

1977

# Traverse

Reg Saner

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## Traverse / Reg Saner

1.

There's a scene I'm scheduled to make  
and I know it, but not what it looks like.  
As a thigh's quadricep lifts  
for its next hoist up talus regions  
whose distances are pure cerulean  
haze, snow-peaked, I hear what may be  
the map of that spot  
crackling parka folds with vast couloirs  
still scared of the ice age.

Topping ridgeline near 14,000 feet  
I'm stunned, overlooking valley  
I didn't suspect, raw space whose bottom  
drops out, filling each eye with abyss  
and 3 frozen lakes. Precambrian terrain  
staggered by god knows what sunsets.

2.

Welters of Rorschach granite  
whose monumental flakes have long since  
set their jaws in metaphysical arrogance:  
"You sackful of names that wake,  
sleep, clothe themselves in each other  
and eat. Yard-and-a-half  
of trained skin."

If the Beautiful here seems vacant  
as wind, it's because the views  
we'd rather not go into for long are those  
most assured of being completely  
without us.

3.

Just short of the peak my way is snowcrust  
struck to this wall whose drop offers

everything it takes to be an eagle.  
I glance a full half-mile down  
over gouges, troughs, morrain rubbish,  
domes the hard-edged sunlight rims  
clear as stone bells.

The traverse narrows to 2 possibilities,  
firm snow, or a send-off where warmth  
eases one patch unglued. No ice-ax  
no crampons no rope. "Saner,  
you're crazy, grow up." Yes.  
There is no need to vote.

Lying low between gusts I lean forward  
slowly, as if not to weigh what I weigh,  
as if to make a believer of snow  
trying on my next footprint.

4.

My moves dip down to thinking about  
not thinking. Pausing too long.  
Over this tremendous glacial gorge I hang  
as the focus of a scene going deep  
because it has all the makings.

Taking stock of granular surfaces  
12 inches beyond my boot tip I say  
to nothing at all  
"Not here, not now. Not this time."

5.

Turned back 200 feet short of the top  
I discover the enormous wealth  
in even irregular balance.  
Out of stone atmosphere the birds,  
pine-barbed floors, Prussian sky, the clouds  
relax and unclench. For souvenir  
I've this handsbreadth of pale blue snow  
where my bootprints leave off

pressing their luck, in a light  
photographers call open shadow.

Far below I see myself as so many scabs  
on so many rocks, each breathless attitude  
fixed, inexhaustibly posthumous.

Near one the splayed crust is still  
putting a slow freeze on bright red clots.  
A foot juts, wearing its bootheel torn loose  
from all but a single bent nail  
where it oscillates a moment, then quits.  
In a fallen pocket lightly crumpled, but dry,  
intact, perfectly readable still,  
I keep the map of this place.

*Clarissima Lumina Mundi:*  
Visiting New York / Reg Saner

From a great way off through roar and doze,  
waking to twilight by jet, all dinosaurs gone,  
the kerosene storm on our tail  
straining us down  
into these landscapes of the made, down  
to be the man in waders, vacuuming green concrete  
under the corporate building's lagoon,  
the man with the dollar bill in his mouth,  
the man who rams his fantasy .38  
into the throat of each dog, and pulls.

At the Whitney's exhibit, 2 pickup trucks—  
a white one blued by felt-tip with hatchure marks  
taking weeks, whereas the black truck  
is pencilled all over in scrollwork fine  
as Da Vinci's silverpoint grotesques  
or that queer vegetation  
on money and stocks. A mini-career right there.