

James Galvin

Winter Solstice Full Moon at Perigee

Being in love isn't about being happy.
Here's a good idea: let's live some more.

After bad things happen we always live
A little more. Good timing, bad timing,

The people against me were probably right:
You can't step in front of the same bus twice.

From here on out, honesty's its own
Intelligence, which may, or may not involve

Philosophy. Try to understand
The world, and leave the mind to darkness where

It thrives. Werner Herzog, for example, says
The mind is a room, better dimly lit

For livable ambiance, some lively music
For habitability – than flood-lit, mute

For self-knowledge – a bogus notion, anyway.
According to the quarterback from Cedar

Rapids, Iowa, Jesus is a
Football fan, without whose intervention

The Rams could not have won the Super Bowl.
Aren't you ashamed at refusing love

Like an hors d'oeuvre (*outside the work* – which was?).
Love's not love until it's lost, and then

You write a corybantic poem about it.
That's what you think. What I think – what do I think?

I think the house we lived in wept itself
All the way down. I think forgiveness mirrors

Facetious animals at play: horseplay.
Horse-sense, more what we aspire to –

Remains the province of the horses, no?

1,2,3

1.

This *cinque cento* hilltop town is like a planet with a dark side and a deep center.

If walls were wedding rings (they are) this town has said *I do* a lot of times without once meaning it, any more than the rainbow's end believes that it exists.

In Todi, here, the outer ring is oldest, Etruscan, shored up by Roman legions, tuck-pointed by countless of the nameless *cinque cento* terrified.

Uphill through several circles of walls – more like water ripples than masonry, on skinny streets haphazard in their ways, I followed my friend Beppe, a caving fool, expert spelunker, toward the center of the town, *Piazza del Popolo, del Duomo*, the height of town, planet, history, what you will.

He set his rucksack of devices down – the miner's hats and lights, some bread and wine for when we re-emerged, a crowbar and some climbing rope.

He levered up a manhole cover in the middle of the street, pushed out his chin the way Italians do to mean, *who cares*, and said with a wink, *I'm authorized*.

Above, the night was bruisy, starless because of streetlights and peoples' windows.

Beppe fastened the end of his rope to the frail bumper of a Fiat *Topolino* (*cinque cento*, if you must know – see how numbers never change?), and dropped the other end into the hole.

No sound came back, suggesting that the rope end dangled mid-dark and hadn't reached (not even close) the end of anything.

What if the owner of this car drives off for groceries or something?

Beppe seemed confused.

He shook his

head.

Who would drive off in a car tied to a hole?

the planet.

We rappelled into

Our headlights wobbled like the pointers of senile professors over the omniscient limestone walls and disappeared into the deeps they were too weak to fathom.

Our planet had no solid core that we could reach, no center, rather it was a system of passageways, like an ant farm underneath the town—waterways, really, ducts and drains, cisterns and subterranean wells Etruscans excavated and Romans, in their way expanded.

The rope's end swayed half way down the breach of a lightless well where we traversed some slimy sideways moves into a waterway.

Cunicoli,
they're called.

You have to put your knees against your chin and twist sidelong to make your awkward way.

Down in, down in, and
down, and down.

How far is in?

Right here.

We just kept squeezing
our inappropriate bodies through the downward ways—the only
ways there were.

Before the middle ages, the Piazza del Popolo was a giant funnel that filled these cisterns (careful) you see here, in case there was a siege and wells ran dry—wells like this one, as we stretched across another abyss our lights were too weak to plumb, though pebbles we dislodged made sure we knew that water waited there—for what?

Here's the furnace, or one of them.

The ceiling is so low they must have used dwarves and child slaves.

They stoked the fire so hot it melted rock all round.

Here, take this as a souvenir.

He handed me a chunk of annealed conglomerate.

From this hell the gentry had hot running water and heat in winter from lead pipes just beneath their floors.

Etruscans had more luxury than we Todini have.

You think things change?

You think there's progress? Magari.

Down we went all twisted, double-bent, slathered in the liquid limestone slime.

I was choking, not from sulphur stink, but claustrophobia of the underneath of civilization, which is not civilized, but dank.

Beppe found a Roman coin in the wink of his miner's lamp, a piece of luck.

I figured I'd got the point and wanted out.

The further down we went the further back it was.

Right now we are a hundred meters below the Duomo.

Mum, I thought it far enough.

But Beppe said I had to see the drain.

The drain went down and so, good God, did we.

Twisted, contorted, like any *cinque cento* painter's damned, we stopped at the juncture of crossed *cunicoli*.

You first, my friend and trusted guide said, stepping aside.

You won't be sorry to have come so far in darkness.

Down and down and further down to where a lip-like spout came out half way up the town's most outer defense, her first false promise, I stepped into the air and straightened.

All around the *cinque cento* town, my dear planet, and all above were fuzzy stars, like nightfires of an army laid in siege, and all eternity to wait us out.

2. The Simultaneous City

Just take away time and you're here, as surely you remember from the first visit.

Nothing starts over and nothing ever ends, or rather, nothing stops ending.

It's a city of endings that never ends.

Am I

being clear?

Everything just keeps ending.

Perhaps the city is misnamed.

It was as close to the truth as we could come.

As you

may remember from your first time here, the tour is required.

Hurry

up, it has already ended.

But really, there is no hurry.

Every other

year since nineteen-eighty-three I've gone to Roger's Shoes to buy a pair of new Redwing work boots from Roger.

To get to Roger's Shoes I have to pass the same house where I met my ex-and-only wife, twenty-six years ago—same house we passed on the way to the class where they teach you how to get divorced after twenty-six years together, if you have a daughter.

It's like the opposite of Labyrinth, where we are still learning how to breathe.

In the delivery room Lily Tomlin is still on TV, sitting in a giant chair so that she looks like a little girl.

She is a little girl.

I have a little girl, who is carefully descending the stairs.

She has to reach over her head for the banister and she only steps down to the next step with her left foot: left foot, left foot, left foot.

Her hair is wispy fine and blond

as a dandelion gone to seed and not yet wished upon.

Meanwhile, she's tripping lightly down the stairs, late for her riding lesson, as she gracefully descends, a beautiful young woman in an evening gown, to meet her date at the door, who will be waiting there forever.

OK, now I'm jogging toward the river, down the same street I always run, where I walked my little girl (who is away at college) each morning to Lincoln Elementary School, then on across the river I keep crossing and re-crossing, to get to Roger's Shoes.

I pass the apartment where Lowell and Hardwick still live, the house on Bowery where my teacher, Donald Justice, is writing *The Summer Anniversaries*, and one of my students is committing suicide — same apartment — letting the sink fill up with blood.

But Don and Jean still walk, somewhat stooped now, down along the river, where all I ever wanted was what they have together.

The leaves are dropping from the ash in my front yard, which isn't the end of anything.

My wife who never left is gone, my daughter is coming home for Thanksgiving.

Look, there's Roger's Shoes.

If you are looking for work boots, Redwings are the best, even if they cost a little more.

Take it from me, they last forever.

Oh, and one last unending fact (I'm sure you remember from before): all of us have already died, the particulars don't matter, even the love of my unending life, my beautiful daughter, dressed as an angel with Halloween wings, dressed for a wedding, dressed for a wake, her innocence unending, her experience without end, waiting at the top of the stairs.

3. Dear Miss Emily

I knew the end would be gone before I got there.
After all, all rainbows lie for a living.
And as you have insisted, repeatedly,
The difference between death and the *Eternal Present* is about as far as one
Eyelash from the next, not wished upon.
Rainbows are not forms or stories, are they?
They are not doors ajar so much as far-
Flung situations without true beginnings
Or any ends – why bother – unless, as you
Suggest – repeatedly – there’s nothing wrong
With *this* life, and we should all stop whining.
So I shift my focus now on how to end
A letter. In XOXOXO,
for example, Miss, which are the hugs
And which the kisses? Does anybody know?
I could argue either way: the O’s
Are circles of embrace, the X is someone
Else’s star burning inside your mouth;
Unless the O is a mouth that cannot speak,
Because, you know, it’s busy.
X is the crucifixion all embraces
Are, here at the nowhere of the rainbow’s end,
Where even light has failed its situation,
Slant the only life it ever had,
Where even the most gallant sunset can’t
Hold back for more than a nonce the rain-laden
Eastern sky of night. It’s clear. It’s clear.
X’s are both hugs and kisses, O’s
Where stars that died gave out, gave up, gave in –
Where no one meant the promises they made.
Oh, and one more thing. I send my love

However long and far it takes – through light,
Through time, through all the faithlessness of men,

James Augustin Galvin,

X,

His mark.