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Elliot Brown's Last Dance

Justin Kleczka

Where, then, shall we stop time once more?
Before my restless heart exhales at last.
Maybe we can lay in our favorite place to stay
Where the evening sky gently kisses the bay?
Or, perhaps, a spot we've never been before
Like that rooftop bar or the rocky shore?

Do you remember?

That first night amid the jubilee
Of desirous bodies out on the dancefloor
And us nobodies by the bar crooning.
I thought (and still think) that I was dreaming
When your friend whispered that you were into me
And I, finally, asked you to some toast and tea.¹

What followed was our first visit
To that café on the East End (I forgot the name);
I was blinded by the rising sun in your eyes
To the delight of your unfamiliar guise.
Guys would watch you and my half-wit
Thinking "when *will* he ever quit?"

But I never quit.
Time and time again I've tried
To beat this bloody disease
All to no avail.
I finally feel that my time is up.
My time. My ties. Mai Tais.
How about we go get drinks on the beach?

1

An allusion to line 34 of T.S. Eliot's poem "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"

Do you remember?

That time we laid under crystal-clear skies
Eons away in the land down under.
And the giggles that night when we tried to embrace,
Nothing but red looking back at my sun-burnt face.
But our desires burnt stronger than our bodies
And on we played, until the next sunrise.

However, there was that one night
We finally let the moonlight win.
After cuddles, music, and chatter,
(Much more of the latter) ...
Bob Marley sent you into a dreamful flight
With the three little birds, as they sung you “goodnight.”

We’ve also had our troubles, no doubt.
Now where should I begin?
How about our son’s middle name?
I wanted him to carry out his father’s fame
As a writer (if he doesn’t dropout);
We shared some sneers, maybe even a shout.

But we figured it all out.
Like I said, I never quit.

Young Walter Elliot Brown
Wouldn’t stand to be here
And hear the stories of our grating roar²
Against the precipice of Time’s pebbled shore
Screaming “Carpe Diem! Don’t let us down!”
Yet here we are, about to drown...

Do you remember?

Our weekly walks along Lake Voltaire
The silence spoke louder than Pangloss³
Which was broken (along with the law)
That time we dared disturb the placid awe
With our youthful bodies bare,
As we dove headfirst without a care.

And from there things have never been the same
Between you and I (and all the stars in the sky) ...
We shared our secrets, our lives
Our dreams, even our lies
Which set our relationship aflame
Hotter than the sun on a Summer's day.

I still remember the first poem I wrote to you:

*I sit in plight and wonder what to say
For the mighty playwright stole my design.
Then I realize you're not a "Summer's day"
Better yet, you are a fine wine
Plucked soft from fertile vines of the Champagne
Sparkling bright through idle tides of yore.
One careful sip of you will ease my pain.
What then, must I ramble anymore?
For you'll witness empires rise and fall
From cellars of the wicked and replete:
If only I could polish off you all!
Without you Heaven does not taste as sweet.
Alas, Time will bear His judicious hand
And I will wait... forever stuck in quicksand.*

3 Pangloss is a character in Voltaire's *Candide* known for vociferously preaching his theory of optimism

It was my first poem, what can I say?
At least I didn't cast you as a sorbet
Or soufflé – (I had fun with the rhymes)
What mattered to me was the pulse of the lines.

Had we all the time and youth alike⁴
We could sit still without rushing life
Like the turtles by the Thames' side
Soaking in the sun nary the tide.
But I grow weary! I grow old!⁵
My wandering soul no bed can hold.
I can see the Future, no longer blurred,
Like a cup of tea, just lightly stirred.
It's gazing back with a vengeful glee
And now it speaks... does it speak to me?
Shouting "You've had enough! That's it!"
Just so you remember, I never quit.

So, where shall we end? It's to you I owe
Our final throes before the coup de grâce.
All I know is we should hurry soon
My time is waning as the crescent moon.
So, where would you prefer to go?
What about where the spotted tulips grow?

4 *The first three lines of this stanza allude to the beginning of Andrew Marvel's poem "To His Coy Mistress"*
5 *Inspired by line 120 of T.S. Eliot's poem "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"*