

LANDON SHEINBLATT

Landon Sheinblatt, I last saw you on a fire escape. Two men held your ankles and swung your fat body. I stood in the kitchen with a bouquet of flowers in my hands.

If you could see where I'm living now. There's a mattress on the floor, a dripping faucet, one cracked window overlooking the alley, a hotplate, the samovar we used to sit around in our winter' coats, our breath visible in the room. Mid-sentence you'd get up and bang on the radiator with a paperweight.

Landon Sheinblatt, your polyester clothes were always too tight and you were forever sweating. Sweating sweating. And yet you stayed fat. You were a big man and the world was too small for you. The night could barely hold your silhouette when we'd walk the streets. You'd buy a candy bar at the cigarette shop, a pack of Kools at the drug store. Yet you never carried matches, always cursing the stars

when it was late and there was no fire to be had. In a fit you'd crush the pack of menthols and fling them at the moon. In this movie I am watching in my mind, there is always a moon and you are always throwing things at it: theater tickets, newspaper headlines, a fistful of leaves, expired light bulbs, paperclips, your Russian hat.

Didn't I love you, Landon Sheinblatt? Were two men ever more in love than you and me? You at 45 and me at 23? Did I not hold your fat body in my arms and kiss your ugly face on city street corners where even the downtown drag queens called us fags? What kind of world was that? This movie's a mess in my head. It's running sideways most of the time. I've grown incredibly old, Landon Sheinblatt. You went out in your prime, two men clutching your ankles on a fire escape, straining with the weight of you.

Maybe it was summer and I kissed you in the spray of a pried-open fire hydrant, your polyester shirt clinging to the waves of your flesh. And a bunch of Puerto Rican boys pulled out guns and shot us dead. Or they threw their Italian ices at our heads. Or they applauded like madmen from the stoop where they sat. The world could have been that way, once upon a time. But most likely they shot us dead.

This place where I'm living, it's cold even in summer. Can you see me, pacing this room in my earmuffs? Talking out loud to your Statue of Liberty pencil sharpener? I'm banging on the radiator with a paperweight and the Super is screaming, *It's July! What's the matter with you?* I lie down on the mattress and close my eyes. Although when do I sleep?

Landon Sheinblatt, you fat bastard, it was me held one of your ankles on the fire escape. You'd been my lover and left me for a Puerto Rican boy and now me and this

retarded cousin of mine are going to get revenge. We're swinging your body and my cousin Jo Jo is going, *Throw him at the moon!*

I still see you in my dreams pouring tea into small, delicate cups. Or crushing a bouquet of flowers between us in your gigantic embrace, breath full of menthols and chocolate. Or I'm running up a flight of never-ending stairs toward a door, cursing you as I go on hyperventilating to death. Damn you, Landon Sheinblatt! But I reach the door, and here's where there's a skip in the film. A mouse is swinging from the end of the reel like a tiny trapeze artist. The projectionist is drunk in his booth.

I'm standing on the fire escape.

What is this thing—suspension—Landon Sheinblatt? I know about falling, but what is it that happens before, when they've no longer got you by the ankles and the whole world is still ripe with possibilities? I'm an old man now and I died in the air, trying to catch my breath. I'm watching this movie but I'm in the movie. And my part keeps changing. I've got a bouquet of flowers. I've got an Italian Ice. I've got a gun. My hands are empty. Sideways, upside down. Jo Jo on the fire escape like the retard he is: *The moon! The moon!*