

the humored self

If you wish to find me, here I am, here in my pantry off the farmhouse kitchen, in my green chair, amid my borrowed books and my coal and my brick and my bone, with found objects of metal and wood, gears and chunks, worn and weathered, all of this lit at night or on deep darkening days by my diddle-diddle lamp, come jump over the moon, come tap on my pane to be let in through the mud room, to join me and partake of my thought larder, to prick fingers and rub blood, mouths stuffed with cherries and shoes stuffed with cheer, there are awful things in the world, your mule is in the yard with my

Here I sit in my pantry, comforted by my stein of water, the concrete boat, the rubber whale under the plastic tree, the painting of broken clouds, the big railroad screw and sundry objects of equivocation, sick in my chest, the cough of the weak and the future of failure, I'll stay where I am until the air shifts me elsewhere, an elsewhere as good as any somewhere, I believe in the illusion of belief, I won't tell you any secrets, let me secret the telling into testimony, the confession of a shrug, there are awful things in the world, entrepreneurial zest, righteous philanthropy, leave me be, if you will, or come by, if you must,

If you wish to come bother me, take heed, I've swung the wall shut, I've hung a disturb at your peril shingle, I'm hunkered in my pantry with a scowl to wither your faith and wet your drawers, the wolverine indignation of a former underachiever, the epiphany of sudden loss, my father dying and dead, my mother tight in contemporary poverty, elderly and practical and alone within her ultra economic solitude, her lifelong teeth in stunning disarray, the bite to my growl, there are awful things in the world, the polite love of irritable offspring, the pathetic self-disclosures of undisciplined navel-

Here I sit in my pantry with my water flask, an unbreakable flask made in my birth town, a receptacle of suburban sorrow, half memory and half sigh amid mapshrouded cigar boxes of momentos and affection, photos of disaster cakes frosted by the fingers of a child, postcards of the still-life of a friend, lapis-lazuli violet in the lamplight, the skeleton key to an attic of seasonal knickknacks, the tree tile painted by an erotic hand, I'd tell you a secret if there were a secret to be told, there are awful things in the world, the melancholy of anatomy in this age of wire and string, of point and line, come see me if you can

donkey, come visit, come soon, come bearing armfuls of cured words, leave your mule at home, you should know the way by now, the gradual ascension, the bluer sky, the drying sky, the clarity of light and the thinning air, the diminishment of frame houses and the proliferation of stucco, the ghosts of adobe and the colors of soil, there are awful things in this world, toast your conscience, knight your memory, we'll survive shoulder to shoulder, we'll thrive arm in arm.

Here, if you will, is what it takes to be my friend, a straightforward task, to strive to be whole and to assist in my striving to be whole and to accept my assistance in your striving to be whole, an ethical wholeness, a pleasurable wholeness, a spiritual wholeness, tongue-in-cheek and dead serious, I'll be your stanza if you'll be my pancho, on a quixotic page, in a quixotic rain, this is an uncertain world, these are trouble-

I'm okay either way, I'll obey the unfolding, there isn't any way to disobey the unfolding, the fork in the road is swallowed into the absolute road, and some forks will lead you to me and most will lead you away, and all will eventually come together in some sweet by and by, as if that is any consolation to the lost, as if they are any worry of mine, there are awful things in this world, coat your conscience, sweater your memory, pull me by a thread.

If you wish to be my friend, and I don't mind if you do and I don't care if you don't, a friendship of duration and integrity, as solid as ice in winter and as lush as clover in summer, a staunch friendship, even if across clichés, if you were to haul this burden as if you were a mule, it wouldn't get me into the canyon, it wouldn't get me onto the ridge, it might get me out of bed on a brisk morning, or

gazers, leave me alone, I beg you, I'll carve up your will with analytical skill, stay away from me and my pantry and my unscratchable itch, steer clear of the whole elevated desert of my soul, a landscape devoid of knickknacks and rigamarole, of momentos and failure, the ethics of austerity, the morality of less, there are awful things in this world, scour your conscience, rake your memory, collaboration is tinsel and trimmings, take your teamwork elsewhere.

Here, if you must, is what it takes to be my friend, an arduous task, to be potently unique and to allow me to be unspecific and to champion my freedom even if it threatens yours, a philosophical uniqueness, a savory uniqueness, a proliferating uniqueness, cynical and innocent, I'll be your outskirts if you'll be my hinterlands, I'll be your periphery if you'll be my disregard, this is an uncertain

spare some language, if you have breath to give, add syntax to my cupboards, if you can find your way to me, across the fruited plains or the withering deserts, you who would come from the east, let it be you, you who would come from the west, let it be you, my kin to the north and my someone from the south, my head of quicksand has swallowed my heart, there are awful things in this world, proxy your conscience, effigy your memory, I'm absent in my presence.

If you wish to be my friend, and I hope you do and I wouldn't be surprised if you don't, a friendship of eternity and soul, as mutual as inhalation and exhalation, a vibrant friendship, even if across stereotypes, if we were to accept this weight as if we were sherpas, we might pursue a climb, an ascent from black bile hollows to rarified aspiration, we might long for a climb we won't ever make, won't even

some times, the lens is scratched, the milk has gone sour in the glass, and now that compassion is a commodity, now that indignation is copyrighted, I know you'll verb honorably, I know you'll segue from personal to communal growth, the esteem afforded cooperation with spine, lending an arm when a hand would do, the unexpected shirt given along with the requested coat, that excessive gesture, generosity with a penchant to smother, a thought with a thousand commas, logic at a suttering gallop around a cyclical truth, what is one to do with love of self, one's pumping blood, that rising joy, the surefire trust in one's desires. it might not, this is an uncertain world, these are trying times, there is grit between the sheets, the milk has gone sour in the cow, and now that anything is possible, now that hope has devoured faith, I suspect you'll waffle and meander, wandering in and out of my yard like an untethered jackass, dragging situational ethics behind you as a rotting carcass, not that I'd mind, not that I'd notice, not that there isn't a corpse or two in the yard already, not that similes themselves aren't corpses, of another time and any old place, stale, if not fetid, what is one to do with self-ambivalence, the immovable liquid in one's lungs, sacks full of stagnant water. world, these are confusing times, the door is coming unhinged, milk has gone sour as a concept, and now that irony is dead, now that I chastise the air in the room, I trust you'll excuse me, I've structure to manage, words to arrange, delvings into the recesses of my pantry, rummagings and comminglings, wild trials and errors, substitutions and rearrangements, the motions of a mad tinkerer, if you'll pardon me, if you'll take your intrusive self elsewhere, I've ambition to brew, I've facts to cook into palatable fictions, musings to boil into potable truths, what is one to do with self-loathing, that feverish intestinal fury. attempt, this is an uncertain world, these are worrisome times, the chalk is down to a nub, the milk has gone sour in our mouths, and now that the light has gone out, now that I'm alone as never before, I hope you'll be my friend, you from the west who think on thinking, you from the east who believe wind knows water, whoever you are, I won't pretend to know you, whoever you were but aren't anymore, whoever you won't be when I need you to be, the lingering odor of disappointment, the fresh aroma of naïve imagination, ripe optimism, fecund hope, what is one to do with loss of self, sadness without instance, imagination without specificity.

—Tim Ramick