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The Cover of Mars

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Two Poems · *Jane Miller*

THE COVER OF MARS

The Lucille Ball—Dezi Arnez hour concludes
with a Fix beer slipping my neighbor's grip.
Again he will sleep on the cot in the vestibule
under a pile-up of stars. Now he shouts
at his ignorant self in Greek, and his wife.
Now that I am returned from the taverna
like change from an empty,
in the unutterable calm that cannot penetrate me,
as the consonants and vowels of the Athenian
newscaster cannot, in my brain, cohere,
as the aggrieved, unformed
mercies on a ward cannot, nor the white ships
beyond the plaka, nor the dead
flowers in my brain this overheated season
in a rented room, neither assisting nor resisting
you at your father's deathbed, all this
aside, dressed in drag in long white skirt,
a woman unmanned, I lie in the amphitheatric
vibrations of the alphabet
of international report & arthritic snore
pelting the strip of beach invisibly like moon drag,
white on white on decanted white forever,
having wandered out of three ouzos with dinner, wondering
whether peace with the Turks lasts
because war with one another continues
mentally, calibrated astronomically,
whether people's hearts are too sore to care
to reclaim territory, or whether I have not listened
nor lived in such a way that I can understand
a strange country's fate, let alone
my own, wracked with mosquito at this juncture
of adult love, face to face like a pomegranate
to a peach the size of a melon, notwithstanding the moon,

the problem that we are not permitted
together, anthropomorphically assigning qualities
a *karpoozi* sold off a truck could care
less for, from this as from any altar, better
than from the shot of morphine
the doctor administers the last time
I freak, cramped, I can blame
myself in your presence & claim this room
never had to do with my life, someone's
rotten smiling teeth above an undershirt like sailboat
mirrored upside-down in sea, lit in the courtyard
by the cerebral cortex of ultrablue cable television,
Lucille in flames, addressing Ethel's willing
slow-take, the enormous wash-out of beach, weed,
sea, sea, & sea, so that I can remember
my center, backyards of beautiful barns & junked cars,
the America I lose you in when we return,
with precision, & with my usual splash
as from outer space, years later, alone, I land
up on a given afternoon crossing
the Mississippi into Galesburg, Illinois, through
Carl Sandburg Drive, past cemented Penney's,
singing down Main with the church
bells of an historic cyclone, as one remembers
an old life lifted from an old notebook, as obvious
as our souls drifting the coast off Mars
or worse, your face on the cover of Mars.
I give you back my heaven. You're all in my head.

RACE POINT POLAROIDS

Rather than bear the farthest touch,
rather than be rain, having been
neither of this world nor mad, as it turns
out, on and off during a year
I saw someone had bitten your neck near the baby
hair, and also your shoulder. Why does it show,