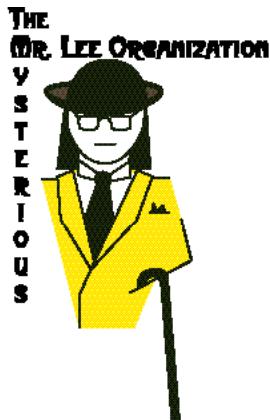


This Endless Day



It is December, three days before the equinox. Where the sun sets, north of Tierra del Fuego, the days are almost at their longest. Here, the sun has not set in over two months. One might think a never-ending day would be a blessing—nature's affectionate kiss to the fortunate. But know this: nature adores not a soul. There is no blessing in a day without end. It is as beautiful as the fields of snow and ice that extend from horizon to horizon sans interruption; it is as unbearable as that field of many shades of lifeless white. Here, death does not wear black.

I have work to do. Ten, sometimes even twelve of every twenty-four hours I spend toiling. I dig new shelters in the ice and repair old ones. I route plastic tubing and insulated pipes through the frozen blue walls. I move equipment and cargo. I fix things that have broken, and maintain things that have not. This work is something that must be done and I am the one who must do it. Other people here do things like I

do, although most do not. My work is not more important than that of the others here, but it is not less so: it is good work. If the sun ever ended its reign, I might even be happy. I am not.



I cannot sleep. Not in the light of day, this endless day. Not overlooking these fields of snow which surround me in all directions. I have a deep, physical need for sleep. My need, my craving for rest is so great I am tempted to describe it as coming from my soul.

Perhaps you, with your Turkish American aesthetics, might find the view from my window breathtaking. I did when I first arrived. I stared out of the window for hours, thinking of nothing but the incomparable beauty before my eyes. Hours became days, which became weeks. The beauty became commonplace, which became mundane. Eventually, I shut my curtains for good, unable to bear the view and the light.

Curtains never succeed in keeping out the light. Even the walls glow with daylight. Our base is carved into the living, flowing ice. Rooms like mine are sheltered from the subzero Antarctic air by a foot of ice. The walls keep out the cold, but they do nothing to shut out the day.

So I do not sleep. I think of you, Safiye. I think of the opportunities I have wasted. I think of what might have been; what should have been. I wander the corridors of ice, my eyes dancing with hallucinatory images of you; seeking the comfort of the past; seeking the dark blue ice womb deep in our catacombs.

As Sezgin took the picture of us, I could not have dreamed in my most fevered nightmare that I would be dwelling in this sterile wasteland, staring at that picture. It is the one where we were leaning against the rail at the edge of the water, along the Bosphorus, while a rusting white and red freighter passed close by. You were wearing the Gypsy dress Sezgin bought you in Adapazar. I was wearing your favorite linen suit, with that silly shirt and tie which shift from purple to yellow, like a three-day-old bruise.

Do you remember that day, Safiye? We had been in Istanbul only two days and were already dying for a drink. Right after Sezgin took that photo, we snuck off for shots of Polish vodka. What I really wanted was a chance to get away from your cousin's chaperoning. I wanted to touch you. I wanted to bury my nose in your clove- and frankincense-scented hair. But there was not to be any privacy for us. Just a quick escape to a bar covered in rich azure tiles, filled with smoke and threadbare Kurds.



I remember the cabbage dolma, the brek and the olives, the halva and the tea. I remember Sezgin's cough when we left for bed together. The shame, he said with his cough and his disparaging looks, of you Americans. Perhaps you forgot that I know enough Turkish to get around. I understood the argument you had with Perihan and Udi as I was climbing the stairs. I would never be welcome in that house.

Yes, my sublime Safiye, with your long locks and skin like muhallebi, I understood. I understood what Sezgin told you at the top of the stairs, when you thought I was sleeping. Did you imagine that our trip to Istanbul was for me, or did you know all along that you were coming to see Sezgin? Did he write you love letters, reminding you of those afternoons spent in sin? I spend my waking hours—all of my hours—imagining you in that room—our room—with Sezgin. You, young, perhaps quivering at first; the sun streaming through the dusty air, golden and warm; as Sezgin took your face in his hands and drew your lips to his. I imagine your eyes opening wide in surprise—oh, you surely knew it was going to happen, but never expected it—and then slipping closed to savor the sensation of your first kiss. Your parents were dead. Perihan and Udi and taken over that roll for you, my love, so even though Sezgin was your second cousin, he was your brother, too. You knew it then, didn't you?

Did you think that I would not be curious about your long conversation with Sezgin, after your aunt and uncle had gone to bed, when I was waiting for you under that ancient iron canopy? I listened to the whispers, comprehending the meaning of your words, if not understanding every one. I heard Sezgin tell you about his memories of you, with the longing ripe in his voice. After the kiss, I imagine his hands slipping from your face to hold your waist. On your tiptoes, you strained to keep your lips in contact with his. He supported you, caressing your sides, pulling you towards his body. As your bodies pressed against each other, you were confused by your feelings. I know how innocent you were, how pure. Except I thought it was someone else who introduced you to the pleasures of the world.

Was it the return of Udi or Perihan that broke your first kiss, Safiye? What about that night, after the photo was taken? Was it the creak of the door as I opened it to watch your embrace?

If I sound bitter, please forgive me, because it is not anger or bitterness that I remember now. No, even when I imagine Sezgin lifting his hands to your breasts for the first time in that musty room, I smile. I smile because I am thinking of you. When I think of you in Istanbul, I think of the kiss you shared with Sezgin just before you came to our bed. I remember you lying down next to me, your hair drifting across my face. The smell of cloves and frankincense, of tobacco and coffee. You pressed your body, warm from Sezgin's embrace, against mine. I had known where you were coming from. I knew Sezgin's lips had moistened yours. But you were here with me, and your lips caressed my cheek so gently, expressing so much love. How could I resent you then, my Safiye?

There have been no clouds in the past few days, and it has been very warm, perhaps ten or twenty degrees below zero. My friend Marcos and I have spent our free time skiing. When it is so warm, I almost forget about you. My skis rush through the wet snow and there is no other noise, except my breath. Strange, how after over a year here, it feels so warm on days like these. The snow and ice have a soft scent, almost beautiful, but so gossamer it is gone in a moment. The bite of the freezing air brings back the scent, but then it is gone, and I am back on this asepticized continent—odorless, empty, clean, and clear. It feels safe, and thus comforting. It is a long way from Istanbul.

But then we return from our jaunts, and Marcos likes to warm us with tea. He makes it strong, just like Perihan, and offers it with lemons and raw sugar. Yesterday, I sipped it and immediately thought of you. Remember when we had lunch in Beyoglu? It was rainy and cold all day, and we ducked into that shop run by that man, bald and vain, who promised us the best onion brek in Beyoglu, if not all of Istanbul. The tea was tepid, but too strong, so we put much sugar in it. You smiled and told me about your great aunt, Perihan's grandmother, who told you about her life as a famous dancer. We laughed at her grandeur, and cried that she had passed; a mosque tumbled before we could worship.

When we could not take the cold tea and bad food any longer, we ran into the rain, leaving our umbrellas behind. You took my hand, and we kissed under a bridge, shocking the proper women who passed us by.

We were so hot from our run and our anticipation that steam rose off our bodies. Pressed against you, so warm. There was honey on your lips, the minaret was gilded twice. The air under the bridge was so still, and the street was surreal in its quietness. The women with their dirty looks passed by us without a peep, even their footfalls were silent. The dogs seemed to be too busy following scents or investigating some dropped Sultan's Slipper to bark or disturb us. So our lips pressed together, and our tongues found each other. Your hands pulled at me, bringing me closer. And the air was still and hot and humid. And clouds barred the sun. And the old women walked silently by.

So I sat there, sipping my tea, thinking of you, Safiye. Marcos said nothing, until our tea was gone. Then he left me, knowing better than to talk to me when I was thinking of you.

I returned late to my work, too entrapped by memories to break away. All afternoon, my back and arms ached as I worked harder and faster to make up the time lost. My shovel seemed to encounter nothing but stones and iron-hard ice chunks as I dug out another room in the glacial floe. The gurgling of the water sink and the rush of the heater's blower combined with the repetition of the work to almost knock you from my mind. Almost.

Later, Marcos made our whole crew a meal of papadzules and cochinita pibil. He spent November visiting friends, and had returned with many crates of food. He made the tortillas by hand, the old way, clapping them between his palms for hours. It was the music of love and comradeship. The rest of our crew still thinks he is an Argentine, so Marcos sulked after dinner. I tried to comfort him with my dusty Texan Spanish, but it was to little effect. Our crew is mostly Asian, and does not know anything about the Spanish-speaking world. They assume Marcos is an Argentine because they have never met anyone who spoke Spanish outside of Spain and Argentina. Trips to Tierra del Fuego, and misunderstandings. They know nothing of the Yucatan.



At night Chinamen jump
on Asia with a thump

Everything brings me back to you. I remember when you recited that poem to me. We were still in Ann Arbor, still in the throes of exploration. Every word you whispered in my bed was the revelation of a diva.

While in our willful way
we, in secret play

How wonderful you were, to bring the poems of a gay man to my room, in order to seduce me. I would laugh at the irony if I did not smell the rosewater on your breasts.

You sat next to me on my bed. It was not a suggestive sitting, as everyone sat on the bed in that small room. You wore a long skirt, with a long slit. It parted as you read and crossed your legs. I listened

As we love at night
birds sing out of sight

to your laughing recitation. Your hand brushed my thigh as you turned the page. Your eye caught mine and you smiled. I rested my hand on your thigh.

You misspoke and began again, pressing yourself against me in a way my friends do not. My fingers traced the slit as it snaked its way up your thigh.

Closing on the ending, you hold each line too long. I felt the hesitation in my heart, each beat you skipped caused two skips in me. My lips brushed your clavicle and then your neck. I touched your earlobe, so soft, with my tongue.

We couple in grace
of that mysterious race

You laughed as my lips drew you earlobe into my mouth. You spoke of how silly the poem was, yet how pointed it was, too. My fingers moved under the seam of the slit, pressing against the edge of your panties.

"It sounds so silly, doesn't it?"

I just nodded, too intent on your flesh to reply.

"Still, it's a serious poem. He's commenting on how pretentious other poets are, and how free poetry can be from 'Seriousness' and still be wonderful."

I kissed the back of your neck and wrapped my arm around you, pulling you closer, pressing your breasts into my side. I did not interrupt your talk of nothing, of poetry and rhyme schemes. Laying you back against the pillows, I parted your legs and found the moisture there.

"Yes." It was a simple word, but word enough. I found the zipper of your skirt and pulled it downward. You raised your hips as I guided the skirt down your wonderful legs.

Never had I seen the length of your legs, the crevasses formed by the muscles lining your slender bones. The birthmark, in the shape of a blunted cross; the tick of my clock in the silence; your intake of breath as my finger traces a line from knee to inner thigh. I marveled at it all. I slipped between the folds of paisley, releasing your blouse from your flesh, button by button. Your breasts, encased in plain cotton, first exposed to my view. Your hand guided my own, and together we undid the clasp. I pulled a nipple into my mouth.

"Yes."

The tick of the clock; the inrush of your breath; my wonder at the beauty, your beauty.

I fell back into the field of flowers as your lips wetted my inner thigh. Hair sweeping softly over my chest, you kissed me full on the lips. Our tongues touched quietly; our nipples pressed together. The books of poetry tumbled to the floor, their words covered by the clothes we continued to discard. We searched for words and found none except our impassioned but illiterate Braille.

You swooned, as did I. The light, bright and yellow, drifted through the blinds. We rested, recovering from such unexpected pleasure.

I remember how clumsy I was. I was less experienced than you, although I did not know it at the time. I tried to get inside of you, but it never slid in properly. Or I would get it in and my maladroit efforts at coupling would go awry. Popping out; sliding towards undesired locations; out-of-synch strokes. I was a nightmare in the most pleasant daydream. Finally, your hand guided me, and we found a rhythm my inexperience could not take out of beat.

I remember a bed of pearls; softly hard, smooth, brilliant; as precious as if I expended my last breath to find them deep within the blue. I remember the smell, so incomparable. It drifts to my nose now, my beautiful Safiye. We lay in that yellow light for so long, drifting between dreams and caresses. Kisses; supple words; glances at beauty.

But now Marcos and I are leaving this iceworld and the memories that have come to haunt these corridors. We must go out past our ice floe to the rocky shores of Antarctica. There are repairs to be done on a monitoring station, and Marcos is the best troubleshooter among us all. I am a better skier than most, and can carry enough extra supplies to make the trip possible without a noisy snowmobile or snow crawler. We located here in the ice floes to avoid attention, so noisy machines must be avoided, even at the cost of a tiring and dangerous ski expedition.



I argued against making the trip at all. The distance was to be over one hundred kilometers, and there was a fair chance of storms as we crossed the ice plains, which might kill us—even a moderate storm in Antarctica can be as deadly as any encountered on Everest. But the Organization insisted. Our mission, so secretive that I wonder if I understand it, requires reliable information about who and what is moving about our hidden base. The broken remote sensor gives our data analysts the information they need to predict incursions which might threaten our security. I cannot say more, but I almost laugh at the thought of some Australian scientist coming across us, revealing us to the world, and in doing so, threatening all of the effort we have done to protect others from harm, starvation, and environmental degradation. My

organization is far more powerful than you could imagine, my Safiye, but so frail: just one convincing report of our existence could bring us down.

Marcos and I made good progress going out. Trekking across the ice floes is neither easy nor safe. The endless day and huge hole in the ozone layer combine to plaster the surface ice with intense solar radiation, which cooks it until it forms a hard surface of ice. Ice is never easy to ski over, but this ice is covering a living, moving icefield. The icefield shifts and shudders, slowly drifting out to sea. All of this movement tends to crack this steel-hard layer of ice on the surface, so it forms many sharp ridges, which make skiing even more difficult. And the shifting creates huge crevasses, gullies, and holes, some of which get buried by later shifts. But the buried crevasses are not filled in, just covered with a possibly fragile sheet of surface ice. So, when an ill-trained ski trekker encounters these sinkholes, he is likely to crash through the ice and fall into a deep, cold grave.

Safiye, the ice is so brutal. It is not like our beloved Ann Arbor and its snowy winters. No, after several hours, each breath bites the lung. After tens of kilometers, Marcos and I have to force our muscles to move, while our bodies protest the pain and cold.

By the time we stopped to put up camp, I could tell Marcos was coming close to the point of surrender. It is strange how the snow plays tricks on people. One sees snow extending in forward as far as backwards, stealing any hope of an end to your journey. All the while sun hovers above, relentless as the snow. Our only good fortune is that we did not encounter any storms. Marcos would have surely given up in the face of a blizzard and let it take him. I set up the tent, digging into the snow and ice to provide us shelter against the wind. We scouted the sky for hints of trouble and checked our weather instruments. Marcos started the butane burner and warmed us some tacos and tea.

Trekking was never one of Marcos's strong points, so leading is left to me. He takes care of the post-effort tea, and sometimes encourages me with a tortilla he somehow manages to keep warm or a tale of his childhood and why he became an Associate.

Marcos is from Quintana Roo, a place not too far from Chiapas, and only slightly less troubled. His people are Mayan, and the government does not much like them. It was easy to join the Organization when the opportunity came up. The Organization is trying to change the balance of power in Mexico, so Marcos felt it was better to work with a powerful organization than to start a peasant revolt, or to make documentary films. While he dislikes being confused for an Argentine, it is better than being a nonperson in Mexico. The pay is better, it is safer than being shot at, and there is the feeling of power from belonging to a secret elite. Marcos jokes about it, but we both know that is a big part of the appeal.

I have told his story in a bland paragraph. Marcos tells it in thrilling three-hour chunks, and never quite makes it to the end. Maybe it is because his story always makes me think of how I ended up here, Safiye. Marcos knows how morose I have become, and he knows that it has something to do with a woman. I have never told him, nor anyone here, about you. It is a secret that I share only with the ice. So when Marcos sees my eyes lose focus, and my smile drop from my face, he concludes the current segment of his story, and falls silent. Out there on the ice floe, he ceased talking abruptly, watched me for a few moments, and pulled his sleeping bag over his face before drifting off to sleep.

I rose after I was sure he was asleep and not just pretending for my sake. I needed sleep for the second leg of the journey, but I needed to talk to the ice more to rid myself of the memories of you; to leave my memories in this endless day.

Slipping out of the tent, I was shocked by the brightness of the sun. It was cloudy when we set up the tent, and while the fabric is thin, it has a reflective lining that both traps in body heat and seals out the light. When I entered the frigid air, the clouds were gone, and the light glared off the white surface ice, more intense than any light you have ever witnessed.

I walked around the tent, inspecting my shovel work, ensuring that a sudden storm would not blow the tent over. Then, thinking of you, I wandered the nearby snow drifts. They form so gently, like sand dunes made of sugar and whipped cream, that one forgets the danger they hold. I did, too absorbed by memories

of you coming to bed, your hair tangled by Sezgin's hands. The ice was not so distracted and opened up when I stepped on a hidden crevasse. I fell in the hole, snow racing past me into the void. My elbows, knees, and hips banging against the rough ice lining the crevasse, I did not fall far. I was fortunate and caught a ledge with my knee, and wedged myself a few feet from the surface. But my arm was pinned by the ice, so I could not get the leverage I needed to crawl out. I cried out, but my voice was gone. Had I already surrendered to my death? I watched the sun through my darkly tinted lenses.

Did you know the sun moves across the sky here? On first thought, one might think the sun would be stationary, hovering just above. We are, after all, at the top of the world. But Marcos and I are actually many hundreds of kilometers from the pole, and the sun moves in a slow arc across the sky. It is hardly any use in telling time, unless you are like me, and have watched its progress for months on end.

I counted the hours, hoping to block my mind from thoughts of you. Gypsy dresses blowing in a hot wind; cinnamon-scented treats, dripping honey; kisses behind the old bathhouse; Lebanese olives on a plate with figs and watermelon; your perfumed hair.

I started watching you and Sezgin after I witnessed your kisses. Every glance between you was suddenly ripe with meaning, dripping with the fruit of betrayal. A greeting kiss on the cheek became an agreement to meet later for more intimate kissing. A hug was a promise of passionate exchanges after the rest of us had slipped into sleep.

I knew you did not lie when you spoke to me of love. Yet, I saw the way Perihan and Udi looked at me, and knew these people—your closest living relatives, your adored family—would never accept me as kin. I saw the childhood of secrets that informed every moment you spent with Sezgin. I knew at once what it was to be an outsider—marked so with indelible ink.

I have a photo of you and Sezgin coming into the house with a large fish. You went to the market to get it, leaving me behind. It took you so long to get the fish, Perihan began to fret that there had been an accident. I feared that there had been intent. The picture shows you both with a hint of a smirk. Your eyes are cast slightly down, yet meeting each others'. Looking carefully at you, each holding the fish with one hand, it seems as if your other hands are touching.

There is another photo, reviving another worrisome moment. There were so many extended trips into the markets, seeking out some exotic purchase. You are a little bit tipsy, or perhaps more than that. Sezgin's hand supports you at the shoulder while your hips touch. You are both slightly flushed. There was no little memento for that trip. The purchase had been misplaced or forgotten.

My suspicions built on those moments, brick by brick, until I was sure that your lips never kissed mine without having first been wetted by Sezgin. Your idle looks during our lovemaking were signs that Sezgin had already been with you. Was this evidence? No. But evidence is for courts. I live in my heart.

So I explored on my own. I started going out when you and Sezgin went out to visit an old friend of yours from childhood. She spoke no English, you said, and there was so much history for them to catch up on. So I was to stay home once again.

Instead, I left and wandered the riverfront. It was aimless and cloudy. Rain. The smell of diesel fuel. Gutted fish and Italian vegetables. Loneliness and despair. The call of the water.

Out I went, whenever you and Sezgin took a trip. Did Perihan and Udi suspect what was happening? Did they approve? Did they encourage you to leave me for him? He is a second cousin. Could there be shame in that?

Soon, I made excuses to leave even when you and Sezgin were there. We argued in the evenings, but I could never speak what we both knew was the truth, so I had to be the fool and aggressor.

Yes, my kind Safiye, you know all of this. What you never learned was that my walks ceased to be lonesome. There was a woman. She was an American, from one of those small towns which shares its name with a dozen others in every state. How she knew I was alone, I do not know. I never asked. She never said. At some point, she was walking with me, without having ever joined me. We spoke guardedly. The fish. The weather. The rain. The taxis. She was at some hotel, but she knew I would not go there.

This Endless Day

One day, we saw a flyer for a dance band from Germany. Neither of us had heard of the band, but we thought it was strange that they were playing in a Turkish Hotel, outside of the tourist areas. We said nothing more, but ended up there the next afternoon. We arrived separately, but left together, after dancing closely for hours.

I suppose dancing was my first real betrayal. We did not go to her hotel, or any other. We just walked together.

The next day, we met at a cafe. The meeting was as unplanned as the dance, but each knew that the other would be there. We were past the need for plans. We knew each other well enough to arrive someplace conspicuous.

We talked about work. She would not give any details about her job, only that she worked to make the world better. I thought perhaps she did education or relief work. She said she sometimes did those things, but her job was more exciting, more important.

Safiye, she was so impressive. Everything would have been different if she had not been so self-possessed, so skillful. But she had perfect posture, perfect diction, perfect everything. Her gestures never betrayed a moment of practice, but suggested a lifetime at court. She knew things I did not imagine people who were not studied experts could know. Her appeal was not in her blue-black hair, nor her deliciously wedge-shaped nose, nor her full lips, nor her high cheeks. My Safiye, my true love, she could have been a model, that is true, but that was the least of her appeal. Her voice, soft and musical, was a command that could not be ignored. Her glance was an order that could not be denied.

When I stole out of the house, I had no illusion that I was in love with her. My dreams were always of you. When you slipped into my bed, even if I could see Sezgin's bite mark on your breast, my day was fulfilled. When you whispered, "I love you," into my ear and held me tightly, I swooned again, no matter how many times I had heard it before.

But your words of love became fewer, and her commanding words more frequent.

She started to tell me more about her mysterious "organization." I learned little concrete, but began to see that this secret sect was working behind the scenes, wielding great power for the good of the powerless. You know about my idealistic side. How often did you tell me that ideals were great for paper and horrible for practice? She had no proclamations of the ideal that this organization strives for, but she had plenty of practice.

These people, from their hidden base in the Antarctic ice, reach out across the globe and influence the flow of events. Sometimes there are meetings with leaders, sometimes it is just a package placed in the right spot at the proper time.

It was a test. I had to go to the Afghanistan Embassy and leave a package. I was to be unnoticed. I was not to ask about the contents of the package. I was not to know who had left it for me. I was to accept everything without question. She told me all of this as we walked along the Bosphorus in a light rain. Her raincoat flapped in the wind, revealing her impeccably tailored suit. I struggled with a failing umbrella, while she relied on her oddly feminine bowler. Her voice was always soft, even caressing, as gentle as your words of love. How could I refuse her, Safiye? I wanted to. I knew the consequences of my acquiescence. I knew it meant leaving you to Sezgin and Turkey. I knew it meant losing everything that mattered to me, and even more.

But I stood in the bright sun the next morning with a package I had picked up from a park bench stuffed into my backpack. I walked into the embassy with a grim calm, confident that I would not be unduly questioned. The guards looked at me coolly, but my demeanor gave nothing away, and they let me go on to look at the rug collection on display.

Breaking away from the other tourists was easier than you might think. I knew the door I wanted and just took a few slow steps to descend to the back of the group. Then a few side steps and I was rapidly punching some numbers into a keypad. I left the package and was out of the building. I went to a mosque

This Endless Day

and prayed for your love and forgiveness. Then I returned to her. She thanked me with a kiss on the cheek and a warm hand pressed into mine.

I wish I could tell you why I was chosen. Maybe they knew I was too heartbroken to refuse. Maybe they thought they could make me into whatever they wanted. You said I have too much initiative and talent for my achievements. She promised the Organization would allow me to achieve far beyond my initiative and talent.

I went to your Uncle's home and packed my things. Perihan was out with the neighbors. Udi was off completing some business deal. She told me Udi and Perihan would be gone. I did not need to be told that you and Sezgin would. I wrote you the note I hope you have kept, the one explaining that I must return to America, and that I understood that our cultures were too different for us to be together again. I signed it "Love," and sealed it with my tears.

She met me at the airport, and we flew to Tunisia. We made love for a week, ate lobster, and swam in the ocean. She spoke to me, and made me into what I am today.

I was almost frozen to death when Marcos woke and discovered me gone. He found me quickly, and pulled me out. He slapped me to wake me from my stupor. His blows produced no feeling. He dragged me into the tent, stripped me naked, and wrapped me in thermal blankets. Marcos is a good friend. He stripped himself and climbed in, sharing his precious heat and saving me. He forced me to drink hot tea and eat cookies. He rubbed my hands and feet, carefully, to avoid tissue damage. He said prayers in a language I'll never understand. I saw snow crystals larger than icebergs; stars explode on dark nights; ink-black birds skim over the ice; a freighter sinking at sea, a hundred seamen drowning with it—all of them with your face. I smelled your honey; your frankincense- and clove-scented hair; your sweat after jogging on a cold day in Ann Arbor; the rosewater you dabbed on your breasts; I felt your body move with mine the first night on that iron bed; your nipple harden under my palm; the line of muscle on your thigh; I saw myself lying on the ice for the last time; the sun coming to a rest; this endless day finally ending.

I heard Marcos on the radio. He was talking about having me see her again. I have not seen her since Tunisia. I may try to kill her, but instead, I think I will try to love her the way I love you. I will ask her to command me to love her with her irresistible voice. Oh, I will ask her, and she will command me, and I will pretend. But I will never love her the way I love you.

Yes, my beloved Safiye, it was your face I kissed when I made love to her in Tunisia. It was your body I caressed. I was never unfaithful to you, just taken away.

Please leave your home and your people. Please come here and join me in this world of ice. It is so cold, but so warm, and the day never ends. We could be together like snowflakes on this endless sea of whiteness. Indistinguishable and inseparable until we meld into the whole.

Note: The lines of poetry that begin "At night Chinamen jump" are taken from Frank O'Hara's untitled poem beginning with that line. We have taken only some of the couplets, and recommend reading the entire poem, as well as more of O'Hara's work. We suggest The Selected Poems of Frank O'Hara (Vintage, 1974), which includes not only a large assortment of O'Hara's wonderful poems, but also his "Personism: A Manifesto" essay.

Send your comments to us at TheMrLee@hotmail.com.