I worked all winter, fought
until I dropped into bed like a crumpled soft-drink cup under the grandstand's

wet metal haunches, and when I woke up, alone on my morbid, high plot,
I was seed-seam bursting to split this atom in three; I'd been unmanned,
needed to find a lover who'd mother. She shouldn't be too hard to spot,

cause I've got the eagle-eyes of a borstal boy looking for love, man.
So I rambled to an impromptu reception where all the people were bubble-gum cards
full of trivia and their outfits matched the trim of the room. The hat stand

was chocolate-warm, like the dirt around the infield at Camden Yards.
The shortstop squatted, her glove the bottom of an eavestrough, making me
want to roll on the turf again, but the tiny sniper spraying snow hard

against the evening crushed the red glow of the aluminium-siding pity
I felt talking to some guy in a talking tie: I rubbed my cheap wine glass with my thumb
while I waited for him to admit he was a poet, and like an electrically
charged dog-fence, the tie tightened every time he approached the opium.

Sometimes, it starts with a pain behind my eye, but moves down fast, focusing attention on my empty belly, the lining of my stomach sagging like a sail on a windless day, lake-still, until, slowly, the last

fat deposits are scraped from inside tissue lining, a spoon looking to lick the dregs of ice cream from the tub; the fat percolates in the nexus of the system, as crumbs, a handful of nuts, sugar cookies, and thick

peanut butter are introduced: enough, barely, to get to the next arcade race-car-game checkpoint. The hunger permeates, bleeding from outside, and I just tumble, crashing the shadowy carousel, vexed

by the scars from when I lost my appetite and ate the golden ring. Sometimes, I'm afraid to eat, for fear of what people will say, cause I'm pretty good at seeing both sides of the issue; if I just wait, an older, thinking-

man said, my thermidorian reaction will come: "You won't be plagued by nitty socialist pox anymore, dirty, red, pus-drenched sores of conscience: dread," as if I were a lion with a thorn in my paw, stabbed eating flowers instead of meaty

desserts, praying for a gust of light that might clean out my issue-paralyzed head, a sun that might burn off all the youthful exuberance painted on the walls of my emaciated mountain den. Sometimes, though, I feel I'm a pawn left for dead,

and the grandmaster who's got black is negotiating my good-bye with the teenage diplomat who's about to knock me off with his knight. My chance will come when the winner, crowned with wreath, looks to the sky,

disregards the standard whisper *sic transit gloria* and somehow, right in the confusing storm of his arrogance, I can slip from the board's shadow, strike out on my own into the wilderness of the living-room night,

my marble carved ergonomically so as not to strain the fingers of bards
not writing *The Waste Land*. But how can I ignore the bloody doom?
Each square becomes a plot for marble innocents whose Tarot card

rang hung: my fellows crying for their mated king, his emblem tipped so soon;
he's gone, snuffed out, returned to his blue-felt home, put away, scrunching
like a child caught on the stairs, put back to bed by the cold, white moon.
Better caught than to suffer adult conversation: I left via the cheese table, munching.

Fertility requires a certain touch, so we flew to a city where garbage trucks with a fetish for fireworks pick through grouchy trash lids for fuses and powder; we got an arts grant and claimed Barcelona, where transcontinental bucks

lock horns on conquistador cobblestone; an oriental arena sprouts tulip towers and bloody bullring floors; sand-carved buildings dissolve in the rain like spring snow: Gaudi's Bedrock *Parc* glistens like brown shredded honeycomb powder,

ground and fleshy, and clean marble tiled from imagination to sand castle, low, rounded into shape by wind. Dusty courtyard surrounded by blue and white ivory stills young rockets partying in the pink-chalk sidewalk San Juan-city below;

incendiary love found a tender spot on Babel streets beneath our balcony. At Sitges: "¡Cerveza! ¡Cocacolagua!" human skin the colour of sand, sand, the hue of a man. "¡Cerveza! ¡Cocacolagua!" Wrapped in cool ebony,

swells swell and gaps grow longer and wider as the pink-palmed hand of the tide rolls in. "¡Cerveza! ¡Cocacolagua! ¡Limonada!" Each crash and clap on the beach louder, more insistent; "Can I get me one of those?" Elastic band

labour pains giving way, one day, to undulating feeding-bra ocean-pap: moon-thirst pulling up. "¡Cerveza! ¡Agua! ¡Cocacola!" a naked child, azure and brown as before the fall, rolls in the mud then bathes, without the slap

of reprimand, aware only of sand and saltwater, not of dirty, nor clean. He matures, gets horny on the beach, falls in love, and thinks it will be permanent. And sometimes, in the ocean, love is the refuge of those who cannot face the pure

agony of their own weakness. The barman fills the gaps with silence: constant as a kiss; playful as a splash — a brown boy on a train platform. Grace: The dark virgin: cold marble, warm hands. A hidden liquid-mountain monument

that disappears behind you. The moment of truth is not the end of the race, but when the sea drops between waves, where the world shuts up, where the roll of the forever-sea disappears from its face,

and you think you're being carried out but the sea chases you like a pup
back to the beach, closer and closer to shore, where panting water drops salt
on your body, and finally, like some bloodshot forget-me-not, the sun comes up:

The shift shines, sharply shimmers; still sitting, the squat star sucks malt
from coral; a tentacle's reach and wave in the wind-current water: "come in, come
in, come over," it says, flinging us back to town. Barcelona at night comes to a halt:

Owl-people ride along insomniac streets, make out on a graffitied bench to some
smell of sunrise. If you go to bed in the park, sunburnt and sea-salty, tomorrow
you are no stranger: come and sit on my side of the tree, make love in the
geranium

garden, streetlight-lit, sweating to the sound of Vespas and the desperate sorrow
of fellow lovers — their breathing the only sounds to reach your ears for miles —
and as the morning comes, though we weren't sleeping, we get up late, borrow

a tandem bike and pedal to the airport, mission accomplished. The pilot smiles:
His face reminds me of the rickety-rackety, hoikety-choik of high school football,
fries and gravy congealing during a fourth period nap, and tie and blazer styles.

We were just boys then, apolitical virgins, raging hormone nymphos all,
heads down in rows, ex-pro wrestler priests patrolling the locker room, the rap
of their garden-rough hands on the blackboard, threatening eternal damnation:
the Fall.

Cameraderie came from our common plight: long beige-blank foolscap
and Father Mulcahy over the P.A. preaching the conversion of Saul,
warning us to chapel, where, if we didn't bother to stop
in for a visit, the Lord might say "who is it?"
when at last we're carried into that Big Hall.