Bern Porter International: Volume 5 Number 17 (September 1, 2001)

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Natasha Bernstein

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Tolerances: ± 5%

On request, ground with parallel faces.

It's a rare individual too who also asks what the strange, 4,000-year-old trappings that have come down to us—colored egg rabbits, hot-cross buns, elaborate outfits, parades—have to do with

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American
"Look!" We were still only about twenty miles from the capital, Maseru, yet it was fifteen minutes short of four hours on the clock. Our lurching bus had stopped in yet another mountain pass. The door had been opened, yet no one came on board. The driver turned, beckoning us to come forward, which we did.

"You look, I turn 'round," he said, rotating his finger in a horizontal anticlockwise circle, and pointing with the other hand toward the exit. While we hesitated, he called out in Susuthu and a boy came forward, and wriggling through us he exited the bus.

"You look," the driver said again, and I looked toward the boy, now pointing into the sky beyond the pass.

"OK," I said, and stooped to lift my pack. He grasped my shoulder, and saying, "No bag. You look. I turn 'round,' more firmly now, he half pushed me off the bus. Caroline followed me more meekly. We shrugged our shoulders and turned toward the boy, still pointing into the sky. The bus door closed and the vehicle slid, reversing down the hill.

"Look," the boy said quickly, still pointing. "Look, look, look," I repeated, waving my forearms like a frustrated, hard bargained semitic shopkeeper. The boy had obviously never before seen such gestures and he dropped his arm. Then he ran off about fifty more feet up the hill. We followed him, walking at a brisk pace. When he stopped at the top he pointed at the rock wall. "He's going to say 'look' now," my companion muttered good-naturedly. He didn't. And we continued our brief climb.

The last few feet were quite steep and treacherous on account of the loose rocks. When the three of us were safely ensconced on a somewhat broad ledge, I saw that his hand was underlining a bronze plaque, obliquely embedded in the rock face. He jumped off the the ledge as I began to read.

"This pass was first discovered by such and such explorers, in eighteen such and such, etc., etc.," it said. My first brief thought was to wonder how little African natives must think of westerners to bring us so often to the relics of colonial times. It was, I'm glad to say, only a brief thought. We could hear the grinding of the bus gears, close by but out of sight.

I looked down toward the boy. He smiled back at me, indicating with a sweeping motion that we should move around the corner, and pushing up into the rock face, I did. I was quite awe stricken by the beauty of the view, and sat down on the ledge. Caroline came to join me and sat down, too.

The road must have been cut into the rock face, then sometime later, just sheared off. About a half mile down we could see where it picked up again. The afternoon sun shone warmly into our faces. Even though our legs were dangling in a thousand feet of precipice, I felt a
relaxation move across my body. Across the valley must have been about seven miles, and down its length, fifteen. Our seat was about two miles from the south end of it. The valley floor was dappled green in a pointalism of variety beneath the sharp, cloudless and bright blue African sky. A river ran through it. About five miles away, close to the river, was a village, the circular brown shapes of the huts salient among the random greenness. I could see no sign of life in it but it must have been there on account of the ordered control of the neighboring vegetation. Another few miles down I thought I saw another, but could not be sure because of the minute size of the brown dots. The sun stayed warm, bringing still more of its lovely relaxation. Caroline was holding my hand. I loved her. I loved myself. A universal love.

After about five minutes, we heard the bus beep: two short notes to remind us to return. Gingerly we climbed back onto the ledge and edged around its corner. The driver had backed around the corner to be within our view. The horn sounded again, and longer note this time, and we jumped onto the roadway and ran toward it.

The door swung open and we clambered in. The bus driver nodded appreciatively without saying a word. I looked down the aisle into the collection of smiling African peasantry there. A woman close to us, with a questioning expression raised her head and said, "Look?" Then the all said it in the same questioning tone, a brief cacaphony of "Look? Look? Look?" The sound reminded me of geese, and, as I settled into my seat, I imagined soaring over that valley. The rest of the journey was silent.

Twenty minutes later we pulled into the bus stop. The rest stop manager checked his watch, and apologising for the delay, showed us to our accommodations.
Ad Men!
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Art appreciated. Bad poetry coveted.
Static
C. Dennis Moore

The rain spattered against the windows, mixing with the sound of static on televisions around the world, so no one could tell where one sound ended and the other began. Everywhere around the world, people sat enthralled by the shifting patterns of black and white, paralyzed and oblivious, hypnotized while outside the rain went to worked, draining the colors and substance from everything, washing the world away. Huge floods of color ran in rivers, vanishing to oblivion, draining away, like blood down a sink. Soon the earth had been washed clean and all that remained was the sound of static.

Vehemence, Spite
C. Dennis Moore

Do you wish now that you'd let me use you like another nameless fuck, like all the ones I'd used before you, the ones who'd expected me to see the color rising in their faces and make it mean something?

Night is still and all-surrounding, and it suits you very well. It was me who formed you to be so fine and straight, to walk with grace and shine.

Once it all falls down, you can redeem yourself once again in my light if it suits you to do so, unless that's something you'd consider too important to let rest?

Puppet
C. Dennis Moore

I saw you looking up and I thought if that glance was meant for me, for my smile, then my eyes will stare right back, just don't look away too quickly, my love; I'd hate to miss the smirk you give when my eyes lock with yours, for no matter what you say, you can do no more to prove you don't love me, that I haven't gotten under your skin, because I know, despite all your words to the contrary (and her eyes look away at this), no other lover could ever invent your will the way I can.

Dimensions
C. Dennis Moore

Every chill was an evaded death. A car rushed past, a tickle reached into his skull, and he knew: somewhere he was dead. A collision eschewed, an accident avoided, another chill, another death. In a world just a few steps to the right, he was dead. And each chill was worse than the last. Sooner or later, it wouldn't be a chill he felt, but impact, and it would be his turn.

Worlds without end, near-perfect copies, repeating into infinity. But even in the endless, everyone gets a turn.

Lightning struck, a chill, and he knew: somewhere he was dead.

C. Dennis Moore
1128 Henry
St. Joseph, MO 64501
(816) 279-1927.

Previous publications have been in Sepulchre, Dark Matter, Prose Ax, Cabbage, Romancing the Skyze, CZ's Magazines, and Raskolnikov's Cellar, with a few more coming up.
I'm 29, married with 3 children, and in my day job, I run an electronics warehouse for a large truck manufacturer.
Jack woke up to the sound of garbage trucks grinding up America's refuse in the alley behind his east village beatnik bohemian flat. The smell of rotting food, buzzing of green-shiny flies, cats meowing and kids playing ball flew over the morning newspaper's voice and Jack turned toward Mina who was still as he spoke.

"I sure hope that bitch turned a lot of tricks last night," Jack thought. "I really need a fix."

"Get up."

Mina moaned and half lifted one eyelid. A "Aahmmnnnn. Fuck you," she responded. Mina was 39 but she looked older. She waved a fly away. "Christ I told you not to come here." and propped herself on her elbow to better look at Jack.

Jack regarded her thoughtfully. "I couldn't stay away," he sighed, sinking back into the pillow as he gazed blankly at the ceiling.

"You know I'm crazy for you baby."

"Crazy, yeah, I know that much."

Mina noted how much Jack had changed from their first meeting eight years ago. Then, he had been rising star in the ad world at the Sears at Willow Hall. Then he failed his urine test and was fired. //jpr/hap/haf/sp/ta/ep/sp /flying/gn

Mina

"Ah, come on baby, don't be like that."

Mina knew that Jack was only half lying.

Eight years ago they had both aspired to more. Nina/whaat, "This life is more than casual. Or causal. Who knows why this shit happens. Sometimes I just don't give a fuck anymore. //jpr/hap/haf/sp/ta/ep/sp damn did/ /nina

How have we slunk so low?"

The words echoed again and again in her mind, like a chant, like a curse, like a mantra.

there must be some way out

some way out

some way out..... suddenly, without warning... at that exact moment...
PEACE TO THE WORLD AND PLENTY TO THE POOR.