

1977

Person Smoking

Daniel Halpern

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with a rose-like tutu and a glazed pink smile.
She has risen as far as the ceiling,
near the resting place of the chandeliers.
From the dirt you can tell it is
taking place in an important city.

The audience does not panic or move
though a girl is hanging above them.
Do they think it is part of what they have come to see?
Their faces turn upward, rose and white.
The dancer, her eyes closed,
does not stir.
She thinks she is dreaming a dream, probably,
in which she has floated away from the earth.
When she opens her eyes
and sees that she hangs there at the center
of a real proscenium at the ceiling like a lost balloon
will she be startled, fulfilled or terrified?
Surely she has never attained such elevation,
and will have to consider all over again
how to cope with
what it is possible to do.

Person Smoking / Daniel Halpern

Cigarette smoke floats up
to this second story room.
It doesn't mean too much,
but it is a sensation.
Below me someone sits quietly.
There is no reason to believe
it is a woman, and there is no way
I can look out the window.
I imagine a woman sitting on a bench
smoking quietly, looking off
into the trees. I could of course
call out, but that would be ridiculous.
I wonder, as I stare into the trees,

what she is thinking about.
She can't know I'm here
and wouldn't care if she did.
She sits there as I sit here.
And then she laughs.
Startled, I turn back
into the room. She watches me
from the bed, smiling gently—
at what, I wonder.
Her cigarette is a gray ash that drops
into the white air of the sheets.

Distant Faces / Daniel Halpern

Sometimes at night
I go out to the terrace
lit by red neon
that vibrates the still air.
I lie down on bricks
whose coolness calms me
and remember those who have left
for cities in the west,
or the midwest,
or for nowhere at all.
After a little I go back in,
and in sleep call back
those familiar faces.
Or else I remain on the bricks
and press to my body
the coolness that keeps
those who have left me
so distant, so far away.