

Through the Silence

Poems

David Elliott



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Picture This

The lens stays the same
but the scene shifts;

the lens twists and
contracts while you
hold a pose. Inside,

the intricate
maze of circuitry sizzles

silently, energy transferred
photon to atom.
And if the focal length

of desire fixes on you,
brings you closer,

I'm exposed, heart
shuttering faster.
It's always you

I focus on. You can
see it in my eyes.

Aegean Light

1.

Reading on the veranda,
my crescent-cut thumb almost healed,
red fading to a fine line, the moon
barely a slice in the bright blue sky,
Paros emerging from the mist.
The wind dies down and heat
settles in. A late rooster calls,
the dove repeats his same three notes.

2.

Greece: sea, air, light—
everything reduced to essentials,
all these rocks, occasional ruins,
the road winding down to the sea,
islands in haze that won't burn off today,
now closer, now
farther away. A car accelerates
around the bend, sound fading
to crickets, cicadas,
vibrating, multi-layered, constant,
the speed of life,
a donkey swishing his tail.

3.

A nap's dream snatched from the sound
of the wind—the last time
I saw my father raise his hand,
nod his head—awakened
by a gust through the tiny
bathroom window.
Time thinned out, whisked away,

hard Greek sun bleaching
everything, even rocks.
Whitewashed walls, streets,
abandoned goatherd huts, that lone olive tree
in a yellow wheat field—
a thousand slices of time in the camera.
French doors ajar, wind blows long
white curtains into the blue.
Come out, good-bye, come out, good-bye.
No more rest for now,
the sea shimmering in mist, no line
between water and sky.

The Composer

for Peter Louis Van Dijk

On the upper deck of the ferry from Paros to Piraeus, islands coming and going, a composer works on his laptop, headphones on, left arm conducting slightly at times, placing the cursor to insert a double *f*, add a note to a chord, a rest to a triplet, oblivious to the sub-bass rumble of the engines, ringing cell phones, chatter of card players at his back, and something above us clicking away like castanets; oblivious to my spying over his shoulder at the complex score. He is hardly here on the boat at all.

Now his wife sets a coffee next to him and he empties a thin brown stick of sugar into the cup, adjusts his straw hat, and stares out toward the sea, taking a few sips before returning to the score, editing, revising, now leaning forward intently, now sitting back, arms crossed, staring at the screen, not working in real time but in one that starts and stops at will, suspended, accelerated, stretched—in and out of real time, creating moments his alone, later for musicians who will ride the score's passage start to finish, notes plucked from this ferry deck and set down perhaps in Amsterdam, for the Concertgebouw, orchestrating maybe twenty minutes of an audience's life, lifting them out of the flow he now ignores, so caught up in hearing the electronic version of his thoughts, the musical flow in his mind, stepping freely ahead, back, jumping measure to measure, choosing which musical moment to land on, creating notes that will set us free of the time we live by.

He shuts down his computer,
takes off his earphones, and makes a little wave
to his wife reading a book across the table, returned
to the cluttered music of the ship, the rhythm
of the waves in counterpoint
with the disappearing V of the wake, water
jiggling in cups and bottles on tables, vibrations traveling up our legs
from the engine room, the sky clear but for clouds
over the islands, hearing the zip of shuffling cards, the slap of the deal,
the kibitzing, conversations in layers, phrases of Swedish and German
phasing in and out, men's voices like oboes, women's
like clarinets, little kids' like piccolos, and in the sunlit air
the radar screen constantly turning.

By Any Other Name

Shakespeare should have been in advertising, he had such a talent for coming up with those zingers that just get stuck in your head. His words could have moved a lot of product, but I guess ads weren't such a big thing back then. So many of his phrases are household words, including *household words*. That was his. A good two-wor-der, like *naked truth*. He's got a lot of great three-wor-ders too: *heart of gold*, *love is blind*, *into thin air*, *bag and baggage*, *one fell swoop*. That last one has stuck even though no one knows what *fell* means like that anymore, it's *dead as a doornail* (to move on to his four-wor-ders). Yeah, Shakespeare gets credit for a lot, and rightly so. Who can forget *too much of a good thing* or *the long and the short of it*? And it's ok that no royalties accrue. After all, his estate, not to mention his literary existence, has been in dispute for centuries. Who would you pay? But me, I'm still alive and kicking. (Who invented that one? A rich man by now, I'm sure.) How many times do you hear *thinking outside the box* with no credit to me? And I'm the one who said it to Charlie Fenstad when I ran into him at the post office a couple of years ago. We were both emptying junk mail from our little metal mailboxes and it just came to me. He passed it on, and *the rest is history*. That's mine too, by the way. So Shakespeare, money aside, he got his performed publically, recorded in books, passed down nonstop for hundreds of years. But my work? No one knows where it came from. All of a sudden everyone's saying it, it's just in the air, but someone had to say it first, and usually it was me—late at night in a bar, after church, over a cup of coffee, wherever. And then some schmoe who heard it uses it talking to one of his buddies, who likes the way it sounds

and repeats it talking to the wife, and it goes viral as they say these days (not one of mine) about stuff on the computer. It doesn't need a computer, although TV and then the internet speeded up the process. The point is I deserve payment, royalties, all of my phrases what they call intellectual property. I think of myself as a poet. Wasn't it Ezra Pound who said, "Use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation"? Take *long story short*—I eliminated 3 words from how people used to say it. Why even write a haiku when one word will do—*totally, literally, whatever*. But saying *price point* for *price*? Not me for sure. Or *at that point in time*? Definitely not me. That was a bunch of Watergater crooks who don't deserve a nickel. But if I had a nickel for every time (again not mine—got to be honest) somebody said *at the end of the day*, I'd be rich. Or the one where I eliminated that word *day*: *have a good one*, I said to the smiling woman on the other side of the counter pocketing her change, and *the rest is history*. *Spoiler alert*: it was me. Not to mention *game changer*, *paradigm shift* (that's a classy one), *ginormous*, *win-win situation*, *fiscal cliff*. I could go on, but you get the picture. I'm growing old and Social Security sure isn't enough to get by anymore. Some day I'll get my due.
Just saying.

Into the Mist

Feathers flying
 from the chicken truck
distant lightning

 On the deck chair
 I never sit in—
fallen leaves

Candle blown out
 orange wick tip
 in autumn darkness

Lights out
my darkness
in the mirror

The old road—
a falling leaf rushes
to meet its shadow

How much I've forgotten . . .
my dog pulling me
into the mist

The gong fades
swallows flying
out from the eaves