

FALL

You drop your anchor in New York City just as the city is turning cold and gold. What is your nationality, you are asked often. My nationality is urbanism, you say. A city is a city is a city is a city. You think Singapore has given you at least that—a passport with a covert hologram of an urban jungle—if not an anchor.

You've heard that a deadweight anchor is meant to weigh about a fifth of the weight of the ship it is serving. This surprised you, the seeming lack of weight, a sixteen-ton anchor for an eighty-ton ship. You weigh fifty-two kilograms, a hundred and fourteen pounds, so you'd need an anchor of just ten and a half kilograms, twenty-three pounds.

And the rope that will tether your anchor to the bottom of the ocean floor or the riverbed or the manmade harbour—how much slack will it cut you? Will it burn, blistering your hands over as you unspool? How long shall it be? What colour are your masts? Who will sail you, when it is constantly unbeknownst to even you the destination of your voyage?

Trains don't need anchors, trains need engines, they don't have sailors, they have conductors. There is the smell of piss in the subway. An old man with a butter yellow linen jacket and a cravat and Yoko Ono shades says to you—

—the thing about Nueva York is, just on this L train, I bet you my last dollar you can find one person of every country the world over, right here in the subway. Wanna jig?—

—and you smile a smile that says go big or go home. He grins at you, tips an invisible hat.

A girl you're fond of meets you by the Lorimer turnstile, tosses her cigarette into the gutter, takes you down by the water. The surf's up, but there's a ruined dock just a little way up, if you can make your way over eight tiny pointed rocks across the water. If you slip you'll dip into the river and you're wearing your good shoes, woven leather dyed purpled, but already she's halfway across and smiling at you. So you go and then you're right on the very edge of the side of Brooklyn looking over at Manhattan. You feel like Gatsby looking at the green light at the end of the pier of the Buchanan household across the bay, longing that is shiny, shine that is flat. You tell this girl you hate the extortionate sheen and conceptual flatness of Jeff Koons except his work/relationship/kitschfest with the Italian pornstar-politician Ciccolini, you tell her—

—then apparently he married her because he said if not the work wouldn't have been complete. So do you think if you were Ciccolini you'd have known that he was marrying you for the work and not for you?—

—and she says, but if he is very much like his work, if he is more artist than person, even as person, then maybe it's actually the same?

You're not sure if you want to see the retrospective in real life at the Whitney, across the city on the Upper East Side, to what, gaze at Jeff Koon's peckers and Ciccolini's asshole, is there any point in encountering art (paying an institution to encounter an artist that big) in person, if it is already so much larger than life. But you ask her if she'd like to go with you anyway, because it would be a date thing to do in the city, in the fall, and a lusty wind goes through your hair as you ask her.

The wind pushes a gull against the trajectory of its flight in the sky. The gull looks like it's trying to get the attention of a prissy-looking duck resting on a raised piler in the middle of the river, and you point it out. She says if it were up to her, her courtship dance would begin with a large, sweeping gesture from left to right across an expanse of sky to catch

the attention of the object of her affection, before she swooped in for the kill. You laugh and the wind blows harder; if you remove your jacket it is too cold, but if you keep it on it is too warm. This is a good problem, because when you were a kid you once told your mother that you think you'll have to migrate someday, and she said why, and you said because Singapore didn't have the four seasons.

Your mother found this to be a very superficial reason, and you couldn't articulate it then, but now looking out at the red in the leaves and the early chill on the tail end of the breeze, thinking of the mulled cider turning lukewarm in the paper cup in your hands against the crispness of fall, soon to be replaced by hot chocolate on a white Christmas, followed by a floral tea in spring, and then iced mint juleps in the height of the summer heat, you see that it is anything but superficial or affected—it's about variations on time as a theme, the quartering of its passage in the year: the sense of change, of beginnings, middles and ends writ into your environs, into your life.

When you feel the seasons keenly, it is time you are honouring.

Later in the night when you're home you'll receive an email from this girl beside you and it will end off with—

—In other news, I'm quite inspired by this emu's mating dance and may start practicing—

—and it will contain a link to a YouTube video of an emu that looks like it has gone insane for love. It is running around and around the emu it is hoping to court, its long neck swaying, its wings held open, at a manic pace. But for now, you're asking her if the Brooklyn river is freshwater or saltwater, and right after you ask the question, the river comes for you and her in a compacted wave. It's in and on your lips and your undies are soaked through because you're in a skirt and you were hugging your knees to your chin. Now that the river is in your mouth, clearly it is salty. The sun is going down very quickly and the lights are coming on over Manhattan and you think of saying to her, The world is my oyster but my world is your oyster, but you don't, you swallow it whole, because loose lips sink ships.

A few weeks later, on an autumn night balmy as midsummer, this girl beside you, currently drenched in saltwater from the Brooklyn river, will ask you to be her girlfriend.

And many weeks after you've agreed to be her girlfriend, when fall is turning indubitably into winter and you're twirling a wool scarf tight around your neck as you and her head out to a place in East Village for Chinese pork baos and hot pumpkin squash, she will make a passing remark—

—Wasn't September the perfect time to ask someone to be your girlfriend?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cTGnQZ-1CDw&noredirect=1>