

Film Clowns of the Depression

by Nancy Lupo

Middle March

We keep talking because we are trying to peel the skin off of our little world. It's not that we're chewing the fat. We're force-feeding this thing so it becomes blurry and undefined like a goose getting ready to become foie gras. When you said that there is a kind of violence in this intimacy, I agreed with you. You can see it in the scatter of broken toothpicks on the table in front of us and the ocean of hair I've been nervously tearing out of my head for weeks. I tell you everything. I mean it as a gift but we both end up with our lungs full of water. Somehow this makes me feel triumphant and, like a desert toad, blood is coming out of my eyes. Blood is coming out of my... wherever.

And then we're back at 56 Leonard, high up in one of the penthouses. It was under construction, same as now, although the form was different. It was a kind of semi circle, like an airport hotel. All of the rooms were joined together by these Jack-and-Jill-type bathrooms. Every time you went to use them you had to choose one side or the other and never knew what or who you were going to find. Evidently this was a problem. You owned the hotel and so it was your job to find a solution. The next morning my jaw hurt, from bruxism no doubt.

Last Spring

The first thing that happened was that you performed telepathy at a very great distance. This spring we had lunch and you actually seemed to smell like roses. When I asked, you confirmed. "It's Le Labo's Rose, do you know it?" Then you said this thing I was thinking, how a lot of people seem to be wearing Le Labo right now, at least in our world. Later, I saw a pack of rose-flavored gum on your desk and wondered if it was peculiar for the pleasure of smell to extend to the pleasure of taste.

On the subject of roses, you told me that your parents have a rose farm. It's actually in the process of being reconfigured into an orchid farm because there's no money in roses anymore.

Though it would seem they would have gotten a boost after Jay Z gave Beyoncé ten thousand of them to congratulate her on a spectacular halftime performance. I wondered what happened after? I pictured an empty swimming pool like the one in Porter Ranch. Then I pictured it again only this time filled with potpourri. For the next months it seemed I could pick up any phone and you would be on the other end. I decided you were Beatrice and you would lead the descent.

First November

We met in the basement of Bloomingdale's. You were holding a piece of iron-colored cardstock to your face and inhaling it. The salesman said that it was the original Eau d'Hermès conceived by Edmond Roudnitska who felt that if a perfume was well made it had a clear and distinct form that would help to articulate the world within. Your pupils were glossy black and heavy with want. The salesman informed us regretfully that Hermès had discontinued the fragrance: This bottle was the last. Your desperation blossomed in that moment but it was clear his hands were tied.

At Annick Goutal, you wanted me to smell this scent you bought a couple of weeks before. There was a whole story. Something about a trip Picasso and his girlfriend Fernande took to northern Spain so that he could paint the portrait of Gertrude Stein. His work was fitful and so they went to get away in this rural village. Fernande was a city girl and hated it there. When one of their friends came to visit and asked if there was anything he could bring, the only thing she wanted was perfume. So this *Encens Flamboyant* is what you imagined she would have worn. You had a plan to use it somehow but I didn't catch how exactly.

Late February

You said you hate the way every car in a film set in 1950 will be a two-tone 1950 Chevrolet Bel Air. It's good because your Scion was one of the original ones that were still sharp and boxy before filling out a couple of years later. I remember well the year 2004. I had just come back to the States after a couple of years living abroad and felt there had been some major cultural shift evidenced in the boxy look of the Scion xB.

You asked me what I did. I told you about the straw factory that had just collapsed or maybe exploded. It's not that I work at a straw factory. I was just trying to give you a sense of the terrain. You seemed to understand because without missing a beat you told me about when you used to collect brake rotors for scrap.

We drove past a series of Plexiglas monoliths that were described in the newspaper as "alien port-a-potties." You said something about the next time I come into contact with some-

one that smells like you. I said something about my world and wondered something about your world. And then we were on the curb embracing for a long moment before I went into the terminal.

Second November

You had just moved back to the city and didn't have a roommate and so offered that I could stay with you. It made sense because we needed to see each other's skin. Time snowballs at a certain point and starts moving faster and faster. You've been on GAPS for several years and have become a different person. I've tried to follow your recipes but I feel I'm only becoming your molted exoskeleton.

I noticed immediately the bottle of Annick Goutal with its awkward gold bow. Clearly, you regretted the whole thing. You wanted me to give it a try but later you said I had to stop wearing it. Your contempt seemed to extend from the fragrance to my presence. I ended up spending most of my time at the reading library at Grand Army Plaza. Before I left you told me that I should take the perfume.

I got home and blanketed myself in a fog of it. There is a really touching scene in the documentary on Valentino where he turns to his partner, Giancarlo Giammetti, and asks him, in the back of their town car, if he's too orange. Giancarlo responds with complete tenderness and says that he is, in fact, "just a little too orange." You expressed a similar sentiment but later let it go, saying that it seemed to be "fun for me," like Halloween.

I took this fog with me to a lunch meeting with the couple in Gower Plaza. Perceptive and discerning as they both are, one of them immediately asked if it was the same perfume that a mutual friend of ours wore. I realized that it was, exactly. Many things then became apparent, all in succession, like a winding arrangement of dominoes clicking down the line until the landscape which once contained only verticals was now a collapsed straw factory.

Monday, February 29, 2016

I thought about you this morning on my way to work because I heard this thing on the radio about sommeliers. They were talking about how it's true that language actually helps people to experience complexities in wine. The language allows us to access different levels of taste, flavor and nuance. This seems like a relevant point for us now. I wonder: What do teeth taste like? I suppose there's no outside there, no way of ever knowing.

I've been thinking a lot about teeth, of course, and how this mouth, this orange grove, this shrub or bush or whatever

that began at the very start of the catchall “holiday” season (also coincidentally citrus season) now feels, in our post-*Lemonade* world, more like a bodega or some kind of storage. That place where you bump up against a cache of mints when you go to grab your stress-relieving herbal tea. It might seem like a coincidence but of course these things are carefully coordinated, orchestrated, scripted.

After lunch you called to say that one of the preparators found a number of rare coins in one of the crates. I explained that they are just wheat pennies, friends of sWheat Scoop. When we’re all on GAPS, wheat will seem horrible, only stuff for cats to shit in. You said that the imprint of wheat on one of these pennies appears to have a shadow, they call it a “double die” and, insanely, it’s worth \$2000.

Twelve Years Ago, April, A Week Ago, Today

This all reminded me of one holiday, years ago, when you brought me into your room because you wanted to show me this spread of cell phones you had been collecting. There were all different kinds, a Motorola Razr, some candy bar phones, early smartphones like the Palm Trio, a couple of smashed iPhones and maybe an Android. As we were talking, one of them started buzzing and another was flashing this blue light. Was I understanding that your collection was really loot? “But what will you do with them?” I asked. As if in a vision you said, “I’m going to use them to connect.”

From another time zone you finally replied to my link. Bissonette (“pronounced biss-on-ay”) the chimpanzee has escaped from the zoo and is swinging across electrical wires before being shot with a sedative arrow. The video touches me because Bissonette looks like what I think I would look like if I were wearing a chimpanzee costume, for Halloween let’s say. Your reply was a clip of a big cat waking up in the wild after sedation. She moves slowly, heavily through the grass as if it’s a field of molasses. She stumbles and the video ends.

In the next step, it’s ten years later and you are back in my life wearing the most elegant Dries Van Noten suit I have ever seen. Speaking of textiles, we sit and weave several lifetimes’ worth of dental floss. You’ve been working at Barney’s and said you probably spent 10k on clothes in the last year alone. All end-of-season sales of course. We talked about everything: your mother speaking in tongues, your sister opening up her forearms and smearing blood all over the walls. We talked about the Purina factory and the Angel Soft factory. We talked about Gore. What did they actually produce? The floss seemed only to be a calling card.

Now it’s been weeks and I have no idea where you are. I picture you in the kitchen looking like an orange though from this distance it’s hard to tell. Maybe you’re not an orange at all,

just a heap of compost. It’s a Sunday night so I imagine you are boiling a pot of those long pasta straws. What are they called? I’ve been thinking about how Scandinavian languages have so many words for snow because there is so much of it, but it seems this particular tête-à-tête might not have any language at all. Predictably, the Santa Anas start raging as the sun sets. I miss the alarm. Of course more seasons pass.

Nancy Lupo (b. 1983, US) is an artist living in Los Angeles.