



OTTER

BEN  
LADOUCEUR

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BEN LADOUCEUR

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first edition



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I

THE  
HONEYMAN  
FESTIVAL



ARMADILLO

My lover spent his summer in the south,  
carving armadillos from their husks. It was, to hear him  
say it, an experience – the term people save

for the places they hate. He spent June in the sunroom  
with a pitcher of sweet tea and a picture of me.  
By August, just the tea, watching hicks

suck cigarettes through long, aristocratic  
sticks, papaya seeds stuck between their burnt  
sienna teeth. Everything was burnt there. My lover

carved years off his life with the very same knife  
the armadillos learned to fear. *Where are they  
now*, I asked him as snowfall took care

of the candles I'd lit. *The not-quite-rodents, not-quite-reptiles,  
not-quite-right gatecrashers of the ark?  
How does their nudity suit them? Do they sigh*

*all cool, how we sighed last year, when we threw our anoraks  
off and found we had that chalet to ourselves?  
If we were ever blameless, it was then. I held your locks*

*in a Chinese bun as you went south indeed,  
throwing, upon my balls, your tongue, how sea urchins  
throw their stomachs upon the coral reefs they eat.*

At which point my lover raised his knife  
to my hairline, scalped me masterfully and poured,  
into my open brain, a tea so cold and sweet.



AT THE MOVIES

Made of X's holding hands, squares  
distinguished by squares, the west side  
of the multiplex is an appreciation

of algebra. Annik  
always hoped to make out  
with a nameless stranger

as a box-office bomb blared  
to an otherwise-empty  
auditorium, as the score of violins

swept in to mute the audible  
saliva. Now Annik is married.  
She wrote me a letter

cinematic in its exposition:  
*You faggot, I loved you. Of all the men  
you could have been, you went only halfway.*

The measures and metres to which our lives  
accord, the math that shows  
on the sides of our buildings. Annik,

I still don't have the heart to tell you  
we don't have any say. Our lives  
are thrown over our bodies

like tides whose proximities  
we underestimated.  
I was halfway to loving

how you held yourself up  
as if there were cameras  
in all the rooms,

how your Eastern European comeliness  
got so luminous, we  
expected moths to round

the corners, carry you away  
and drop you from such a height  
the body would bounce upright.

OX

That was our last unripe year, rib cages bald, bright and evermore palpable. The county's only queer bar had just swapped its signage from hand-painted to Helvetica. We drank as though new policies had activated and we would not be grandfathered.

The men inside covered in slobber and glitter, I felt unreflective, so filthy, a pauper. *Did someone say poppers?*, Alexander would blurt, and his asshole would begin to open wide. Outside, the rain arrived as if under curfew. We had curfews too.

*If I ever got a tattoo – I confessed, walking through the dirty water, through the lightning's penmanship – across my ribs, a zebra mussel, inching imperceptibly away. Something clever written in the slime of its meander. Maybe 'epilogue.' Maybe 'occident.'*

Alexander protested, because everything I did was on purpose. It filled my heart with helium. *Occident*, I emphasized. *Not Accident*. Ox. His insufficient moustache hairs caught small drops of rain. Crickets scraped songs off their bodies with their legs.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY, THOMAS DEARNLEY-DAVISON

Happy birthday, Thomas Dearnley-Davison!  
Sorry to arrive empty-handed. The plan  
was to give you some tallboys, a carton

of Viceroy's and a quality handjob, but I couldn't  
find an unmarked paper bag in which to keep  
the first two gifts, then to throw over your ugly

mug as I perform the third. Besides, it's time  
to get to work! Just talk our ears off  
about the nearest chip stand and you'll have

your writing den to yourself before the city owls  
hit the hay. Then you can tend to a woman named  
Marcie, a woman named Deb – and others too –

while they experiment with colour palettes, fondly  
recall their ex-husbands and get to the bottoms  
of their mothers' enigmatic dying

words. (Why do you write so much about women?  
You aren't one of them. You don't even make  
love to them.) Soon you'll be voting

conservative, snorting royalties off the back  
of your own bestseller, telling some young  
thing to make himself at home in the clutter

while you share with him your parliament of stories.  
Until that morose night arrives, I hope you don't mind  
if I keep calling you *Brother*, as if I never stood

in your doorway after a damp stroll back  
from the moon district, wondering which beverage  
you would nonchalantly offer me, ouzo or tea.

## DERWENTWATER

Your taste must once have been  
unwelcome, but now, like mucus  
of the nose, it is a sugary testament

to ubiquity. How things do not change  
but do dim.

In a dory, I paddled

into the lake called Derwentwater.  
I was in its epicentre. I could go  
no further in. Any movement on my part

would have been escape.  
A lake is a body of water  
plus the bodies of hundreds of birds.

I was a winged collective  
eschewing you, a watery cavity, toward  
a definition. The birds I was

forgot that names  
are just ephemeral devices.  
Your syllables – *er, wat, went, der* – had a taste

their gullets were welcoming to.  
Nobody goes to that lake today.  
The hostel beside it was sold.

We moved away, to dry, flat lands,  
but I kept moving, all the way to Canada.  
We wrote letters, until we didn't.