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UPON THE BIRTH OF MIKE'S DAUGHTER, SOME
UNSOLICITED ADVICE REGARDING LOVE AND OTHER
SUCH VAGARIES

T. J. Beitelman

for MH & MH

I. The Underworld.

I will tell you this, dear little girl,
there is a Hades and it can be found
everywhere. I imagine your course:
there will be places you go. Just as
important, there will be places you
never go. To wit: Appalachicola,
Florida. Its own kind of Underworld.
I shudder at the memory—a pea-soupy
night in March after eating succulent
oysters from a bed gone bad. Teens
in pick-ups tear down the quiet streets,
whine through their gears. If you do
not end up there on what, God willing,
will be your long, strange ride, know
that you are lucky, that it is a hell-hole.
Know, too, that it's just as hellish to love
and lose as it is to have never loved
at all. That night in Appalachicola, I saw
a thick-necked, tattooed man.
His back was rigid, his hair clipped
tight. I was afraid of him because
I believed he was ignorant. He retrieved
a woman, a barmaid with floppy
breasts. She, too, had tattoos. They
stumbled off to a Lincoln, their life

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together. Hell is tattoos and oysters,
 ignorance. Hell is unlucky geography.
 Hell is knowing the rest of the story.

II. Orpheus & Eurydice.

Once there was a nymph—
 Eurydice. Nymphs are beautiful, so she
 was. Orpheus sang every chance he got.
 Saturdays was karaoke.
 Eurydice came into the bar baring
 her midriff as was the fashion then.
 The bikers dropped their jaws.
 Orpheus put down his beer and sang
 her an Elvis song. They became lost
 in their mutual charms. Together they
 were young and pretty and in love.
 They smelled good and they tasted
 good and there was no place on their
 bodies that was not smooth and good.
 They spent blissful Appalachicola days.
 It was hell.

III. An Interlude.

What I am trying to say is that hell
is. Much fruitless effort can be spent
 looking for places where it is not.
 But it *is*. Everywhere. Do you know
 that I am smiling? I am smiling.
 There are certain things you do not yet
 know. That is probably best, but I will
 tell you a secret because I can, because
 soon enough you will figure it out
 for yourself:

IV. The Rest of the Story.

Orpheus and Eurydice had many trials.
They churned through life on the Panhandle.
They loved and lost. It ended. Orpheus sang
a sad song. And then, alone, he gave in.
His music was full. Perfect. Ripe.
It was midnight on a Saturday. No one
in the bar but him. Eurydice long gone.
Stolen by a mean old snake from Wisconsin.
There was the ubiquitous pea soup.
His throat warbled to nobody. Then he
realized the secret in a flash: Wisconsin
is a bus ride away. Surely it is an iced-
over hell. A nightmare worse than this.
But it can be got to from here, and there
I will find my beautiful nymph.
I will be with her in the ice so our lips
freeze together. Or we will flee that old
man. We will scamper through the hellish
landscape. We will melt and we will freeze.
We will be wet, dry, thirsty, full as ticks,
rubbed raw in the genitals from love.
We will read too much and not enough.
We will snort Ritalin, shoot up. We will
abstain. We will know the word of God.
We will do things our mothers cannot
imagine. There will be unnamable
objects, acts, purity, peace. All of it is hell,
yes, but I will be singing and she will be
Eurydice and we will know everything
there is to know. Where is Wisconsin?
What if I don't remember her face?

Then he strikes out into the misty night,
blissful for the first time in days.