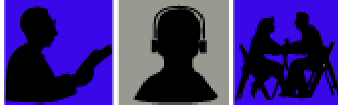


## ARRIVISTE PRESS



READ. LISTEN. EVOLVE.

### VIEWS VIEWS VIEWS

*Karen Kasaba*

*It's not you – it's this town that turns everything into a story where sooner or later it all connects and gels into metaphor, blatant as sunset.*

That night I left it at the Wharf, folded into an origami crane, under a flat, water-worn rock I picked up on East Beach. Not exactly a message in a bottle. Tar spotted timbers creaked beneath my feet as I backed away from the note, watching it suspiciously as if the rock wasn't heavy enough to hold it on the pile, as if a paper crane might take flight.

When I turned I saw a pelican, full-scale, Actual Size you'd say, standing on the dock. I'd say a pelican is an Object that is Caution, Larger Than It Appears. I've been soothed by deltas of pelicans gliding low over Miramar Beach, and I've sketched dusty, taxidermal birds at the Museum of Natural History, but this pelican was real. Tall as my shoulders with a bill three feet long and a gullet big enough to swallow me whole. I startled, shocked by the proximity of the pelican, but didn't let on.

I drove up past the Mission to the Riviera. I don't know why, I just had to increase my elevation. And then it happened – I remembered where you said you might get a place for the Fall, off a crooked hill road in one of those four bedroom stucco boxes with views, views, views. Below Alameda Padre Serra – APS to locals – you and five roommates could make the rent. I know how Sola becomes Alta Vista then turns into Grand and winds up Jimeno. In Santa Barbara everything can change that fast, disappear or morph like a Cheshire Cat. Like you, for instance.

"Everything here is interwoven, connected," you told me. "An ongoing story. Nothing is an accident." No accident that you, a frizzy-haired fifth-year senior, Art Major /TA, would meet me, a freshman, in a papermaking class at UCSB and take me up another of the hundred roads that intersect and connect in the Riviera, the web of roads that keep the hillside from eroding, that hold half-million dollar homes intact.

Is it all connected? There was that party you threw on a Tuesday night – the night I saw you last. Not a Come-As-You-Are, but an Actual Size party. I passed out flyers you and I had designed to the entire Art Department. A halftone background of lower case Helvetica, your favorite font, repeated the phrase BEHERENOWNOWBEHERE, and over that the words: JUST YOU, THAT'S WHO = ACTUAL SIZE. I didn't come Actual Size that night. I came as the Past Tense, dressed in gray with rainbow-striped socks, but didn't know why at the time.

We first met the year of the Chihuly exhibit. Chihuly who, I had to ask. "Dale Chihuly," you said. "The greatest living glass artist. A real coup for the Museum. World class." You got us in opening night. We walked under a Plexiglas ceiling glistening with glass sea forms. Cathedral colors refracted onto the concrete floor and made the moment holy. Everywhere, swirls of hue danced and balanced into impossible shapes. Standing among them, you memorized my eyes and found a glass form that contained the colors you saw there. Ochre merging with olive, rimmed in cerulean. "Beautiful," you said. "You, that is." I didn't believe you then. To convince

me you took me by the shoulders and held my gaze with the persistence of a mirror, daring me to look away. I didn't look away. Instead my temperature rose and I expanded; I became molten, willing to be reshaped. Then, the sound of crashing glass. Breaking glass at a Chihuly exhibit! We hurried to see, blending with the arc of a curious crowd. A twenty-foot chandelier made of oblong, saffron shapes was less a globe – one had broken loose and fallen, shattering onto the concrete floor, the glass so thin it looked like a cluster of butterflies had landed there.

Now I watch you through glass, the house transparent on both sides. From the front door I can look onto the back deck where you sit taking in the view. At least I think it's you – I can see the Einstein haze of your hair catching the last light, haloed around your silhouette. I shadow myself amid a profusion of bougainvillea and watch, unseen.

There was that night you took me to a house above Franchesci Park, perched on a vertical acre. "Realtors don't always lock 'em up," you said. "It's that kind of town." We'd been to Joe's Café earlier that evening and I had a third Tanqueray tonic because they mix them like silk, and what was I doing anyway? A freshman with Fake ID? Or did you know the bartender? The night of the autumnal equinox, just after school started. I didn't know anything and wanted to learn.

The house was empty, a one-story, two-bedroom rectangle built in the fifties. Not a rectangle, but a trapezoid, we corrected ourselves upon entering. We know our shapes. You led me through with a flashlight, intent and intrepid in spite of the dark.

Empty living room, glass, and views views views. We laughed at the kitchen, all original, pink Formica with turquoise appliances. A sink/stove/washing machine unit manufactured by Westinghouse. That would be worth something today, wouldn't it? Whether it worked or not. And the bedrooms, two trapezoidal boxes off a crooked hall. It would sell as a teardown. We were in a museum, a time warp. On the living room wall, over the fireplace, a mural – Dr. Seuss-inspired plants, oddly charming, in pale heliotrope and silver leaf.

You propped your flashlight and the beam bounced off the ceiling, defining the parameters of the room. Through a wall of glass a circus of lights pulsed, expanding and contracting like a heartbeat. I let you undress me and together we stood in the middle of what appeared to be faded turquoise carpet. I didn't know how it would feel. I didn't think we could stay standing! But it would make a better story if we did. I felt like a gyroscope, tilting and whirling, tipping and yawing, all the while maintaining a single point of contact. My first time. Our last.

The day is ending, one of those lucid autumn days when the topography of the Channel Islands is technicolored and layers of sky/clouds, islands, water and town are sharply defined. At dusk islands wink into darkness while water relaxes to matte – not just blue, ultramarine, azure, I know my blues – losing its luster. Later the city blinks on – brilliant, hard candy balls of light – and high enough in the hills, the stars take shape.

I want to tell you – there's a paper crane with your name on it waiting on the Wharf. I want to tell you where to look, and I want you to find it yourself – anything but stay in this moment where looking at you is a funhouse mirror, undulating and disproportionate, not crisp and easily defined like this view of my town.

But I do stay in the moment. I hold myself by the shoulders and dare myself to look away.

Now, watching you through layers of glass you seem caught in time, like a taxidermy bird. And smaller, like the pelican encased at the Museum, not the shocking fact of nature I faced on the dock. It was never about the way you looked – like a genius, like a madman – or the way you spoke in faux-profound Zen koans. It was about me moving through the darkness of a new self in a new town, and you were the one with a flashlight.

Beyond you, a pale fog rolls in and city lights bloom, vibrant as molten glass. And eventually, just

as Alta Vista becomes Grand, standing here, I am transformed. I am no longer Larger Than Life, like the night of the Chihuly opening, the way I enlarged when you handed me a plastic glass of free Chablis as though you'd crushed the grapes with your own feet. And I am not Smaller Than I Appear, like the images in my side-view mirror, like the night of your Actual Size party. By then I'd become a sophomore and you were teaching Drawing Level One. I dressed as the Past Tense and didn't know why at the time. Then at the party you introduced me to the Present – a willowy freshman named Gwen you said did amazing things with gouache.

Maybe I did come Actual Size after all.

Now it's clear enough to look away. Stories continue to undulate around me and through me, and like this town and these roads, I've morphed again. At this elevation I've got a great view. Up here I have lights and water and fog, the fragrance of pittosporum and the rhythm of crickets, and the comforting trumpet of the train, calling me to ride on to the next moment.