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"Watch. Watching"

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Recommended Citation

Jirgens, Karl (2014) ""Watch. Watching"," *Ontario Review*: Vol. 68, Article 13.

Available at: <http://repository.usfca.edu/ontarioreview/vol68/iss1/13>

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Watch. Watching

KARL JIRGENS

NOW, THE WARM AUTUMN RAINS HAVE BEGUN, and yellow leaves sweep about my feet as I walk to work. Lately, she's been sending me on-line links to kink pages. Research for a new book. Leather bound, corsets, harnesses, halters, for her, or him, as well as latex and pvc, all tastefully illustrated with attractive models, busty, long-legged women, lean, muscular men. Toying with mischief. Enticing, the way it was that summer night. Yesterday it was nurse and doctor outfits, naughty patient gowns. Stockings, hose, and thigh-high fishnets, vintage style replicas of the 40s with the backseam, garter belts, and naughty illustrations from the days after the Second World War. Eisenhower vintage. She sends them to my work email which I find mildly embarrassing but secretly stimulating. Restraints, braces, dungeons in a box, all shipping details accompanied by friendly looking receptionists, actually actors or actresses in costume, players playing, purportedly ready to respond immediately to your phone call or internet order. Adult services. I flip to other emails, try to be discrete when my secretary walks in to drop off mail or documents for signature. Or, I forward the messages accompanied with her coy comments to my private email where I can consider them and the websites in greater leisure and privacy. I recall that mid-summer night. She said, "Just because we're going to your place for a drink doesn't mean anything will happen." I agreed and had no reason to think otherwise, but was intrigued. We talked politics, poetics, drank wine. I've moved since then, to another house. My short term lease was up in the summer home. I had hoped to find something more permanent by summer's end. Instead, I now find myself bouncing from place to place. Nomadic. In transition. Searching. It was only a couple days after the encounter when I received an electronic message:

Lost: Bangle-style with simple face, contemporary ladies' watch. Open links on either side of face and smaller links on underside. Adjustable. Face, mother-of-pearl accented with gold hands and markers

complementing polished gold-tone case and bracelet.
 Scratch-resistant crystal. Water resistant to 30 meters.
 Jewelry style clasp. Sentimental value. Reward if found.

I remember the moment. Her sudden decision to take it off. The abandon and relief. "I'm taking this watch off. Hmph." I find that I can situate myself in that moment. I am there, near her, watching her hand place it on a nearby ledge. I seem to remember a ledge being above my head at the time. But, I could be wrong. I was, we were intoxicated, by each other, wine, poetics, casting a net of words arching from Yeats to Olson, a wide net stretching from the early myths to Graves counting the slow heart beats and the bleeding-to-death of time, Eliot and what the thunder said, and Edward Lear, the blues, the Beats, the Roxy music of passion, dissonance, the moan of doves in immemorial elms, even Tennyson, when the blood creeps and the nerves prick, when time is a maniac scattering dust, or life a fury slinging flame, and we spoke of Bishop's September rain and what we planned when summer changed to autumn with the iron kettle singing on the stove, and Stein's roses, and Stein's roses. The art of Picasso, cubist constructions, and his African influence. The night was hot and words steamed around epics, vengeful gods, mornings after, the *jouissance* of Handel's royal fireworks, Huxley and his doors of perception lighting our fires. Diviners and divinations. I-Ching, Tarot and what the cards said. At one point, half-attentively, I watched her open the link and thrust her watch on a ledge. The ledge seemed higher at the time, but perhaps I only thought that because I was not standing. I can't remember precisely, but I think I was lying down, but near. I can't remember exactly when the watch came off. We were talking, sitting on the couch, drinking Fat Bastard. Talking books, periodicals. Cards on the table. At some point, we kissed. I am there now, in thought, and it is earlier, perhaps later, or both, and we are standing at the fridge pouring wine into glasses. Talking dreams, and she's telling me I'm talking to her head, not her body, taking her seriously, radical poetics, muses and writing, we draw arcs of thought in the midnight air, she digs I'm talking to her head, it arouses her, in her loins she says, and she likes the wine, too. Debating metaphor as opposed to accumulation. Bodies, tongues in motion. An undefined time later, was it back at the couch, my head resting on her breast? Breathing thick, warm breath, arousing. Was it at the fridge she took off the watch? Tossed it on top, maybe? Or by the couch, at the window ledge. What did she say? "I don't want to wear this right now." Or

was it “anymore.” “I’m taking it off. Umphff.” She pulled it off with joyful abandon. I remember remarking on it. Momentarily considering how released she seemed, the watch unclasped. Off. I remember thinking how perhaps I should move it somewhere where it could be found easier later, but also thinking how the ledge, or wherever it was seemed a perfectly safe place, and how I shouldn’t interfere with people’s actions, how, if she liked it there, wanted to leave it there, it was all right. Let it be. A couple of days later, the email. In cryptic fashion, phrased like a want-ad for the newspaper, discreetly seeking a lost item. Promising a reward to an audience of one. The form of the email, an inside joke, made me laugh. But the reward part grabbed me. What exactly would be the currency of thanks? Leather or rubber accessories, gloves, boots, bodysuits, the vengeance of the furies, or graces of the triple moon goddess? I scanned the other emails she sent as well. Her “lost” electronic message arrived at my office in mid-morning. I wanted to go to the house right away and start looking. Wanted to throw off the office, leave it behind. Release myself. She said, “Just because we’re doing this doesn’t mean I’m leaving him.” And of course I agreed. Transitions. Intersections. Ships passing on a mid-summer’s night. A cliché perhaps. Still, there was the matter of the lost time-piece. Lost in a moment when neither of us was fully attentive. Sucked down some warp-hole, or lying near the crumbling flanks of a half-formed memory. She got it from a close friend, her erstwhile lover. Perhaps there was to be more with him. She hoped or meant for more, but somehow . . . time. Searching, I was conscious of the importance of not creating a fiction of what had happened, conscious of the importance of not recreating the moment, for in that recreation there was bound to be distortion. Conscious of the need to suspend what I thought had happened and instead simply search without preconceptions as to the location of the thing. I knew if I projected onto memory, then it would metamorphose into a self-wrought story. The preconceived layers of events re-created would blur the actual. I had to suspend, stop time, thought. Wait for a period. At home, I searched the obvious places. Top of the fridge, window ledge near the couch, surrounding areas, between cushions on the couch, then the floor. The obvious places. I tried to suspend any internal dialogue, tried to see, remember what was there then, on the night of. Searched the second floor, bedrooms, closets, memory and slippage. Again, the window ledge, sheets, pillows, slip-cases, behind the couch in case it slid there, under, or onto the carpet. Blurs, slippage, new thoughts bumping into memories of the actual. Recalling motion,

the porch, the slow dance of actions. Inside the house that night, she, wanting. Wanting me, inside. Aroused, drunk, outside of our heads, beyond the world's sticky grasp. Thinking hard. Mother of pearl. Smaller links. Spent. Her face in morning, obscured by locks, links of hair, pale features, sun, gold, the face clasped, calm, accented with open hands, nose-line almost aquiline, cool morning shadows accentuating cheekbones, lips, drawn, dawn, a photograph, discretely sunlit through dim clouds, the city awakening, morning, a portrait, a series of photos stored in flawed memory, thinking of Stevens' blackbird, and his thirteen ways of looking as I flip through moments layered, watching, seeking a watch that cannot be found. I could see, really see inside her, the distanced beauty, and when I spoke of it, she brushed me off with mock derision, then asked for more. Skin, supple, heart turning its gaze upon itself, deep gaze into, what was it? Later, she said, "Just because I misplaced that watch doesn't mean . . ." Twelve years. Her time. But no commitment. Nothing ventured. Years lost, perhaps, but nothing truly lost . . . except. She, thinking maybe marriage, with him, another. And then this, what? Passage or digression? And of all times, the solstice. Diametrically opposed to the halcyon, days of winter. A magic equilibrium. A match struck. Eyes illuminated by the candle's flickering. Fingering. Books. Each other. Traces. Beautiful losers. Something gained, maybe. Me, thinking. God is alive, Nietzsche is dead, buried by latex kink fetish nurses in a freshly turned plot. "I'm not really into the heavy bondage, ball-gags that kind of thing," she says. "But sometimes, I like the aesthetic." Research. And I'm listening, drinking her words with red wine. And now, me, revisiting places in time, unclasping temporal pockets that insisted themselves during the night when words gave shape to fists raised previously in passion with smashed glasses, missed appointments, opportunities. Her closeted places, momentarily unlocked to reveal a coterie, half forgotten. I listened, parched, perched, awaiting flight, restrained and bound, awaiting release, a caged bird, singing words, a command or permission, or ships, anchored adjacent on the wine sea that brought us together. At port. No fixed destination. Me departing marriage. After twelve years. She considering one. Or not, the unspoken thought. Uncovering old sores, bitter taste of each other's pasts, inventing winter futures. Wine coaxing, tongue fury, eyes on hands, loosened clothes, but still of two, maybe, three minds. Tongues freed, falling into each other's orbits, mouths, bodies. Later the morning. Then a couple of days later, the email: "lost watch" and me searching mind and house, passing

through that night again, bits at a time. Not knowing which to prefer, the beauty of inflection or the beauty of innuendo. I was relishing the pleasant anxiety of the task. But left wanting. "He gave me that watch." Thinking perhaps the loss or absence might somehow signify something of import. Innuendo. Sentimental value. An undefined inflection. The need to be on time for work, meetings, buses. Timing, a real need. And, now, me searching, and while searching, re-tracing our steps, movements. Hot breath on neck. Biting. Gentle. Or gentle-hard. Or hard. Her mouth, and mine. Wine and words. Touching. Crazy with night. We spoke paths. Opposite trajectories. But for the passing. Dancing. Predestination or free will. Veering. Comets accelerate when hurtling too close to planetary or stellar gravitational fields. "I'll never leave him." "Of course." And we both knew. And it was at this pocket of time, a closet where we hang umbrellas or coats, where we hesitated, came to a momentary standstill. I remember, here, time, breath, stopped for a period. It is little, but perhaps little enough, or more than enough. Thinking there sometimes comes a moment when you hesitate and say this isn't right, better withdraw, simplify, surrender to the confinement of words, and the lonely clasp of talk alone. But, there also comes a time when someone says there can only be a single moment, brief as it is, in which passion rises, and on passing is gone forever, without return. And caution can't help. It needs to be fed or it will consume you instead, and to give in to caution, or to refuse to unlock the clasp is bondage, is to capitulate to the condition of absence unendurable, and to condone a hunger that renders the spirit too weak to sing for its breakfast. Abstinence and denial collide with tongue and thigh. Inflected innuendo arrested. Sometimes you must make the wrong choice, or you're dead, and you stay that way and know it. Sometimes it's best to leap without a parachute, into free fall, land on a couch, or bed, to taste hot summer in your mouth. Amidst the thunder and words, her restive carnality reigned that night. And later, I found myself musing, recalling all this while searching for a time-piece. Thinking, maybe she still has it, always had it, but wants me to look, an arch dig, a playful card, knowing that as I'm looking, I'll be re-tracing the steps, here where we embraced, here when we first touched glasses filled red with wine, tracing, was it here, on the couch where we talked for what was it? Hours or seconds. Later, stars, the stairs, a room, and the window with ledges, a bed, where madness met delirium in the intoxicated night and sleep emerged as victor, where morning fingered her hair, her quiet shoulder, where dawn touched our lips awake. And so, I'm

watching, searching, looking for a watch, but not finding it. Wandering, bemused, wondering, if maybe she still has it because I can't find it, or if she took it without thinking, and perhaps it will yet return or be returned, or one day be found in the bottom of a bag or drawer. And I'm thinking, perhaps the plumber, or electrician, or one of the maintenance people saw it, a day or so later. So many comings and goings, preparing the house, repairing it after my reasoned complaints to the landlord. Minor matters. The overhead light switch broken. The leaking tap. Broken locks on the window. Perhaps one of them noted the watch on the ledge, and without thinking put it safely aside, perhaps in one of my many cluttered drawers, or thinking swiftly, seized the purloined moment and stuffed it into a pocket. Our haste that morning did not enhance reflection, departing without breakfast. I'd gladly purchase a replacement. But there is the other matter of sentiment buried under temporal inflection, perhaps too personal an innuendo. Or, perhaps it will return at an unexpected moment stimulated by some liminal event, a tune on the radio, the turning of a card, or a page, and as I search the house, I pause momentarily at the inescapable rhythms of sleeping breath, rumpled sheets, morning, a sea washing through the window's glass, looking to the ledge for a watch that might've been there, is not there now, but if it was eyed and found, clasped in hand, passed to a second hand in an unbound moment, then time would stop