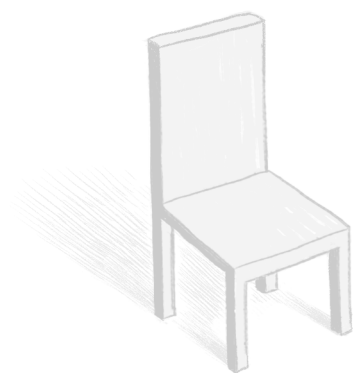


this  
poem  
is a  
house

ken sparring







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§

God knew that all over the world people were thinking.  
Old men cried thinking  
back over their years of lament  
and mistrust. It wasn't their fault.  
God felt that people wanted him.

God was a technician.  
He knew how to scrape away at the world.  
He could encroach without rupturing.  
He knew his job.

God didn't create the world at all –  
he discovered the world  
and then introduced it to the masses.  
And now everyone holds him personally responsible.

§

The boy wanted to go out into the snow  
and be flash frozen,  
only to be found ten million years later,  
a mythical beast, a symbol.  
A dead one.



## §

What place do we hold in ourselves for God  
when God comes visiting  
and our chests expand till they hurt,  
God crushing the breath out of us  
till our teeth blow out  
of our faces like tiny white heat-seeking missiles.

We have seen the clouds.

## §

Once upon a time there was a little boy and a little girl  
who lived in different places  
and didn't know each other.  
Then they grew up and met each other  
at a dance club.

The boy was attracted to the girl's curly hair,  
crooked front teeth and wayward eye.  
He soon fell madly in love with her.

*Who are these people?* the girl whispered  
when they were together  
on the dance floor.  
*I don't know,* said the boy. *I've never met any of them.*  
*Tell me a story,* said the girl.  
The boy tried to look  
the girl in the eye, but he couldn't tell

which eye  
to look in.

*Well, he said, finally, in this story the girl felt  
that the boy was a walking fashion statement,  
but even so, she spent time with him only because  
she couldn't seem to get him to go away.*

Each of the girl's eyes seemed to have its own mission.  
The boy wanted to understand  
the girl's mission  
so he could address  
the correct eye when he was telling her  
his story.

§

The boy came across the bridge.  
A crowd was waiting  
on the other side.  
He saw people.  
People he knew.  
He saw his mom.  
He saw Mrs. Haversimmel.  
Old Lady Rain.  
Spot.

He felt lonely.

*Step forward, they hissed.*  
They were angry  
at him.

Seeing them made him sad.

They were disgusted.  
*Grow up!* they told him.

But the boy was asleep  
again and the people were gone  
and the morning ravished him  
and he got dressed  
and went out  
to the driveway  
and stood with his heart bent forward  
in his chest.  
The light hurt his eyes.

His dad was suddenly there  
beside him, lighting up a cigarette,  
squinting into the morning.  
He looked so tired.  
He needed a shave.

The boy turned away into the hurting space  
and tried to stare at the moment truthfully,  
with no illusions.  
His dad put the cigarette into his mouth,  
drew on it  
deeply.

*When people talk, the boy told the girl, I hear what they say  
but something that I want goes  
beyond,  
or somehow arrives  
under the bright sky,  
like hearing the secret pantings of a soul  
whispering a secret message.*

Who is God?  
What is God?  
If you ask the question  
wrong, they say you will never get the answer  
right. Most people already know  
the answer they want,  
so it's easy to get the question right.  
It's harder when you really don't know.

§

The boy's boots made the girl feel  
nervous. They were sitting  
on the window ledge  
in the bedroom. She didn't even know  
for sure if they were the boy's boots.

Those aren't the boy's boots, she thought,  
and it scared her,  
the way the dark scared her, descending  
as it did,  
like a boot  
coming

down  
on  
daylight.

The boots on the window ledge looked  
like a pair of boots the girl had seen  
on the boy's father's feet  
in a picture that was pinned  
to a bulletin board  
at the funeral for the boy's father.  
The girl wondered if the boy had kept the father's boots  
squirrelled away all this time  
in the back of a cupboard  
in the house somewhere  
where the girl would not find them,  
the way he squirrelled away small items  
of furniture,  
like footstools and TV tables.

She imagined the boy's father in his coffin,  
the boy leaning in,  
taking the boots off his father.

She imagined the father now, in his coffin  
in the ground,  
in those long black socks  
he used to pad around in  
when they went to visit him  
before he was dead.

*I am afraid, the boy told the girl,  
of what lies beyond, in the windy motion  
on the plane where beams of light grow  
hard against crisp night.*

§

The boy wrote what mattered.  
Then he wrote what didn't.  
After that, there would be a moment  
when he would no longer be capable  
of writing  
anything.

§

*The tree had gone strange, the boy told the girl,  
and when we looked at each other  
we found we had the same wind on us  
but a different wind, also,  
each of us.*

*Because every speck of wind  
coming down the hill that morning  
was a different speck of wind,*

*yet they all came down the hill together  
like they were going to a party  
and not each to its own destiny.*

*I am rising in the wild windy dark.*

§

*Roll down your window, the boy said. It's okay.*  
The girl was afraid.  
She spent a lot of time playing with the dogs.  
The dogs were white.

The girl had feelings.  
She tried to slip past them.

She tried to slip her feelings into random moments  
of the alreadiness of her ongoing and uncooperative life,  
as though they weren't her moments  
but moments that belonged to another person,  
as though they were on loan to her  
from the library of moments.

§

The boy's dad died in October.  
Christmas dinner that year was baloney  
and honey.

§

These are people, the boy told himself.  
These are people who have been riding Route 6  
every night of their lives.

When the door opened  
at the front to let people off, the lights came on.  
It was like daylight.  
It was like creation.  
The guys who designed this bus sure knew a thing or two  
about lights, the boy thought.

People on the closed highways were freezing  
to death in their cars.

§

*I was in the rec room today, the girl said. Did I tell you  
about that already?*

*I have long wavy hair, she added at the last minute.*

*Then, more languorously: I am a goddess, really,  
in the looks department.*

*I should send you a picture.*

The boy wrote on medium-sized post-it notes,  
which he left  
on the fridge  
for the girl  
to find  
to endear him to her  
while he was locked away  
in the basement



for the day,  
making plans  
to move the furniture  
around the house.

*Spike is our baby kangaroo, the boy wrote,  
and he's inviting school kids to come  
out for the festivities and to pay him  
a visit.*

§

The girl was in the attic. Piles of books  
rose like apartment buildings. A wardrobe sat  
at the back by a window. A child's dresser lay on its side  
in the middle of the room. The girl was looking  
for something, a book  
the boy had told her about  
a long time ago.  
But after a while the girl forgot  
what she'd come up  
to the attic for and she stood  
by the window  
in the muted light, humming  
a song.

§

The smoke from the girl's cigarette seemed  
to have a dark purpose.  
It curled richly around the conversation.  
*I don't smoke anymore*, the girl said, exhaling smoke,  
her chest falling like an avalanche.  
*But you make me nervous.*

She was wearing a party dress  
over a pair of ratty jeans.  
Her feet were bare and wiggly.

*Cigarette?* She offered the pack.  
*I don't smoke*, the boy managed.  
*You could start.* The girl smiled. It was a mischievous smile.

§

They were all laughing  
and drinking  
wine.  
The boy put his coat on  
and went out  
the front door  
and walked to the end of the street.  
It was his father's street  
and his father was with him.  
The snow was coming  
down in big, fluffy flakes.  
It was beautiful.

*I believe in lying, said the girl,  
down on white.  
And, sure, red will arrive.  
But lie  
on your back  
on the white  
and let the red ride  
over you like a lover.*

The jello seahorses rode the waves of the bed  
like they were starving.  
They rode like stallions salivating  
in the form of a new god.

White foam rode  
over the edges  
of the boy's dream  
like white cum spilling  
from the hole  
at the top of a cock,  
dripping like rain  
being pushed  
across a moving windshield.

There were amber anchors  
in the sand.  
A flotilla of boats rushing, suddenly leaving  
the world behind.

Dripping gobs of humanity  
ran over the far edges of the earth  
drifting into the infinite vacuum,  
sliding beneath the grand waterfall  
at the far end of the great god's garden.

§

The girl pushed her face  
into the place where the morning felt  
most vulnerable. She watched the day  
arrive  
like a trigger  
on a gun.

The boy was drifting around  
the house on slippers, making notes  
on scraps of paper, leaving them in places  
around the house where he could locate them  
later to help him try to find a path  
through the chaos of his life.

It was like the boy had set his life down  
one day and then forgotten where  
he put it.

§