Girl Reading a Letter at an Open Window

(after Vermeer)

I. Lover/Woman

Rising with the cool gray dawn’s first light, she splashes cold water onto her face from a white basin.

On haunches, clutching the folds of her nightgown, she splashes hot piss into a blue basin.

Her toilette is careless, the mustard sleeves of her dress wrinkled, though she tames her rowdy gold curls in a bun, determined to bring order to the bits of universe, such precious few bits, as she can bend to her will.

Her eyes drilled by a headache induced by a night overtaken by dreams of the letter, its dull parchment growing into a monstrous blanket that smothers her in its grip, the oncoming silence of death, until dry fingers send bedclothes sailing to the floor and she pushes away visions of encroaching enclosure.

The letter arrived yesterday, damp and crumpled, its scripted voicings postponed in a bid to hush time.

Now, just now, the white-gray light like soiled linen blows silvery dust motes through the open window.

She would await the yellower light of an open sun or the steel white of a sheltering full moon, but the letter in her hands now with inky insistence commands her post-nocturnal attention.

No more hiding in the shadows of sleep or deep inside the black folds of the room, shutters drawn.

She reads two-thirds down the page before a hot flush stings her cheeks to scalding crimson.
Her lover is not arriving to take her from the room
where the putto gazes impassively overhead.

She needn’t turn her head toward the wall
where the fat putto performs his fake Cupidic virtue.

For she already knows the putto’s serene indifference
mirrors her lover’s effortless destruction of expectation.

The boy angel and the lover mocking her together:
The boy pretending to privilege love over deceit,

the lover couching his relieved relinquishment
in flowery words of regret and painful duty.

She already knows the nightmare was harbinger
of a future beyond the reach of her lover’s arms,

her blush a blossom of ecstatic relief—her soul’s
narrow escape from a forever entrapment.

No entangled mermaid, she, her tresses caught
in the fenced rails of her half-drained swamp-home

while men in wooden shoes gawp at her beauty
until she dies of livid embarrassment.

She wishes for the white-gray morning light
to prevail through the window just like this.

The light that dapples the off-white wall,
heightens the folds of the mustard curtain,

that glistens on the skins of apples, peaches, quinces
and the lip of their blue delft bowl.

The light that brings life to her smooth young face.
She will walk out into that white light alone.
II. Putto/Trickster

Bad Boy.
Bulging Boisterous Bastard Boy.

My babycock is mere misdirection.
See how I spurt dies irae.

I am Power: chubby muscles uplift looped garlands for all eternity—garlands as fat as the Cock in my Mind.

I am Cherub, containing multitudes.

Young Male as Godhead.


Winged Ego, flitting beyond mortal reach, bearing luscious fruits and fragrant flowers to the countryside where my cousin, Hellequin, the Devil’s Emissary, chases the damned to Hell.

I enjoy watching, wings a-flutter, all dimpled smiles.

But here you are, in the light-bathed room, more chaser than chased, sweetheart.

In your black-mustard confection, you ride the morning light like a Virgin ravished by her Bull until night returns,

your golden ringlets disheveled as the last ray of twilight withdraws, leaving you spent.

Burn the letter. Don’t burn the letter. Slash the canvas of my likeness with a paring knife.

Nothing alters what I am to you:

Your spiritelli, injecting lust, hunger, and jealousy into the blood of your veins.
Your *erote-putto*, stuffing love into your resisting heart.

**III. Painter/God**

After the explosion in his beloved Delft, and after the invasions—

damn the French army and the German bishops!—

after the courts, theaters, and shops close and the economy collapses,

after moving in with his mother-in-law because he cannot provide adequately,

after the births of Maertge, Elisabeth, Cornelia, and all the rest, including baby Ignatius—

four of them taken early by the Lord—

there is only the front room on the second floor where he’s set up two easels

there is only vermilion with blue underlaid for the folds of her dress, casting purple shadows

there is only lapis lazuli, umber, ochre, lead-tin-yellow green earth and grisaille

(he will ask Pietr for more paint)

there is only the surface of every object partaking of the color of the adjacent object

there is only Fostedina, girl of Fresia, girl with the golden helmet of hair.


…red yellow blue over brown…
A girl reads a letter by an open window—
his mother-in-law’s window—

He poses her beneath the Cupid with staff,  
a framed possession entirely his own,

and so is she, the girl, his own,  
in a dress that matches the curtain.

He asks God to forgive his arrogance  
for creating the world in his image,

for shutting out his children’s cries  
and ignoring the barren cupboards.

In this room, he creates life,  
bestows love’s hope upon the girl

and sets Cupid’s blessings o’er  
her blushing countenance,

as the ever-changing undying  
life-giving light,

his light,  
lights his way and hers.

Vision(ordin)ary

I mistook a stack of black chairs for a pony waiting to be led away,  
a rounded bush for a time portal crouching by the side of the road at dusk,

a bandeau of thickened clouds for mountains beckoning from the horizon,  
and a black crow for a discarded tennis shoe dangling from a wire.

My sight is a lie that invents little stories for its own amusement,  
or perhaps to deflect my attention from the real real

or shake me awake, shock me back to life,  
peel consciousness like an onion, revealing tender layers ripe for static.

Never trust first sightings at first light when  
eyelids, like heavy theater curtains, part to reveal fake worlds
sewn and bolted to seduce you into believing
what you see is what is
when your soul’s windows operate only in the dark
where shadows are as sponges soaking up the sea.

Reminder to Self / Whichever

Reminder to self that this artisanal collecting, pantry stuffing, closet fattening, money-out / thing-in lifestyle is a Ricky Jay conjuring from an obsolete playbook that sends you and me racing for the exits in a sudden fit of ferocious boredom that demands shaking off like a mink coat you never intended to own and now it owns you / and you wish you knew how to stop wanting more and stop wanting to fill every minute with downy soft / plush / high thread-count / the touch the feel of cotton / the genuine article / two pairs of headlights twinkling in the dark in the garage, sharing a private joke because the joke’s on us / because they don’t need us, never did, but we ache for them like a fever rattling the soul / and we go searching for a cure for a disease / a dis-ease / we never could name convincingly / but I’ll take a stab and call it a perpetual gnawing suspicion like an earworm that never leaves / whispering that the world is shrinking so fast, the blue marble will no longer be visible to our naked eye when we wake up tomorrow / or the next day / or some day soon / and then we each will stand alone spinning slowly in tiny circles until the spinning, mercifully, ends us / or we take matters into our own hands and end her first / whichever.