

ELIZABETH J. COLEMAN

Admission Against Interest

Let the record reflect:
ab initio,
I chose; you demurred
(no defamation intended).
Sua sponte, duces tecum.

Let's expunge from the record
failures of consideration; we've held one
another harmless,
the elements of enchantment elusive,
an act of God.
Sua sponte, duces tecum.

A plea: after my statute of limitations
has run, rule against perpetuities
played out, appeals lost,
you'll be at counsel table, by my side.
Sua sponte, duces tecum.

San Ignacio

Maybe next time I will be born near sea
in a turquoise shack by banana
trees, frangipani, flamboyants,
ocean's burlap weave against silk sky,
and sand's tan linen where tousled waves cradle
sergeant majors, hogfish, lemon sharks.
Umbrellas are for sun as well as rain;
an old school bus announces Jesus saves;
four traffic lights, one at Hawksworth Bridge
above boats that have capsized in the wind.

I wade in wistfulness for waves I will
not see, my life two thirds complete.
At least I've glimpsed the thatched roofs of Belize
on wood piers that jut into the sea.

Illumination

Only when I began to study art,
did I see the way light falls on fruit,
how much of an apple is blue, not red
at all, in the sun, or that there are spots
so luminous they're best represented
by the blank page. I didn't understand
that art is illumination, and to appreciate
a Pissarro, you have to see the way
the rays come through the trees into the brown
wood. So too, really to see your child
who cleverly plucked some features from you
and some from your husband to create her own
astonishing face, you must
look at the way light falls on those wide green eyes.

Irrational Numbers

It didn't add up:
your white church, my Dutch colonial house;
your father said tater, had never met a Jew.

I've always been more comfortable with sines,
and easily distracted
by tangents: your sharp angles, home-baked pies,
fascination with fire.

Unbounded sets
measure
love's volume,
a complex number.

Proof

The best proof I've seen that God exists
is found on the face of sand dollars, echinoid fish.
Though it makes me wonder if He used paint by numbers,
the design too charming, unencumbered.

Found on the face of sand dollars, echinoid fish,
a reflection of tern, dune, sandpiper, sky;
a design too charming, unencumbered,
white caps from a Japanese print thunder out of the sea.

A reflection of tern, dune, sandpiper, sky,
my children, young in this picture, skip behind laughing.
White caps from a Japanese print thunder out of the sea.
I want to warn my boy and girl: stay close to me.

My children, young, skip behind laughing,
My daughter's hair flows, undulating sea creature.
I want to warn them: stay close to me;
but want them to break away, dash to the sea.

My daughter's hair flows, undulating sea creature;
my son follows, gray sweat pants billowing.
Want them to break away, dash to the sea.
The best proof I've seen: my two children right behind me.

George Washington Bridge

I watch the red umbrellas down below,
merged in mist with people passing through.
I cannot shake the sadness of the rain;
a grayness has submerged the streets again.
Not a downpour that prevails on you
to run for shelter, laughing with a friend,
dashing arm and arm down subway stairs.
No, one that invites you to feel alone,
dwell on acts for which you've not atoned.
But I made amends, I tell myself.
After all, I came back to this town
to be close to where my mother lies,
and to the small red lighthouse beneath the grand
gray bridge she lovingly described
each time that we passed by.

Evening Primrose

In the cooling paynes-gray air, we sat
barefoot at our city's beach, post-prom
all night, and searched the sand for clues about
our future paths, my first time out 'til dawn.

Back in those salad days, we felt so cool,
watching the night unfold, black, vast and wise;
a mellow mystery that made us fools
for NoDoz, coffee, heedless lovers' eyes,

Now I'm an evening primrose on the hill,
shivering in the cooling twilight breeze.
Visitors arrive and will not go away:
a sadness or a death that haunts me still.
Inscrutable, sleep's turned into a tease,
who coyly saunters in at break of day.