

Daphne Marlatt / OUT OF THE BLUE

“Good Luck Tea” from Harrogate. clay mug fashioned by West Coast hands. pinch of green leaves in a tea-darkened bamboo sieve, its broken handle propped by a spoon sinking under the hot pour of water. winds and bamboos. a rattanchair seat. gaps and continuity. watching it steep, i wonder will it help me pull all this together? “good luck!” (acidic tone — ah the 50s!)

home gaps, gapes, like the gape of her blouse our eyes avoided.
going downhill.

i came home to her (body), their house, full of her taste. satin brocade cushions mushroom colour, plumped in place. we’d sat on them for years. lemon polish under-smell of the house. in the kitchen sink, yesterday’s rose-painted cup, familiar, its blur of crimson where her lips had sucked hot tea. English tea-towel limp and slightly grubby from use. in the bathroom, light-brown hair tangled in her brush and the sadness of old Chanel bottles, residue-caked and askew in a drawer splattered with face powder. sense of trespass staring at what had been part of her. these things that belonged in the house, that still felt as though they belonged to her.

The entire material structure and substance of an organism, especially of a human being or an animal.

first rent in the material solidity we live by.

and the closest Footprint: *Time and Distance* on the corner outside the once-synagogue later turned boys' club (a fire at night), then renovated into condos. in the dark its old dome, lit from below, floats at the end of our alley like some spaceship . . . *a woman kneels, waiting, with a child. A path behind her, leads away, over the horizon. Points on the curve, a piece of an arc, hide ghostly male figures. . . .* this is emigration history, not Jewish but Chinese. families broken by the head-tax. palimpsest of removals.

in the body of the mother-text

Time and distance are how we measure separation.

against that: *fee-bee, fee-bee* the birdbooks translate it. or an English friend, *yoo-hoo*. the vowels all wrong. *you here? ye who?* spring's piercing call to bliss. all *ye here . . .*
here.

out of the blue it was.

that peculiar mid-morning hush of the suburbs, houses shut, people gone to their various destinations. let sleeping dogs lie, she warned us. the dogs themselves sun-drowsed, content. do dogs know blue?

the body incontrovertible. does not lie.

a thing. burned futon and sheet, dumped in the alley in front of our garbage cans. who dragged it for how long down the alley's gravel? and from where? green as in purloined hospital sheet? deliberately set on fire? or some boarding-house smoker's accident? to wince or not at the charred rim, the skin, of someone's passing through.

I had been to big cities before, but I had never seen one with such a war zone.

and roses, roses frosted onto birthday cakes, sparkling with fake dew diamonds on anniversary cards. organza petals nodding from a doll's hat. *Red Roses for a Blue Lady*.

what to do with the body?

. . . the longing for some fairy godmother who will arrive at the reader's door and put her to sleep. When she awakens her bathroom will be full of exactly the right skin-care products. . . .

despite the shed skins of condoms, limp underfoot, despite the worn pair of boots, one still standing askew, the other bereft on the schoolyard hill, morning rises fresh, scented with balsam from the poplars that line the fence. walking means greeting solitary others: the sweatsuit, sun-visored woman, professionally intent, whose face on her third? fourth? lap round the park illuminates with "hello." the woman who runs the corner grocery store, performs her morning chi gong next to its "OPEN/ Dairyland/ Your Fresh Ideas Dairy" sign. or the trim man who jogs in spats, face with the serene look of a Ming scholar floating above light fists.

I am not your charwoman.

summer's here, i say, and the bodies are on display again. the girls, the nubile self-conscious bodies of girls. we're driving The Drive's urban circus of stares, ruffled hips and bare midriffs, bodacious tank tops, lean spaghetti straps sipping cappucino or beer. yes, you add, the large ones and small ones, the good-looking ones and the not so good-looking ones. i glance at you but your mirrorized shades reveal nothing about the particular shade of your smile as we pass by.

gulls wheel and cry above the dumpsters, wheel and cry. swoop — that lunge of desire. where does a body begin and end?

Leftover stale food that no one wants, waiting in the cold for an hour to eat, then waiting another half hour for preachers to tell us what sinners we are . . .

stretched flat on a mossy roof, the black cat only lifts its head to Cantonese. the retired man pacing infinitely slow with Beau, decrepit bear of a Beauvoir who flops, refuses to get up. with infinite patience, one hand leashed, he shakes out a cigarette, waits, remarks on the weather, waits. crows cawing Crow in the horsechestnut trees.

the exit from her body years ago . . . connect. connect the dots.
mother body demands the daughter remember.

like burglars whispering as she lay behind us under the blanket, curled into herself as if asleep. curled up and gone. Margo and i rummage through her drawers for something, some explanation beyond the empty bottle of sleeping pills. but how do we know how full it was? maybe she took one every night. it looks new. how can you tell? a note, something to tell us — something to make sense of the void.

city a memory-rim around that hole. allure of neon scrawl, capital marquee names, The Oyster Bar. mannequin window postures across the water, everything larger, cinematic. Foncie's Street Photos. city lights in a daughter's leaving eyes. The Lux. "Fire in the Hold" — gone cold. the contrary whirl of re-, re-, re- in rebel, re-moved.

A number of persons, concepts or things, regarded collectively; . . . walked out in a body.

she had no neighbourhood.

touching the tree, touching the fence. olly olly home free.

or moments like that warm expanse of shallow water coming in, sandflats' wide vista. ripple history in a name (Vancouver and Quadra) cool up to our knees and the dog cavorting free of heat stupour (*Sutil, Saturnina*). fur sprinkles glisten, late light's almost amber, *super-natural*, islands to the west mere silhouettes (Quadra, Valdez, Galiano) all that's left of the Spanish. just offshore two centuries ago. same gulls overhead? we cavort, wade, turn to go — and there, hallucinatory, banked in ahistorical distance, a vertical construct of glass and concrete lifts its windows' flash, its dazzle semaphore the “world-class city” Vancouver *did not know that there would one day be . . .*

body of water. named, erased, and named again.

for sale. Open House. cars coming and going. Sunday drives with the Classifieds. “horrid little kitchen.” “appalling colour scheme.” homing in on the ideal.

shall I make a cup of tea? he stands in the doorway, useless hands at his sides, unused to being the one to make it (long days ahead. . . .) in the sudden lapse when no one answers, Margo asks, shouldn’t we notify someone?

city of reconstruction. city of body shopping.

they did it in a day, he says. I get up this morning and look out the window and wow, there’s the American flag. it gave me a jolt I tell you. Stars and Stripes flying over Hastings Street.

presiding over an all-white *COUNTY COURTHOUSE*. moulded cornice, colonial shutters, porch with two white columns and classic pediment above the door. prefab, he says, they put it up in no time.

‘Awfully well indeed,’ said Great-Aunt Topaz.

“whose Footprint?” you ask, staring down at the mosaic circle inlaid on Gore, a splash of koi colour against the faded awnings of Chinatown.

it was the flick of the sprockets as the end flapped free. it was the smell of heated metal and overheated celluloid, his rare “damn it!” *daddy’s cine* burning up.

just the smell drove us wild. or those faces caught in a blitz of light, faces we recognized less and less, stuck forever in the mechanism of time. in the spin of rewind’s marionettes. a sudden whirr as the loose end flapped free, the dazzle of empty screen as he called for the lights. *what on earth is wrong with you three?*

otherwhere overexposed.

low spirits. No Spirits Here. *Ladies & Escorts*, ah, the blues. the dumps, the mopes, the megrims. (grim me’s). flattened to a word, walls collapsing with enough internal pressure to blow the roof sky high?

in through the flap (BANG) of the cat door (*you here? you here?*)
howled question on four grey feet running upstairs. wanting a lap,
wanting milk, wanting to nudge my hands off the keyboard & into
fur. talk to him, you say. he wants to know you know he's here.

To practice being home is to put home into action.

and if it's not just practice? my tongue exploring that delicious area
of your hairline where your thoughts emerge, soft earlobe wordless,
silent history of breast. and down, down the sensitive midline of you,
cloud-flesh of belly, non-blue heaven without a single thought (will a
kiss do? to keep you here?), nothing in the balance. . . .

a piece of matter (celestial body)

no one mentions the morgue (lugubrious word). no one calls a
funeral parlour. no one knows which one to call. first we have to call
her doctor, though it seems a little late for that, in fact it seems
absurd. he has to sign the death certificate, Dad explains. his hair's a
mess, he's been raking his hands through it, back and forth, back
and forth. still standing in the door. no one sits in the . . . lounge.

mushroom, she insisted. sure of her colours. cushions. had they changed in the last fifteen, twenty years? dwindling visits from overseas friends, people with “plummy” accents who admired *the scenery* and smiled at our Canadian slang.

what lasted through the strain of time and distance? the broken arcs? they declared it was “just the same” as they sat reminiscing over drinks, the ladies with their knees together, feet tucked neatly below tweed skirts, the men with gallant manners.

how far the history that is home extends. in differing lengths.

on the radio now, the final bars of Chapman’s “Grouse Mountain Lullaby” — solemn, funereal. what ever happened to “that jolly chairlift”?

hours pass in the hush, waiting for her doctor to arrive. we’re perched on her bed as if she might wake up and ask for a book, her glasses. but she won’t. brown blotches have begun to appear on her skin. why? the unspoken question stuck to her blanket, her folded

counterpane, pasted all over her room. we sit in a hush as if one of us might hear the answer. what about her rings? no one moves.

Footprint 2: on the way to the Portuguese bakery we come across “Community in Bloom.” neighbourhood mandala imaged in bits of ceramic embedded in the sidewalk. the usual halo of black triangles on white (shades of a compass rose) around renovated rowhousing once inhabited by railroad crews, now brightly-painted townhouses replete with cherry blossom, (non-depicted gay gardeners), and west instead of actual north, snowpeaks sheltering peaked roofs. jagged lines and circles.

on the homefront.