

Gaston

“Make it new.”—
Ezra Pound.

Standing there, unbeknownst to me,
the little girl in the long black trench coat
with the reddish curly hair
stepping off the metro or the bus
who feels like a detective
conducting a secret rendez-vous,

in his wide-brimmed black fedora
and lengthy black wool coat.
Close-cropped black hair with a hint of a curl
and a remarkable goatee and moustache to match,
A modern-day Humphrey Bogart.

He did say that he learned his English from his Father and Frank Sinatra.

When I picture him I hear classical music in my head.
Glenn Gould doing Mozart,
Bach,
Chopin,
and most of all, Rachmaninoff.

Gaston owns a coffee shop,
And therein lies
several Russian dolls and other souvenirs.

“How is the coffee shop doing? I miss it as well; it was so peaceful, alive, and comfortable like you yourself. I loved it as much as a person *can* love a place. It is so much better & welcoming that anywhere here. Most of all I miss your face, smiling, & the smell, like coffee, exotic spices in the chai, & friendship. It was a warm refuge, familiar & protecting from the cold wind & the crowded, noisy, strange street. I also miss the music, which was the perfect combination with the delicious tea & coffee. Here in the US, we don’t have coffee like yours. It is tasteless or tastes poor, often burnt or watery or both. The syrups are too sugary, artificial or worse. I also miss the Russian dolls, their faces smiling as well, which grew & shrank like magic,” (excerpt from letter to Gaston translated, 5.20.09).

Sitting on top of a large toile sac of beans,
sipping strong coffee or tea,
listening to the Mac or to the stereo,
quieting up when customers, mostly regulars,
entered in.

This was delightful.

One day he could sense that I was upset and famished,
So he bought me palmiers from the bakery next door and
insisted that I eat them.

Another time we went out to a rather ostentatious but tasteful restaurant
where I would not eat much of the seafood platter,
Which I did not realize was completely raw.
I did, though, drink the vin blanc.

We have a lot of food memories together.
Like the best falafel in all of Paris,
Or my embarrassing, nervous tofu and spinach stir fry.
I had to go all the way to the Asian market near his shop for that one.
Apparently not many Parisians are pescatarians.

We also have a lot of music memories.
Listening to Bach, Mozart, and Rachmaninoff in the shop,
the tiny tinny music boxes in the boutique,
the classical guitar in the cathedral.

We were antiques, old souls together.
Like the pale blue 70's wind-up clock that I bought him from the market on the side of
the Boulevard
for his shop.
The clock was eerily precise,
it didn't work.
Neither did our time,
it was with space and without time.
Rather, it was waxing up and waning down all too soon.

Like my appetite.
I stopped eating unless I was directly presented with food.

I remember our last evening together,
I was so anxious and sleep-deprived that I almost forgot how to use the phone.
I had been wandering with aim but without success around the Georges Pompidou that
afternoon.
Then I came home and gave up and tuned out with shitty movies.

He agreed to meet me in a café across the way.
I was so anxious that I nearly shook (again).
But our time together still had some poetry to it.
We walked along, arm in arm,
serpentine down the little ruelles,

discussing life and my impending departure.

I knew that I was in over my head, that I couldn't stay.
My novel apartment would have been much nearer to Gaston's place,
with a gentile older teacher and journaliste.
But I had to go, a-leavin' on a jet plane
Don't know when i'll be back again.

It was a beautiful neighborhood.

I never took and don't have your photo.
It is not just one of my souvenirs.
So I spend my spare time forming mental images,
Imagining and dreaming of the become, different outcomes, and the becoming still to
come.

It was a beautiful neighborhood.