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The Cracked Jar Called Can It Be Taught?

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THE NOVEL IN THREE CHAPTERS

1.

The subway mouse crackled the wrapper.
A man with a bonsai walked by. Comfort is brazen.
Caution a train. I had said to the priest, it's the light-bearing lucifer
that's causing the trouble. You lack knowledge not faith he replied.
Dusk and half-huddled, I kissed him. To the eastern mind,
my lover said. Street smart with a birthmark,
how far would you get? To him, I looked just like his daughter.
To me, he looked just like himself. You must break
from yourself, I once told him. He first wanted to know
who was I? To empty myself and from where. To the east-
ern mind, he said, to be filled is to finish before you've begun.
I wanted to laugh but I wouldn't. In the west I said
a king is an ache. The queen is the one who beguiles. It was dusk
and half huddled and raining. That's when we went inside.

2.

It happened like this: a Cezanne gripped my arm and took me
to X. He said: on an escalator, this would be up.
He bought me those flowers I'm fond of (no, not roses)
but romance only takes us so far—down the lane to the lake
with the needle neck swans. Of course we were happy, who isn't,
for all of five minutes or so. A tangerine touch
set high in the sky, splendor of green at our feet.
And *lover, come lover* tripping our lips, turning the leaves into teas.
If only we hadn't ignored the late lunar eclipse
but simple were we, and bewildered. A kiss on the quick,
hand in my hand. Nothing done wrong to unreckon.
The one on wood stilts turned to the one with the alabaster turban.
He bowed once from his waist and again with his noggin—
then sat himself down and said: How different we are in our head.

3.

On the lake at the back of my mind, he rowed
to and forth in a small fishing boat; I kept him in sight
as the crab does the cuttlefish. Currents were strong
and traffic was heavy. Incident? Or adjective? Both fail
to convey the cathexis. We quibbled each morning
with gravity's assertion—what wasn't susceptible to showdown?
When it rained, I sang a capriccio, respecting the pause
between lightning and skybreak. He'd been injured he said.
As a youth, he'd been placid. The letters he wrote
were all written in a late alphabet, a Y that refused to divide
but was more like a door with its solid assertion. He was good
at markdown diversions: leaning against a wall's suave modesty,
we counted the buttons on the hangman's black jacket.
It was clearly a bargain, clearly a good buy.