Looms
Also by Camille Martin

Sesame Kiosk
Codes of Public Sleep
Sonnets
Camille Martin

Looms

Shearsman Books
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 pealing 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, shacked 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.