

Looms

Also by Camille Martin

Sesame Kiosk

Codes of Public Sleep

Sonnets

Camille Martin

Looms

Shearsman Books

First published in the United Kingdom in 2012 by
Shearsman Books
50 Westons Hill Drive
Emersons Green
BRISTOL
BS16 7DF

Shearsman Books Ltd Registered Office
30–31 St. James Place, Mangotsfield, Bristol BS16 9JB
(this address not for correspondence)

<http://www.shearsman.com/>

ISBN 978-1-84861-235-8
First Edition

Copyright © Camille Martin, 2012

The right of Camille Martin to be identified as the author of this
work has been asserted by her in accordance with the
Copyrights, Designs and Patents Act of 1988.
All rights reserved.

Cover image (*Blind Man's Bluff*) by the author.

*to my mother
for the gift of life and language*

Its remoteness from the center of things is what is
endearing about a Tale and it doesn't tell the truth
about itself; it tells us what it dreams about.

—Barbara Guest

Right now is what dwindling feels like, despite
the mulberry outside my window steadfastly
anchoring its taproot. The new century counts planets
that might support rooted beings and ravenous predators.
But stardust piles up on lines connecting dots
in constellations, blurring them into nebulae. Shapeless
experience waffles between concrete and abstract, accounting
for the popularity of horoscopes, especially when Jupiter enters
Aries and we vacillate, like volcanoes heaving ash
before the pyroclastic flow, collapsing before tsunami, dwindling
until the next cycle. I abstractly shake dew from ripe mulberries.
Or I lie down, gazing at shivering green tracery non-existent
a couple of months ago and just as soon to vanish.
A more or less concrete cup of coffee balances on my belly,
wobbling to the diastolic and systolic rhythms of my heart.

To believe is to please what most you love, cruising
 surface, catching strains of an old ballad
 whose punctuation flickers like fireflies. Meaning
 darkness, believable onyx in which crested memories
 wander into a cascade. Of what? No one recalls,
 but many have known roman numerals in black ink.
 I believe I see them. I make them convincingly
 cascade like tiny angular droplets, enough to . . .
 I forget. But I believe I'm here with the beloved, each moment
 fertile with cataclysm. If that's the only flaw, what's not
 to believe? Habits levitate until land morphs into map,
 flapping birds into street names. Zoom out,
 zoom in: same catastrophic universe in which to believe
 is to please. Zoom closer. One baby shoe perched
 on a ledge. What happened? A smooth-talking
 carnival barker magnetizes all his ducks in a row, pleasing
 no one. Any belief will do, but every now and then
 perfidy shows up with its pleasant molecules
 and the baby just has to wait.

Not all slopes are tragic. Sylphs propel delta waves
 careening toward a valley floor, unearthing fossils
 more enduring than the rock that embeds them. Debris
 downshifts, yielding to free agents that activate selfhood's
 dormant genes, flip the switch linking all by murex
 to dye royal robes purple. Not all storms are deadly.
 Riddles in calm light keep their secrets. Silver-tongued
 thistles divine cyclones, release harbingers
 of spiked flakes. Not all weather affects grain and rat
 equally. A farmer sets his table and waits for poverty
 to scavenge embroidery from famine. Not everyone
 at the same time is hungry, some born to plagues of rust,
 others to peeling bells. Not all the hungry awaken.
 Some reach ether. Others concoct a scheme:
 shred the map, ditch the crutches, torch the house.

Re-inventing stairs takes a plot as subtle as dust
drifting onto a slope in undecided space: position
is everything. Even drifting stars imply a story.
Gather enough stories and some get buried forever
in urns. Those exhumed know that memory and sunlight
rove hand in hand, but they keep it secret. They know
that both weave their mirrors as loosely as spider webs
reflecting a clear sky shattered by more splashes than words
to describe water. As the saying goes, the lake shifts
its words in light of the hill. Shifting the alphabet is chancy
like the judicial system of a virus. How soon vapour
driven by chance forgets. Speech is soon followed
by rubble. The speaker remains hopeful
only to hear a familiar echo: "I am your voice
and I have your vote!" Fading echoes aren't the best
antiseptic, but isn't all life sacrosanct? Embellished
with disease, warriors long to understand,
but what they really want to fathom they kill.

Night's pendulums rust. Penelope drops
 a stitch, vespers nibble a shifting breeze, flies collide
 with half-dreamt webs. Black bear and tundra
 tumble down the well into sleep. Wings quiver
 in quiet suspense. Spandrels breed more
 spandrels for the involuntary ornament
 of speech. Ebbing light's paralytic stinger
 calms gravity fishing more gravity. Far
 from desert, far from tropics, night blankets
 the shade of a maple. Even the town crier sleeps.
 I loiter and let whirligigs land, or navigate
 fuzz floating toward shiny worlds. If I pantomime,
 I lose detail, blurring the flame that lures moths,
 gaining their figurative love. And though I offer
 scant evidence, I unwittingly lay waste
 to wide swaths of happy homes
 and their stainless steel clocks.

A tiny pronoun gestates under a full moon
 beaming into a chamber. Forget
 the enlightenment, forget the soundtrack
 of a clockwork universe. A sweaty little god
 parks his flesh on a telephone pole, panting
 blessings on his nascent look-alike: "Bathed
 in happy scraps, stunned and limbed
 as you are, we anoint your salty room.
 In your heyday, we'll climb trees with you
 and spur the urge to pluck ripe
 plums. In your dotage we'll rewind your key
 until naïve blossoms once more adorn
 dolls of dubious gender basking in the swoosh
 of our endearments. Farewell to modesty,
 you darling pout, goodbye to the intellect
 of harpsichords. You deserve so much more."
 His Chubbiness aims an arrow and releases, infusing
 his would-be twin with the everlasting sorrow
 of wrecked desire. "And now you of tender stuff
 must practice with no discipline your blind
 freedom, and I must flee to fertilize dry clay."
 His job done, the imp flits away. The pronoun is ready
 to kiss and scream its way with oily breath
 into everlasting mischief. It wears the innocent
 guise of the infant king, long gone and accepting no
 responsibility, A sunny haze blurs genetics darkening
 through its veins. It embarks flailing its arms, reaching
 for its proper name to wield as it can,
 schooled in cruelty by the best.

A phantom cowers behind each thing stared at
 but never seen, like a banana by its monkey. Lenses
 drain the anvil's veneer, wipe the roof
 of rain. A person flaunts a public pose but acts
 alone, an extra in a movie about the sovereignty
 of a bareback rider sporting a red cape
 in a colouring book. Onto the set darts a warbling
mimus polyglotus repeating a phrase a few times
 then never again. Idly picking weeds, we await
 the hack from a film noir to careen
 over a bridge after the detective shoots
 the cabbie, barely alive but whispering to us
 of a slicker lunacy, a blither kite.

In the badlands of the vernacular, the talk is all
galactic halos misting retinas, fickle nymphs twirling
pinwheels. Pockets of silence, too, holding up soft mirrors
to wordlessness. Failure, shackled up with its rival.
Their coupling blurs the latitude dividing forest
from forest, haven to ferocious embryos that crack
their shells and flap into a menagerie where they can rouse
the most bedlam. Not the best place to ponder long-term
teleology, just apples and arrows, gadgets to open
containers of doubtful nutrition but undeniable
pleasure. This fattening up is ominous. One more bite
and I'll cross a border into realms where difference
is guarded by masquers. Impeccable their hunger, imperfect
their torches burning certainty as they sleep off three-dimensional
space. I create a predator and shoo it away. I clamber
after focus, pristine arts and letters, idols in limos,
mirages conjured by a jack-of-all-trades
with a love that triggers mutiny.

Reaching the border, I forget why I came.
 Must be for its own sake; the point seems
 moot. It's a good place to camp and I can still see
 out the window. I imagine the vista broader
 here: I can quibble as long as I like. I know my disease
 but only catalogue symptoms, like eyes the exact shade
 of the clutter they invert. And my thoughts
 having no passport, no crux, just background noise
 to accompany their inevitable mistakes. Here
 I can fail the Rorschach out my window, chatter endlessly
 about rivers flowing upstream. Still at the border
 in a dim room plunging headlong into omens.
 I only know that a bit of sand makes a few marbles, that random
 is just fingerprints, one planted on aging vellum,
 the other on a coin spinning in soft light. Leaves
 huddling next to my window last yellow
 and fall, still filtering light on children at play.
 It's a more ordinary place than I expected. I'd know
 their little calls and yells anywhere, though it seems
 I always hear them for the first time.

Where peasants now hack at tough clods, a wharf
 once jutted into shallows where kids caught sunfish
 and threw them back into ripples lapping at rotted
 wood. In the booming trade of myths, a paper plane sheds
 pollen along a road where pages in a taxi's route once
 floated out the window. Polaroid ibises peck holes
 in papyrus while headlined runes guide the course
 of their evolution. Breathed molecules feed into squalls
 threatening scenic details, thin black perimeters defining
 white lilies against foaming surf. You must retain these details
 to be conscious, and each time you become yourself
 it's the rapture all over again and you have to recommence
 chanting and climbing hills. An old chorister recalls his songs
 from youth, crisp and wild, but the chemistry never bloomed
 the way he thinks it did. He can't read fine print anymore
 and hears only dogs howling at the end of tethers.
 He pedals a bicycle toward a castle whose nobles
 have until now enjoyed bountiful harvests. He's desperate
 to deliver his telegram: *This time around,*
the banners must be blue with a crescent moon.