

Ode on Luck

What was I thinking when I got into cars with boys
I hardly knew and drove to houses out in the country,
where my screams would be muffled by the oaks and pines
and the teeming carpet of mushrooms, too stupid to know
I wasn't even close to being free, though I thought I was,
but all that happened was we listened to *Blood on the Tracks*
and tried to write down lyrics in the flittering of candles, and
I was dropped off at my apartment all too alive
to the possibilities of mayhem. Where was I going when I walked
down the streets in my armor of beauty and youth,
lying in the sun, and thinking of Anaïs Nin in Paris, Rimbaud
in Abyssinia, Kafka in Prague? How did I translate
my dreams into Italian? Not by planning, that's for sure,
because I had no plans unless you could call reading
a plan, or daydreaming a plan, or making soup a plan,
so if I could ask Lady Luck, what was the secret
to wooing her, she might say not giving a fig was a big part
of it, also being happy with a stack of books
and infinite cups of tea or watching all those bumper foreign
films like *The Marriage of Maria Braun* and *Last Year*
at Marienbad, throwing the tarot a hundred million times
to see what was going to happen in the future
when it was going to happen anyway, or visiting psychics,
who were canny in the extreme, figuring out
pretty quickly that when they told me I was going to have
two, three, six children the look on my face
told them that this was not my dream come true,
though there was that one in Houston who said
that in a few days I was going to have someone scream at me
but not to get involved because I had nothing to do

with what was going on, and a few days later that's what
happened—one of my best students started screaming
at me but it was because her mother was trying to take
her daughter from her, and I was a great stand in,
maybe looked like her mother, so that was a piece of luck—
me being tipped off by the psychic, and Deborah
having someone to yell at, i.e. me, her poetry mom, who
in no way wanted her daughter, and I've had my share
of mommies saying snarky things to me on this same subject,
because they had no idea how much work children are
even though they are adorable, but being the oldest in a big family,
I knew, so that, too, was a piece of luck, though when I was
changing my little brother's diaper, it didn't really look
like it, but that's the thing about Lady Luck,
she can show up dressed in rags, smoking a corncob pipe,
and reappear twenty years later looking like Glinda
in *The Wizard of Oz*, it being a matter of interpreting
your own life to yourself, which is what I'm doing
every day—translating my own language into an English
that drives a spear into my heart, and I'll tell you
who's lucky—everybody and nobody in the same milkshake;
you put in a scoop of chocolate, a scoop of raspberry-
dishwater sorbet, a squirt of kerosene, and lo and behold,
there's a cherry, and what can you do but put it on top.

Ode to All My Late-Night Great Ideas

The Germans have a word for you—*Schnappsidgee*—an idea
fueled by Margaritas or shots of tequila or bottles of red
wine or white, you know the ideas that maybe involve a road trip
to Miami or California and you wake up in a parking lot
in Mississippi or Delray Beach with a dead French fry stuck
to the side of your face or you decide to drive over
to your ex's house at 3 am and give him what your mother
used to call “a piece of your mind,” and if you're lucky
you won't remember that psychedelic trip into the night
or you'll be able to retrieve the piece of your mind
from the sidewalk where he either threw it or you fumbled,
and it almost slid into the gutter, or what about the time
you volunteered to serve Thanksgiving to the homeless
and all the women with their sliding makeup and soft
chins whispered, “We could trade places with you tomorrow,”
or was that the Buddha, trailing along on the comet tail
of all the acid trips you took when you were sixteen, especially
the night you discovered Motown, because you're slinging hash
in the 24-hour diner of your soul, and what is it that keeps you going
through that dark night but four men singing harmony,
and so what if you end up on the side of the road in Arkansas
reading a beat-up copy of *A Season in Hell* or *Fleurs du Mal*,
you still have “It Was Just My Imagination” flowing through your
cerebral cortex along with Billie Holiday and Janis Joplin,
and that road trip across country in the 1966 Cadillac convertible
with the boyfriend who hated to travel. Was he the one
you gave a piece of your mind to? No, that was another one who had
so many rules about food that when you were behind
his new girlfriend at the local co-op and saw the belt full of tofu,
lentils, soy sauce, turmeric, fenugreek tea—all the brown

meals you ate with him passed before your eyes, and you felt such a sense
of relief that his Nazi regime was over, Berlin bombed
and you walking through the rubble, glad that you still had your arms
and legs, but back to that Cadillac convertible on the road
from California to the East Coast, hitting Taos and trying to conjure up
D. H. Lawrence and thinking about the description of Gundrun's
and Ursula's stockings at the beginning of *Women in Love*, but really
we were driving to a one-month meditation retreat,
which is kind of the opposite of a car trip, sitting for an hour at a time
and then walking and sitting and walking while your mind roams
like a wild monkey on amphetamines, but after a week in Himalayan
storms, being attacked by pterodactyls swooping out
of the wild skies, you finally coast down to the plains or savannahs
with their endless vistas of nothing and its brother and sister,
which is an oasis of cool water, and you find that your mind's zoo
has lost its savage beasts, the lions now little pussy cats
and the wild boars, piglets, and yeah, it's kind of boring, but it's also
like a radio with Bach playing, so you can always tune
into the Kinks if you need to, and I don't really want to tame my mind,
but I do want to get the good out of it, leaving room for a riot
or two, though it takes so long to get over the riots—windows broken,
walls collapsed, doors splintered—that you think, Is it worth it?
and I guess I'd have to answer, yes, the bombs exploding like fireworks,
the shelves looted, and the little girls crying on the street
corner—Oh, that's me sitting with my torn dress and skinned knees,
so please, Mr. Postman, keep all my great ideas in cosmic envelopes
and bring them to me whenever I need to be shoved out the door with no
idea where I'm going or how or where the hell I'll end up.

Ode on Consciousness, Cell phones, Joshua Bell, and the Night of the World

Joshua Bell is sawing away on his four-hundred-year-old-
four-million-dollar Stradivarius, and Grieg's Violin
Sonata No. 2 in D major is swirling around my head
and invading my brain, the citadels of cortex
and nerve endings falling to the battalions of notes searing
the room, when a woman on the second row
raises her cell phone, and for ten seconds I'm watching
Bell play and watching his image at the same time,
and I can't help but ask myself which one is real—one is small,
but other than that, he is the same—and isn't the man
on the stage a picture in my brain, much as the video
on the camera, which is a little sharper than the image
on my retina, and how does something exist outside my mind
and inside at the same time, not to mention the music,
which was born in the mind and fingers of a man in Norway
and then a boy, who practiced hours every day
to be here with his ego and the pianist who played his scales
and arpeggios, too, as well as the architect
of the concert hall and the team who installed the heat,
because I lived in Hawai'i as a girl so even Florida
is arctic in February, but I'm warm, and before the concert
I drank a glass of Sancerre, actually two, and they
are tamping down my inner napalm at the woman
with the phone, which is up again, but without her
I wouldn't be thinking about consciousness, so I should be
grateful, but there's a ping-pong game in my mind
between Ecstasy and Fury, which is pretty much the way
in goes in my cranium—I loathe Jehovah, but I'm
out of my mind in love with the King James Bible, the "thees"
and "thous" and the holy thought like a drop

in the sea of divine retribution, so blessed is the cell phone
recorder on the second row, for she shall hear
Joshua Bell when she is boiling water for fusilli or sitting
in the dentist's office waiting for a root canal,
or snuggling in her 200-count percales, and blessed
are the synapses of the brain, that glorious highway
of molecules and nerve endings that constructs its castles
of what happened and what might, and blessed
are Grieg and Wolfgang Mozart, who conjured their tiaras
of notes and threw them in the air like the confetti
of a delirious nightingale, but fastened together by invisible
threads that shimmer in the filaments of my ears,
the arpeggios, the triplets, the scales that sometimes fall
from my eyes when contemplating the infinite
but usually stay plastered to my lids though I think I can see,
but what is sight but an optical delusion of retinal
origin, and who can explain anything, though we try so hard
to make sense of the falling pianos, black cats,
and the call of the owl in the night that sounds like a woman
being strangled or the creak of the floor board
that could be warning of a thunderstorm about to break
or a scythe in the hand of our darkest thoughts.