

# DAY *for* NIGHT

SAMPLER

RICHARD DEMING

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COVER Anna Conway, *It's not going to happen like that* (detail), 2013, Oil on linen.  
Courtesy of Collezione Maramotti.

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## FILM THREAT

*(after George Romero, Takashi Miike, and Sam Raimi)*

### I.

The survivors barricade a bay window with plywood, an old armoire, an empty refrigerator and it is dark enough within to read by candlelight. Through a crack you can see two eyes and a mouth in shadow and a night filled with intent, glittering teeth. What the image tells us—that the hunger of the zombie, however slow, does not sleep, that the cottage and everyone in it is surrounded by rage, and inside no one will admit the possibility of cowardice aloud, even as the wine is decanted, the cream sauce simmers, and Mendelssohn plays on a stereo somewhere in the background. But maybe we have it wrong. The dead do not hate the living; love hates the dead for being dead and again and again summons them back. One day, and soon, the boards will come down and the zombies will break in and devour everything in their path and yet someone will raise a shotgun and shoot the beloved who is no longer the beloved but something else, some other wanton form that wears a recognizable face and someone in the audience will wonder if that is how we are meant to survive our memories.

2.

If a black phone sits on an apartment floor, then a middle-aged widower will surprise himself placing a call and then he's been alone for seven years; then on the other side of the city, another phone will ring nine times—each a small and reasonable amount of faith; then on the other end a shy, beautiful woman with black hair will answer. If she answers, then she is dressed all in white, and kneels on the floor. Then she will tell him, with her quiet and open voice, she is surprised that he would call. Then her head hangs down as she speaks, her long hair covering her face almost completely. If there are no windows where she is, then she does not yet know he has already lied to her out of his sadness. Then he does not know she has been kneeling, alone, for hours. Then they will make plans to meet for dinner and then she will smile and she will hang up the receiver. Then he will be relieved and excited and so then, in the room just beyond the black phone, a body inside a canvas bag cinched closed suddenly struggles one last moment, then stops. If so, and knowing we know that, we do not avert our eyes, do not stop listening, then there are such terrible, such familiar thirsts. These do not hide for long, no matter how white a dress may be or how many times a phone might ring, and so it cannot end well.

What is it we don't do well enough that we're constantly afraid? For the insomniac, night is a book that will not stop letting itself be read. Now it's too late. A young couple, beautiful but not too bright, arrives in a yellow Oldsmobile. And when some uninvited rage rushes toward the door, anyone else would know not to open it. There will be a botched incantation and someone won't survive because the words went wrong.

In an empty room, in the coldest shadows of some forgotten house, an older man's voice echoes on a reel-to-reel. He is a disappointed father who tells a secret history over and over and who, once, long ago, was rent asunder by voices in an empty cellar. *Remember me.* Startled anew, don't ask why it's always like this. You already foresee an answer with bared teeth. And those hungers beneath the stairs will not close their eyes. Each of us a small, nearly forgotten body spinning and falling like a long kiss or a bad dream or the sound of celluloid catching fire.

## RASHOMON AFFECT

In *Rashomon* the rain

does not sleep, sounds  
like ink-blackened pages, turning, then  
unwriting themselves.

In the unrecognizably literal forest

*likeness* is like falling,  
like catching,  
like falling.

It is human nature to fall  
into the middle of events.

What matters is that in the tale someone's dead,  
murdered,  
tied to a post and words unsaid.

Some arctic continent of unspeakable  
resentment opens wide round.

Mifune conjures close a relentless ghost, deeper  
than you think,

and who'll speak for it?—That's where you come in.

*Remember me* remember

what is here  
what is white what is true  
what is heat.



As you turn to go,  
the weave of threadbare scrolls goes slack—  
the day becomes a draft of disdain  
no one can bear.  
Still, it moves:  
Look/tell, look/tell, look/tell.

In what follows, everyone left until the room spun  
against its own  
unblinking. Not even the story  
owns its own  
moment.

And, later, who would not wish  
in the want-nothing light  
to wear a face  
just like  
the rain in *Rashomon*.

## SPEAK AT THIS

In a clear  
chromosomal light  
of sudden departure,

the tongue becomes an unlikely weight.

There are hours when songs will not come,  
in grief or joy, or in the startled whirlwind  
when we don't trust any love.

Not nothing now, some silence attests  
what more, what noun  
does not do.

That is to say, syllables coordinate vanishing  
in the ledger of lost chances.

Try this:  
If an apple, then exile;  
a pomegranate? Then wintering descent;

a glance backward, and the pupils of the eyes  
become a banishment.

What Echo said was  
a name not  
worth repeating.

And thus a beautiful daughter  
slides her thumb along her lower lip.

It blooms, it shatters.

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