

Scott Sandler

Miss California Plays Around In Earthquakes

1. Run to the t.v. and there's former Miss U.S.A.
now doing the morning broadcast.
Carefully explains to you why your windows shake
and why the tonka truck hits you square in the head.
Tells you this with grace like she's got A-Z balanced on her head.
Tells you this like it's the talent portion of her act:
swinging hips and finger cymbals.
Says there was a time when all of this might've surprised her.
Says there was a time a long time ago.
Says when I was wee-high.
Before I entered Carpenter Elementary.
Before I entered Miss Junior Miss.
2. Takes us live to the schoolyard where jungle gyms are pretzels.
Ballbox has burst open and red rubber balls, basketballs,
and tether balls roll around her legs like seaweed.
She says, as you can see it's not safe.
Not safe to walk out your own door.
She says, as you can see it's not safe
and gets hit with the pointy end of a football.
Checks her nose in the compact and says, still smilin' pretty.
She says, back to you in the studio.

3. She says, do you believe in God.

The one that gave you a racing heart and me long legs,
pretty face to boot.

The God that, in seeing that you didn't finish your homework,
cancelled classes.

Do you believe?

Cause I tell you, the whole of San Fernando Valley is acting up
like a rickety, old washer and dryer, bouncing us around,
moving furniture.

Do you believe?

I'm just curious is all.

When they said, Miss California, whom do you most admire,
I said God. Do you remember that?

Will you vouch for me?

That wasn't all just fluff y'know.

Fractions

Gail drinks half our whiskey.
She says, "I am three-fourths buffalo,
one-fourth the woman I pretend to be:
I am an indefinite term."

I drink the other half,
lie down, three-fourths asleep
behind Gail's knees,
falling asleep, lovely, sweaty, sweet
knees which I pack into my lungs
one hundred percent.

She says the buffalo want to bring me back
into the fold,
to make me one of their whole numbers.
She says, "My averages are better with the buffalo," &
snaps a dragonfly out of the sky.

I say, "The world is three-fourths water,
one-fourth Gail.
Will you deprive me of one whole quarter?"
I say, "The sun will come up tomorrow and will
completely restore you to that Gail I once took you for
when the moon was low and full of muscle."

Gail takes off her Levis, hands over keys &
says, "As a buffalo, I won't be needing these."
She says, "Send my regards." She says, "My love is divisible
by two and I can only choose one."
She waits for a fraction of a blessing &
gets none.

Dusk

Flying insects infiltrate blue dusk,
speed toward dark shapes of buffalo,
humped, low to the ground shapes,
cooling in mud shapes.

Flying insects burrow in thick buffalo hair,
soak on buffalo blood and hook
electrodes up to big buffalo chest.

Flying insects with their tweezers,
glass slides, plastic bags.

What information will they gather for their superiors
regarding the sacred buffalo, the power buffalo,
the buffalos who keep their true identities hidden
between belly and sluggish mud, their true plans
rolled and corked on their forehead, in a mass of
bone?