

# American Notebook

Roberta Hatcher

Below my window  
people are singing,  
it's a party across the street.  
After the first line they  
don't know the words—  
*da da da da da da da da ...*  
The voices drift apart—  
they don't know the tune either.  
Sometimes wanting  
is not enough.

✱

We are driving down the highway  
and you know the words to every song.  
The windows frost up  
with the wetness of our breath,  
like music made visible  
before, laughing, we wipe it away.  
The car rolls like a cloud  
over the Minnesota plain.  
I wonder if you ever  
think of that day.

✱

We sit undressed at your kitchen table,  
we've been sitting here three days.  
Afternoon of pot and opera, then brandy,  
cigarettes, now two remaining Marlboros mark the end.  
I had brought you a tape, Keith Jarrett at Köln.  
A man alone with a piano.  
The music holds, withholds—  
one moment as he plays he softly moans.  
You teach me how to listen, like an initiation:  
sex is everywhere, the square root of everything.

\*

I've come alone to Avignon,  
where I'm soothed after travel  
by a cool shower and smooth sheets on my skin.  
In the room next door heels click click on the floor,  
moving with purpose like European women do.  
Then I hear laughter and the sound of young women  
singing Where Have All the Flowers Gone  
in German.  
Everything here is like that—  
familiar yet strange.

\*

Last week in a movie I heard "Beyond the Sea"  
in French, taking me back to the bar  
on the lake, that summer, that jukebox,  
that dance we should never have danced.  
Now I learn that "Beyond the Sea"  
was written first in French; its A side,  
"Mack the Knife," was German.  
I don't know anymore  
where anything begins or ends.

✱

People had assembled for a party.  
We had heard there'd be a band.  
The band was late, the night adrift.  
Thinking of nothing,  
I picked up a dead electric guitar,  
and face to the wall, fingered a blues in E.  
When someone turned on the amp I jumped,  
then turned to see the room erupt in dancing.  
I held the rhythm as long as I could,  
which was not long, then, terrified, fled.  
I regret the times I've been unable  
to rise to the occasion.

✱

After Simon and Garfunkel split up,  
Paul Simon changed the keys to all his tunes.  
*I'm tired of writing songs*, he said,  
*for Art Garfunkel to sing.*  
But when they played together  
in Central Park years later,  
the songs were back in Art's key,  
and Paul Simon never looked nor sounded  
so radiant.

✱

Bob Dylan wanted to be the next Elvis.  
Like so many,  
I once wanted to be the next Bob Dylan.  
He came closer to his mark, of course,  
but when I hear those lovesick songs he's made lately,  
some days I'm not so sure.

Roberta Hatcher was born in MI, raised in MN, and educated in WI. Her poetry has appeared in *The St. Petersburg Review*, *The Comstock Review*, *Main Street Rag*, and *Pittsburgh City Paper*, among others. She currently teaches French at Allegheny College in Meadville, PA.