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DONALD PLATT

Two Poets Meet

for Carlos Drummond de Andrade and Elizabeth Bishop

When my two favorite poets in the whole infinitely worded world met,
and they met
only once, it was by chance on the sidewalk at night in Rio,

and they had just come out
of the same restaurant, where they had eaten at separate tables. Drummond
had had the humble

tutu, black beans mixed with manioc meal, and fried bananas. Elizabeth the
gringa

had wolfed down
a caper and pimento picadinho served with farofa, manioc farina larded

with butter, sausage,
and eggs. Both had drunk cachaça with chasers of beer. The acacias
were in full bloom

and lit the street with their yellow globes. Their faint scent
could not conceal
the smell of urine from the side alley where the drunks would piss

copiously and with great
long-winded sighs. The panhandlers were out with their chorus of coughs
and por favors.

Lota, who knew everybody, introduced them. Elizabeth had not yet
started to translate
Drummond's verse. Drummond had never read any of Elizabeth's

few poems, which shone
like a single strand of pearls against a black funeral dress. Because they were
both

“supposed to be very shy,”

they said little and spoke only the formalities
in Portugese,
which was Elizabeth’s third, half-learned language.

But when Lota
had taken Drummond’s arm and whispered that there was someone
he must meet,

he was anything but gauche. He bent over Elizabeth’s
outstretched
hand and put his lips, which had once murmured, “Love in the dark,

no, love
in the daylight, is always sad,” briefly to the dry skin
of the back of her hand.

Let it be recorded that in the life where people meet and pass
there was a kiss
in the middle of a sidewalk. In the middle of the sidewalk, this kiss.