

the HARLEQUIN

Peter Campion

1989

No luminous jade that divers fished
where Szechuan cliffs
fell purple to an emerald river.

No sweet brew
distilled from mare's milk
savoring of almonds.

But closed eyes
stinging when you screamed

“Marco. . .” the others called “Polo.”

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All that summer was enchantment
of the almost there not quite yet
straining of bodies.

Older kids on a lifeguard chair.
Zinc oxide stripes beneath their eyes. Their laughter
was allure, was menace.

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No silken sedans
lofted by concubines.

No assassins wandering
the Gardens of the Saracens.

But word got round about our
baseball coach
busted at Motel 6 with butane torch and pipe.

“He was wearing old fatigues and the girl was fourteen.”

Or rivers of Hungarians
flooded a border gate
while Uncle Dennis sobbed at his TV.

Soprano whimpers, from a man
who would send terrors through his cadets.

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Half remembered poems
mumbled in half sleep:

“We all stand right-side up, when earth
lies upside down.
The way an old man, at his birth. . .”

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One recurring dream
went ectoplasmic Planet of the Apes
and screeching up the elevator

wires of my voice box

words like ogres pounded home
their one conclusion:

“I am a monkey on the moon alone.”

*

No Dairy Queen and driving range.
No bellies oiled
to smell of coconut.

Growing so slow then
fast as a wave falls
desire turned the world

right here unreal.

*

“Marco. Marco. . .”

and there never was a choice but follow.

Thank you for reading! Find more at www.theharlequin.org

