

THREE POEMS

Soliloquy: An American Bride Remembers Japan

*for L. H. B.*

Your nurse had silver hair ornaments,  
A brocade obi, rare sashes  
Pulled tightly about her waist.  
You were a baby with a round face  
Like other babies. Your father fought  
In the Korean war and brought home  
Presents and stories on leave.  
Too often, it seemed, he left too soon.  
I tried, as always, to be strong.  
One day, we sat together  
And he told me of the Korean snows,

Compared the Japanese fogs to spring.  
I thought that fog was as cold  
As anything I had ever felt.  
I number one dawn among my worst.  
Waking from dreams, you were screaming,  
Your cries like small ax blows.  
I grabbed for you as the floor rolled.  
From the front door frame, I saw  
The sunrise flaming across our horizon.  
Fuji shook and the landscape floated  
And billowed toward me. The nurse's tears  
Streaked her fine white face powder.  
Fear kept us quiet in that silence  
As tremor after tremor tensed  
Through the valley. Sirens were sounding

When I finally felt you swinging  
Upside down in my hands, your thin  
Baby hair fanning toward the floor.  
The nurse took you from me: kimono swish  
And your round red face, bobbing, retreating.  
We had a table made to our design  
With intricate wood carvings: tall bamboo  
Fuji in fog, pine branches, fluted border  
Of chrysanthemum and leaves, sun above  
Orchards of cherry blossoms. So much carved  
It is almost ugly. Yet nowhere did we inscribe  
The cold, the earthquake, the empty thin-walled rooms,  
And I'm shaken when I clean the covering glass  
And see a wailing child reflected there  
Who has never gone entirely away.

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## V-MAIL

Passed by Base 083 Army Examiner

Somewhere in Iceland  
1940-1943

Today

TWO YEARS AGO AT SIX IN THE MORNING I BROUGHT THE FIRST WORKING PARTY ASHORE IN ICELAND. WE WENT OVER THE SIDE OF THE TRANSPORT ON LANDING NETS AND USED LANDING OR HIGGENS BOATS TO COME ASHORE. IT WAS IN POURING RAIN AND WAS ONE OF THE MOST UNCOMFORTABLE DAYS I HAVE EVER PUT IN.

TODAY IS CLEAR AND THE SUN IS SHINING BUT THE WIND IS COLD.

TODAY IT IS RAINING LIKE THE DEVIL.

TODAY IT IS SNOWING AND RAINING AT THE SAME TIME.

IT IS RAINING PITCHFORKS TODAY.

IT IS A VERY DEPRESSING DAY ANYWAY, DARK, AND RAINING, AND THE RAINY SEASON IS HERE AGAIN SO WE WILL PROBABLY REVERT TO BEING DUCKS.

TODAY I START MY THIRD YEAR IN ICELAND.

I HAD HOPED TO HAVE A LETTER FROM YOU TODAY.

Getting the Silver Fox

THE MINK SKINS IF I GET THEM WILL BE THE WHOLE SKIN.

I AM GETTING SEVEN SILVER FOX SKINS FOR SURE.

THE FELLOW THAT WAS GOING TO GET ME THE BABY SEAL SKINS GOT THERE TOO LATE.

BY THE WAY, I CAN GET THE BABY SEAL SKINS AFTER ALL. AS SOON AS THE SKINS ARE TANNED I'LL SEND THEM TO YOU.

ABOUT YOUR SEAL SKINS, THEY ARE ON THE WAY, AND YOU CAN HAVE THEM MADE INTO ANYTHING YOU WANT.

I AM QUITE SURE THAT I CAN GET ENOUGH MINK SKINS FOR A COAT. IF YOU WANT THEM SAY SO RIGHT AWAY.

BY THE WAY, IF YOU CAN'T USE THE SEAL SKINS FOR A COAT OR IF YOU DONT WANT TO, JUST KEEP THEM UNTIL I GET THERE AND WE WILL FIND A SUCKER TO UNLOAD THEM ON OR TRADE THEM FOR SOMETHING YOU CARE FOR.

This Letter

THIS LETTER IS BEING INTERRUPTED VERY FREQUENTLY.

I AM HAVING MORE DIFFICULTY WRITING LETTERS.

THE LAST LETTER I WROTE YOU HAD A NOVEMBER DATE. PLEASE DISREGARD THE SAME.

I AM WAITING FOR THE LETTERS YOU SAID YOU WERE GOING TO SEND. I THINK YOU HAD BETTER KEEP WRITING THROUGH NOVEMBER.

THERE ISN'T MUCH IN THIS LETTER BUT IT BRINGS YOU MY LOVE.

I JUST SAW THEM UNLOAD TWENTY-SIX HUNDRED BAGS OF MAIL.  
IN A DAY OR TWO I SHOULD HAVE A LETTER.

NOW MAYBE I CAN WRITE YOU A MORE INTERESTING LETTER.

IT TAKES ME THE BETTER PART OF AN HOUR TO TYPE A LETTER.  
YOU PROBABLY DO YOURS IN FIFTEEN MINUTES.

I ALMOST FORGOT TO USE CAPITALS FOR THE CENSORS WHEN  
WRITING LETTERS.

TODAY IS A RED LETTER DAY.

I JUST READ THIS LETTER OVER.

SO FAR TODAY I HAVE RECEIVED FOUR LETTERS.

I IMAGINE THAT I REPEAT MYSELF IN THESE LETTERS BUT  
SOMETIMES MY MEMORY GOES BACK ON ME AND I FORGET WHAT I  
WRITE TO YOU.

I OWE ALMOST EVERYONE LETTERS.

AFTER MY LONG LETTER THE OTHER DAY I REALLY AM AT A LOSS  
FOR SOMETHING TO SAY.

THE COLONEL WAS JUST IN. HE FOUND ME WRITING THIS LETTER  
BUT HE DIDN'T SAY ANYTHING. ALL OF THE CLERKS IN HIS OFFICE WERE  
DOING THE SAME.

I HAVE JUST RUN OUT OF WORDS FOR THIS LETTER.

WELL, HERE IS ANOTHER DAY AND ANOTHER LETTER.

I WISH I KNEW WHAT I WAS GOING TO PUT IN THIS LETTER TO FILL  
UP THE PAGE.

I'M VERY HAPPY THAT YOU ENJOY MY LETTERS. IF I EVER  
STOPPED TO PROOFREAD THEM, YOU PROBABLY WOULD NEVER GET  
THEM.

DARLING, I DON'T ALWAYS FEEL LIKE THIS LETTER.

#### Cross Your Fingers, Don't Worry

DON'T WORRY ABOUT YOUR RING.

I DON'T KNOW OF A THING THAT YOU CAN DO BEFORE I GET  
THERE.

TO ME YOU ARE GETTING BETTER LOOKING IN EVERY PICTURE  
THAT YOU SEND. I'LL BE GLAD TO MEEET ALL OF YOUR NEW FRIENDS.

YOU SOUND AS THOUGH YOU ARE GETTING JITTERY ABOUT MY  
COMING HOME.

DON'T WORRY. WE ARE GOING TO DO PLENTY OF DANCING AND  
ANY THING ELSE THAT WE DARN PLEASE.

I HAVE BEEN DREAMING ABOUT WALKING IN ON YOU ONE OF  
THESE EVENINGS AND TRYING TO FIGURE OUT WHAT THE REACTION  
WILL BE.

I WOULD GIVE A LOT TO BE ABLE TO GO OUT TO THE LAKE WITH  
YOU AND SPEND A WEEK-END THERE DOING NOTHING BUT MAKING  
LOVE, AND IF THERE WERE A NICE BIG FIRE IN THE FIRE PLACE AND RAIN  
ON THE ROOF SO MUCH THE BETTER.

YOU WILL JUST HAVE TO BE PATIENT AND WAIT UNTIL I GET  
THERE THERE IS NOTHING THAT WILL HURRY ARMY PROCEDURE.

YOU ARE NOT TO OPEN IT UNTIL I GET THERE. DO YOU  
UNDERSTAND?

SHE IS CERTAINLY A FINE HEALTHY LOOKING LITTLE GIRL. SHE  
WILL CERTAINLY HAVE TO GIVE UP SLEEPING WITH YOU.

I HAVEN'T THE SLIGHTEST IDEA OF WHAT IS GOING ON IN THE  
STATES. I STILL THINK I'LL JUST WALK IN ON YOU.

I LOVE YOU LIKE CRAZY. DON'T LET ANYONE TELL YOU ANY  
DIFFERENT.  
CROSS YOUR FINGERS AND NOTHING CAN GO WRONG THIS TIME.

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## Souvenirs

*for R. L. B.*

1

Beyond Reykjavic on a country road,  
He watched the piebald horse  
Measure itself against his jeep.  
Reckless stride, its hooves beat  
The rocky field and seemed to beat  
The very coldness back into the ground.

He stopped beside a cottage  
And bought a plum-colored, woven blanket  
From a grinning farm wife.  
It was impulsive, a foreign act.  
Later, when he mailed it home to his wife,  
He didn't explain. She thanked him.

2

A small room in Iceland.  
A metal night stand  
With ashtray, vase and tags.  
On his cot the farm wife's blanket.  
He dreamed of Korea.  
He dreamed of war, of bivouacs,  
Of how he woke once in the hollow  
Of his mummybag  
Adrift on an unknown field  
A storm of snow  
Coming down and down  
And melting on his cheeks  
And burning.  
Encased in ice that was his breath,  
He wanted to break it off, to scream.

How to get through days  
He could not understand?  
Still in his barracks room  
Something heavy upon his chest,  
He was suspended between  
Waking and sleeping,  
Injury and recovery  
While the arched curve of his rib cage  
Hurt. An object resting there, cold  
In spots and warm in others  
Where his fingers held—  
It was the vase.  
He traced its design:  
Mother-of-pearl inlay,  
Some birds and vines,  
One butterfly.  
With apologetic hands  
Koreans fixed them there,  
Months or years before  
Across that empty gunner's shell.

He set the vase back beside the bed  
And waited hours for dawn.  
When he got up, rest at an end,  
He put his souvenirs  
Into an army trunk  
Stenciled with his name.

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