

Double Life

He was a regular guy who loved his wife and kids, no Masked Marvel nor Dr. Fate. He had no double life at all but for one little secret. He would walk around town with the business card from an Indian restaurant tucked in the torn seam behind his silk necktie. Every Sunday after church he would select a different card from his collection and hide it within his tie. He had cards from London, New York City and Paris. Any place in the world serving up a mean chicken vindaloo would sooner or later receive his polite letter and self-addressed, stamped envelope thanking them in advance for one of their business cards. It was a mid-life crisis of sorts. He told his wife he was collecting stamps. And sometimes he would sit alone in the park studying the card and imagining the girl who lived above the restaurant. She would always spray pine scented freshener around her room when she knew he was coming, self-conscious about the funk of Patchouli and onion that drifted through the under-lit stairwell. In the early morning hours, after making love, they would lie on the bed like a face card, thighs crosshatched into a seamless torso, fingers nearly touching, heads on pillows at opposite ends. They would listen to the traffic and the landlord leaving to walk his pregnant Doberman and feel like their meeting—almost secret, almost ritual—in some way connected them to a bigger world.

Glen Armstrong

A Brief History of Chinese Food

Chinese food was invented in North America shortly after World War Two by an enterprising Korean family named Pak. It was never so much food, as memory, an old soldier's pedagogical tool: *This egg foo young, this sweet and sour pork gives you some idea, my family, of what I went through in the South Pacific.* It tells no specific story and tells it all wrong. An American song blares from the com system in Japanese, not Mandarin. The Filipino girl's lips taste of Ketchup and canned pineapple.

Glen Armstrong

Dictionary of Imaginary Places

THE ABOMINABLE SNOWMAN EXHIBIT:

you have to imagine the abominable snowman

BIG CANYON:

that first step is a loo loo

CHICAGO:

there is no such place as Chicago

DANTE'S INFERNO:

Dante walks through his own inferno

END OF THE ROAD:

there's a rope at the end of the road

FISH IN A BUCKET:

easier than shooting fish elsewhere

GONE:

today, at least, we're here

HOME:

the guests have all gone home

IN THE STILL OF THE NIGHT:

are we still in the still of the night?

JAPANESE BATHHOUSE

nobody bothers to notice much

KAFKA'S BATH WATERS

everyone is watching

LOGIC:

a drawer of socks, a drawer of underwear

MISS LEONA'S CLEAVAGE:

not to be imagined by anyone but Miss Leona's sweetheart

THE NAUGHTY ROOM:

you imagined it, didn't you?

OUR TIME:

our time exists in space and time

PEACE IN OUR TIME:

you can't get there from here

QUESTIONINGLY:

enter all imaginary places questioningly

REMEMBER THE ALAMO:

the Alamo changes when it's remembered

SANTA CLAUSE IS COMING:

to town, an actual town

TOWER OF SONG:

I ache in the places I used to imagine

UNDER HER UNDERWEAR:

Leona is under her underwear

VARIATION ON A THEME:

Leonard is under his underwear

WITH A SONG IN HER HEART:

the zookeeper in shoveling snow

X MARKS THE SPOT:

under the spot, another spot

YOUR GRANDMOTHER'S SONG:

I remember my grandmother's song

ZOOLOGICAL PARK:

we are leaving the zoological park

Glen Armstrong

A Brief History of Taxi Cabs

Even in the golden age of rickshaw, the driver would have us believe that there were destinations only he could will into existence. His dress just left of any cultural norm, his accent and body odor subliminally different, he would rearrange the city at night so no trail of bread or futuristic hiss of neon could ever form a ladder back. The passenger's only real map is, to this day, the wheel underneath: *Eyes open, straining left and right, you will find your best translation of "faith" in the understated embroidery on my collar; gentle passenger.*

Glen Armstrong

American Poet in Tokyo

I was ill equipped for Japan.
My box full of weird little lyrics
didn't really translate,

so I worked the crowd.
I learned to anticipate
these streamlined people

as great and unruly inside
as they were efficient
in gesture and stature.

I carried my box in front of me,
half-American, half-Frankenstein.
Aware of my freakish appeal,

I smiled only when Kapok
offered me a strawberry confection.
No one panicked.

No one took me or the candy
or the ten-thousand blinking
neon signs seriously.

Everywhere I looked,
young couples ate pink
mystery-discs from little packages,

each box decorated
with a different geometric mammal
and its otherworldly love song.

Glen Armstrong