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A PARALLEL PRESS CHAPBOOK

Marquees
of
Buffalo

POEMS BY DENNIS TRUDELL

DENNIS TRUDELL grew up in Buffalo, New York. A retired professor of English from the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, he received his B.A. from Denison University and his M.A. and M.F.A. from the University of Iowa. Trudell's poems have been published in many literary journals, chapbooks, and anthologies. His story "Gook" was chosen for an O. Henry Prize volume. Trudell has won fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Wisconsin Arts Board. In 1996, the University of Wisconsin Press published *Fragments in Us: Recent & Earlier Poems*, for which he won the Felix Pollak Prize in Poetry. In 1996, Trudell also published *Full Court: A Literary Anthology of Basketball*, (Breakaway Books). A collection of stories, *Vast, Brief Days and Nights*, is currently under submission. Trudell lives in Madison, Wisconsin, with his wife Dee.

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A P A R A L L E L P R E S S C H A P B O O K

MARQUEES OF BUFFALO

Movies in Poems & Prose Poems

DENNIS TRUDELL



PARALLEL PRESS · 2003

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I wish to acknowledge the following publications where these poems previously appeared—*The Ohio Review*: “Triple Feature” [“Voice-Over,” “Off the Train,” “Sleep or Morning”]; and a chapbook *Road Forks: A Ramble in Poems* (March Street Press): “Matinee.” Forthcoming—*The Progressive*: “Fin de Siècle.”

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FIRST EDITION

Contents

Sword · 7

Love Note · 8

Balcony · 10

Matinee · 11

The Song · 12

Late Show · 13

Swingtown · 14

Movie Story · 15

Triple Feature

Voice-over · 18

Off the Train · 19

Sleep or Morning · 20

My Father Gets Up in the Middle of the Night to Watch
a Movie on Television · 21

A Cappella · 22

“Dancing Cops” · 23

Usherette · 24

Now Playing · 25

Movie · 27

Fin de Siècle · 29

Dancing Friend · 30

Marquees of Buffalo · 32

for Dee
Yes, let's watch a few more thousand together

Pictures that move, that can tell more than their stories: show in long, dark rooms among strangers how lovely, kind, goofy—sometimes scary—strangers can be. How *vivid*. Good movies say: love is our best impulse; flesh runs out of time; greed hurts people; war is anti-human, and so is its form called capital punishment. I've loved movies since Saturday matinees cost 25¢ at Dipson's Amherst Theater, Buffalo, New York.

Sword

After I kissed Gail Wakenhut
on the cheek at the movies, I ran
up the aisle and made my way here
to age sixty-one. Rick sat
on Gail's other side on that
first date—and I see him there
more clearly than as a doctor
in Atlanta telling of his hospital
ship off Vietnam. Three fourth-
graders at a matinee: Larry Parks
was *The Swordsman* in Technicolor
before he named names of fellow
ex-radicals to Congress; and my
mother drove us and picked us up.
I seem to remember getting mad
about her laughing phone call
with Rick or Gail's mother.
She was alive then—twenty
years younger than I am now.
Her laughter seems this morning
like that shifting, bluish, magical
beam I moved my lips under
running from that kiss. Larry
Parks was huge near a cleavage
at one end of the beam: narrowing
dust-glints through a boy's heart
and a man's into the other.

Love Note

I blew a date with Lynda Hopkins
at The Lafayette in downtown Buffalo,
circa 1955. *The Eddie Duchin Story*
ended with the pianist and son
at a two-keyboard grand piano—
we'd known that he was ailing.
Then only the son and "The End"
. . . . And Lynda wiped her eyes,
the other girl on the double-date
wiped, and I said: "He's under
the piano"—and no one laughed.
Or my friend did, then stopped.
And Lynda never loved me. She
had a stepfather, I now remember.
She didn't love me in third grade
when the teacher intercepted Ken's
and my love notes, and read them
to the class. Didn't as I climbed
that summer night in high school
onto her neighbor's garage roof,
tossed pebbles at her bedroom window,
afraid of the stepfather, who drank.
Once I saw him with a .45
cleaning it? I don't know—he
drank. She didn't love me. Didn't
laugh, and wouldn't if I could
somehow make her hear me now
say, "Remember *The Eddie Duchin*
Story . . . Tyrone Power disappearing
from that piano at the end to show
he'd died, his son played on
my joke: 'He's under the piano'
at The Lafayette in downtown Buffalo?"
She wouldn't remember. Nor wipe

her nearly sixty-year-old eyes
if I added, “Ken went there—
We’re all going under the piano.
I won’t see you there. You were
right to cry. I was right to joke.”

Balcony

I think it was *Love is a Many-Splendored Thing*, but it could have been something else—and they were noisy. Six or seven of them, balcony in downtown Buffalo, and I was back from a typewriter in the Army wary of repressing too much anger. “You guys enjoy the show?” I asked as the lights went on; and they were stout, middle-aged, ties and suits, thick eyebrows.

“Yeah . . . you?” I was their height and not afraid until I said, “Might have if you’d kept *quiet*”: and one of them was a row closer, fast, and his eyes near my eyes. “Kid, you don’t wanta fuck around.” And his voice didn’t waver. Maybe I thought Mafia later because mine did, and I felt relief.

Felt relief after saying, “That’s just talk,” and his eyes hardened; then turned to his watching friends. “He’s just Billy’s age,” he told them and smiled. “No older than Billy,” while I moved to the aisle instead of saying something else as he and a few of them nodded.

Matinee

“Nobody loves me. . . .” a man told
me in Monterrey. “Nobody.”
He ate my shrug, ate popcorn
three seats away as it dimmed—

Cinema IV, and he cried. He
ate popcorn and cried. “Hey,”
I told him as someone huger
than most walls faced someone

huger. “Hey, it’s okay.” “Shut
up, for Chrissake!” he said,
pointing. “About to—you know,
embrace,” came through popcorn.

The Song

“This woman where I work. She’s eighty-five if she’s a day, usually just nods when I come with her food. Or shrugs, like: ‘What the hell? Here I am in a nursing home.’ Anyway,

this morning looks up at me from her wheelchair. ‘One time I went to the movies. With a young man,’ she says. I nod or whatever. Then hear: ‘And I didn’t wear any panties.’ Gazing these eyes like a bird’s,

gleamy, sharp. *Don’t need this at age seventeen*, I’m thinking, but just shrug. Summer job at minimum wage—and now I got her butt on this old-time movie seat. In my mind. About to go throw up or something,

and she touches my arm. She’s moving her head, these ratty old curls you think will fall off. Sound like rust hitting the floor. Moves those eyes back and forth. ‘It’s *true*,’ she says, and . . .

kind of like she sang it. I felt those eyes on mine, on my uniform. Boobs. Navel, for Christ sake—like they’re fingers tickling. Fingertips. And that’s about it. She looks away, and says nothing else,

nothing at lunch. Meanwhile, it’s sort of echoing in me. ‘*It’s true*,’ tingling my blood. Spinal fluid. Especially my own butt: am I sick or what? Feel that movie seat’s wrinkles there like music—

both of my rump-halves filled with her song.”

Late Show

When young, I loved the movie page.
Buffalo Evening News—all those choices
of what to dream while awake in the dark.
I grew up to insomnia. Once I stopped
believing in God, what could be trusted
to choose what I lived while asleep?
Once I left Buffalo, they tore down
nearly all the old theaters. Now several
times a week, I sit trying to decide
with pencil what to dream while awake . . .
what God might choose to live through
my eyes and words if He weren't torn down.
Sometimes at night, much of the night,
I can't stop loving all the choices—
all the Buffalos and Gods in myself
and people I see or imagine: the dreams
someone should write or film or pray to.

Swingtown

An aging, overweight farm couple
move to town and learn to tap dance.
They aren't very good, but they love it.
The man can go faster. His wife is more
graceful and can't help smiling when his
taps click louder, quicker, than her pulse.
Their children are embarrassed and angry—
except the son who took over the farm.
He says, "There's no doubt many things
in life farther from walking to milk cows
in minus-thirty degrees at 6 a.m. than
Fred Astaire on a polished dance floor. . . .
But offhand, I don't know what." Still,
the couple's daughters veer into stores
seeing them tap into view on pavement.
The ex-farmer still wears overalls; his
wife, though, is trying high heels this
week. It's ugly—she's awkward walking,
dances like a vast and wounded duck.
She has a 1940's woman's wide-brimmed
hat she wears tilted. And she laughs
loud enough to be heard from produce
onward at Foodway. And has found she
has a knack for memorizing lyrics;
that's her "Lady Be Good" rising now
along the cereals. That's her youngest son
and daughter-in-law scurrying a cart
with grandson past Cheerios to soaps.
Are those taps that seem to follow?
The grandson sends a gleeful, "Whee"
toward aisles behind, short denimed legs
flailing in air. Loud crashing, "Ompf,"
not unlike an overturned pig, stops him
and parents. "Ginger did the same damn
things *backward*," they hear, "and on just the
same tilty heels. . . . I'll get it yet!"

Movie Story

A slender old man in the third aisle of eight with videos for rent. He is looking at Westerns, flinches; “My God—” he says, and you maybe work there. Are maybe a customer. “I fell in love during this,” he adds, holding the box for *Shane*. It’s empty, tape on the shelf; it quivers. His gaze into yours. “She died . . . after watching—” The man moves past with the box, and you briefly feel his breath. You notice *Saskatchewan*, starring Alan Ladd, who was Shane. You shrug. “This!” is shouted from Musicals. You move there, as do others—the old man waves a box: *A Chorus Line*. “To a hospital that same night, and never came back.” His gaze brightens through yours; he follows it, bumping your arm, knocks *The King and I*, *King Creole* to the floor. You leave them and hurry to where he holds a box from War. “*Great Escape!* The night her water broke—we never saw the end. Our Daniel was born. Danny. Was . . .” Now he looks at *Shane*. At gold top hats of *A Chorus Line*. Your eyes move to *The Longest Day*, *The Naked and the Dead*. “A good kid, Danny. Was in school plays,” the man says slowly, walking. “Was Elvin P. Dowd in *Harvey*.” Taps Jimmy Stewart’s

face on that box, but keeps on moving. "Married badly," his voice declares. "Never seen this one," you hear from a young man holding *Harvey*; the woman with him shrugs and nods. "Danny said to watch this, and we'd understand." The old slender man is at the end of Drama, touching *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* "We did—and we didn't." He holds the box's open end close and breathes inside. Looks away. "Named our little girl after . . . her." And he wiggles briefly Jane Fonda in *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?*, which he seems to forget he's holding and drops. "You know?" the man addresses faces on boxes along Drama, across that aisle at Mysteries: Humphrey Bogart, Faye Dunaway, Joan Crawford, Richard Widmark. . . . "I was a kid. Was a young boy Saturday afternoons," the man calls at watchers, empty boxes, tape cassettes beside them; then rushes to Science Fiction. "Yes, this—!" And flips *It Came From Outer Space* toward you, toward others crowding behind *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, etc. You say, "Sir, maybe you should take it easy. . . ." But he doesn't; he's now swerving to Horror. *The Creature From the Black Lagoon*, *Donovan's Brain*, *The Night of the Hunter*. He grabs some, spills others. "I

was a boy at the movies," you
hear through his panting. Through
other voices, laughter, through "911"
and "nutcake," boxes flipped back
his way. *Abbott and Costello*
Meet Frankenstein hits his belt.
"Was a teenager," he says. "Young
man in the Army—the post theater.
Back home at the drive-ins. . . ."
And suddenly it's quiet. The man
looks wildly around. Huge faces
from the ends of large, dark rooms
are now around him on covers
of boxes that anyone can hold
in a hand. You touch a box-
spine as though it were human.
This man is slender and old;
and his face is a teenager's,
a soldier's in Technicolor glow.
Calmer now, watching a story . . .
now a civilian face above a tie
"Downtown movies on dates,"
it says; and you see it there.
With Alan Ladd's tiny reflection
in eye luster. Matching the face
on the *Shane* box he still grips.

Triple Feature

VOICE-OVER

“They left me naked in that alley, bleeding, sweating—the moon and my pulse sliced by fire-escape. The last one had pissed on me. I heard my car start and disappear. All I could think of was: movie. In a movie something else would happen. Nothing did. The moon sliced me. Finally the pieces stood.

Comedy, I remember thinking. How to make this movie a comedy? I was two miles from home. Out on the sidewalk was a woman’s shoe. High-heel, another story—double-feature, I thought. Walked with the shoe ready to hide my business.

I got an erection. Something about the high-heel, the fear . . . relief that I was alive and moving. It reflected on plate glass in moonlight. Above it some blood shined; above that a grin was brighter. ‘The End’ didn’t rise to block my stick from view, so I slapped it—

‘*Slapstick*,’ I murmured. Limped toward the cop scene.”

OFF THE TRAIN

I couldn't understand the language. Small town by the sea where I'd suddenly decided to get off the train between two foreign cities. Just needed to feel something *else*. "Else," I murmured, and saw an old movie theater on my way to negotiate a place to sleep.

A few people were entering, so I did with my suitcase. Large woman with a small mustache in this classic ticket booth cashed my traveler's check, and gave me a handful of odd bills and coins. She pointed at my wheeled suitcase, shaking her head and saying something that made her giggle.

I think that there was no charge for the suitcase. Or that anyone hiding inside would have to stay there. Anyhow, the popcorn was the best I'd ever eaten: a butter made with olive oil, perfectly salted. Maybe a dozen other people inside, and one dog sitting alone on a seat gazing at where the drapes would part. They did, and there was no screen but a vast window. There was the sea, which changed colors as evening approached.

SLEEP OR MORNING

"Dream of me," the *femme fatale* said in black-and-white in the 1940's. And after watching the rented video, I did. My six-word reply there was wittier than the private eye's had been, and my stare from under a fedora made hers lower as his had not.

I took her hand. It came off in the dream, and I awoke kissing the back of my own. Around me the night was still—no gunshots or thump of corpse. No torch song. Down in the parlor the videotape was rewound; her image pressed against her image, the private eye's, the headlights in rain. . . .

The actress was no longer alive. Or she was old, very old. My reply to "Dream of me" came back as I thought of her dead or withered. I could rise and move barefoot on carpets, and see her young and dangerous. Or I could repeat, "A dream is all you are" to no one but myself. And wait for sleep or morning.

*My Father Gets Up in the Middle of the Night
to Watch an Old Movie*

On cable television. Because he can't sleep.
My father gets up in the middle of the night
to watch an old movie on cable television—
because he can't sleep. He has done this before.
He will do it again, and sometimes he eats
cookies. My father eating cookies and watching
an old movie again because he can't sleep.
He is eighty-seven years old. He lives alone.
Because my mother died . . . and sometimes he looks
at her absence on the black sofa. My father
turning back to the movie on cable television,
eating another cookie. The movie has a name,
but he doesn't know it. My mother died—
because this is not a movie with a happy
ending. Or any ending. My father returns
to bed and goes to sleep. Or does not,
and then later sleeps. The television reflects
the lamp he leaves on . . . the black sofa.
Reflects an old mirror behind the sofa —

A Cappella

Two old women holding each other
ascend another block. Pause, breathing.
“It’s Saturday,” the smaller says. “Used
to, I’d look forward, tingling, all day.
Dancing. Me and Phil half the night;

then diddle-whumpus till dawn.” One
young woman descends, grinning, from
her eyes. And fox-trots out of sight.
“Me was movies,” the other says.
“Married or divorced—Saturday night,

I’m there like a church.” This larger
woman smiles. “Lights would dim,
then come on inside me. That’s when
I’d tingle.” “Movie pictures, huh?”
Another young woman descends from

eyes into plate glass. Which reflects
two old women leaning one another
into motion again. They each breathe
harder now, as if to revive Saturday
nights and a tingling inside the other.

“Dancing Cops”

My father has lived eighty-seven years and is overwhelmed, sometimes angry, at how things have changed. “Signals, for instance,” he said yesterday as we drove under one. “Traffic signals. Never had those. There were stop signs. And in big intersections,”—my father was young in the Bronx—“I mean like Times Square, they had cops. Turning these posts with words on the sides: *Stop, Walk, Go.*” He and I drove past stores, computers, TV antennas, Hondas, starter jackets, cell phones. Headlines. “Turning one way,” my dad said, “holding up a palm the other, waving: ‘You move, you stay.’ Their arms, their bodies, in constant motion. Some of them were like dancing”. . . . And that’s a movie I want to see. Am not sure of the plot; but in the Technicolor musicals I grew up with, and black-and-whites before them, plot never mattered. We’d view whirling, slim or not yet incredibly *graceful* cops, in intersection after intersection while soundtrack music arose. Maybe from a beginning of car horns, ones outside that got squeezed, and shrill whistles, shouts: “*Go now!* Not you, not yet! *Wheet.*” The gloves—maybe white gloves—flashing while uniform pants do, badges, mustaches; there are no guns. The cop shoes, their “rat-tat-tat,” as my old comic books stated, of soles and heels now dark blurs . . . under smiles that movie dancers can’t keep from lips, shouldn’t try, when they feel one with the dance. Maybe there’s a city-wide competition: winner gets a lead on Broadway. Dancing cops in Harlem, the Village; ones watched by kids in *yarmulkes* on sidewalks; in Chinatown; one atop a stalled Austin on Park Avenue. The pedestrians unable not to shuffle to the rhythm. Males all wearing caps or hats, boys in knickers. . . . That small one there peering between adults—with my father’s mustache, his naked eyes and smile, overwhelmed: his life stretching on and on, past this nearest and all the dancing cops.

Usherette

Movie usherette's uniform from the 1940's,
\$395, on a cubicle hanger in Illinois—
Antique Collectibles. A man touches it;
a man didn't know he had come there
to browse, pause, and now move a hand
inside the jacket. And he stands there
because no one is watching, and because
this man is not young . . . not young at all;
and fifty years ago, his eyes moved each
Friday night of seventh grade for some
moments to such a jacket's push of breasts.
Then looked somewhere else. Dared
to glance at her face only as she passed
above flashlight beam with another patron.
She was always gone when he and friends
left. *"And I've always been half in love
with a curve of near-darkness. With
half a dim face,"* he murmurs now;
and he turns knuckles toward the lining.
Cupped, his palm is empty. And empty.
He stands there breathing, does not cry;
and doesn't pay \$395 when he leaves
five minutes later. Although his palm
remains half-closed, the daylight fills it.
Daylight fills the man's palms, nostrils—
dims a boy's lustrous gaze in near-darkness.

Now Playing

A woman in her late sixties. Enters a pink stucco building near used-car lots. Near warehouses, and small motels where families do not stay. Outside the pink building is a sign twice its height: *Flamingo Lounge*. Shaped like the bird with female human breasts, legs ending in stiletto heels. Its bulbs that still work unlit now at 2 p.m. on this weekday.

“Starring Gilda Lovemore!” the woman announces. To a trio of male patrons at the bar with stools between. To a bartender with mustache, tank top revealing a tattoo on left biceps: upside-down skull with bowtie. “I ever tell you guys that was the screen name I used?” she asks. Facing the man nearest the door. In a ballcap, brim torn off, above a face the shape and color of a rusted shovel.

With that much vitality. “Do I know you?” it asks. “In ’49, on my way out here to be in movies,” she tells all four. “Gilda—because of Rita Hayworth. *Lovemore*—just because.” She pulls the ballcap’s torn front nearer the man’s eyebrows. He turns back to his beer. “Co-starring Jim Bob Dupree!” the woman calls at the bartender. Who does a mock bow, placing a shot of vodka and empty coffee cup before her.

“You three are supporting cast,” she declares, pours vodka in the cup. “It’s an old RKO-type mystery, in black-and-white.” The man beside her wears an extra large T-shirt a few sizes too small; he regards the woman. She is red-haired this month, today wears a green silk blouse. Orange slacks, hiding neither outline of panties nor still shapely calves. Shoes with two-inch heels. “Right,” she says. “So, the plot begins. . . . Woman of a certain age enters this bar, a dive. Its few occupants are not enthralled by the event. We sense the entry—the absence of enthrall—are not common.”

She pauses until the third patron finally turns her way. He is a small man with eyes as large as his mouth. He has emptied a shot glass beside his bottle with beer. Touches shot

glass to flesh around an eye. Closes the other, as if sighting through a telescope. "One of you has to slump over like dead," the woman tells the three patrons. "Your hand will twitch one final time on the bar. Then open to reveal this note."

She has taken it from her zebra-striped purse. "Jim Bob will unfold the note as though he does that every week. Which is true except for Saturdays, when I go see a matinee. Eastgate Mall Cineplex. *But . . .*" Her voice has deepened and gained resonance, which seems to echo from reds and golds of the jukebox. From purple neon beer signs and bar mirror beneath. Four heads gaze in it at the paper she holds.

The mirror is about the size of a movie screen viewed from most seats in a theater. "But the note changes each time he opens it," she continues "Each time he reads it in that flat, so-what?, famous Jim Bob Dupree bartender voice. You follow? For instance, last week's was. . . . What, J. B.?" He towels a glass he'd plunged in gray water. His face has altered a bit, become more vivid in eyes and lips. When the woman and other three have breathed a few times, he utters: "*No-body loves me.*"

Stares from under the torn cap and from above three chins meet over the woman's hair. A reddish wave of which now covers one eye. She says, "So, who dies—that we can hear what's in the note? With his final ounces of strength leaked to eternity." Long pause. "*To eternity,*" she repeats, and someone claps twice.

"What's the film title?" another asks. And when she raises the note and wiggles it in answer, four heads lean toward it a few more inches. Their breathing has changed in the past minutes, quickened slightly; and now an invisible luster enters the room from their nostrils.

Movie

On screen is the view from inside
a dirt-floor shack. It glares heat
out there, so the hour is probably
between noon and dusk. A dull
gray frames that stark rectangle
of baked earth, pebbles, a slinking
dog, wisp of insects, car-panel wall
of another shack . . . smells: we
know it smells out there of fetid
water in a ditch, and two kids
play in it with a stick and a pig.
Now the gray is receding. We
discern edges of a few possessions
on the floor of this home; they
are strange to us. Is that sphere
of rag some toy, a doll?, or maybe
garment, a means of scouring pots?
Is that oval a pot, a vessel for
this region's bartered wine or rum?
For adults' urine at night? Is
this foreground shape—the last
blurred yards of screen to focus
—is it part of a foot? Yes,
it appears a few toes of a naked
foot; and yet it does not move.

We sense that outside two small
kids play unsupervised in fetid
muck with a pig: did that image
fill the screen for three seconds?
Is that why we imagine, *feel*
actually, flies on the open sore
in one boy's neck? We feel
flies on the sore in a boy's neck,
and we wonder why these toes

on this foot do not move. It
will grow no brighter, more vivid,
inside this open doorway. Beyond
it, the dog will slink its cage
of visible ribs across the light;
a large bird with bat-shaped wings
will land upon its own shadow,
aim eyes' glints through the doorway.
Will move a few inches toward it—
toward the audience, toward the foot.
Then something will make its wings
beat the air and fly. We sense
the heat out grows more intense,
and that nothing on screen will
move. Not the ball of rag, not
pebbles, not the foot; not the foot.

Fin de Siècle

There were twenty-three people at the movie theater, and all of them were dead. One of the soldiers, a sergeant, thought it would be amusing to switch on the projector. And now humans moved in two dimensions, in Technicolor; often their faces became huge, occasionally a single mouth and nose, pair of eyes, nearly filling the screen. The face would smile, grimace, speak; reveal doubt or lust, anger, curiosity. . . . And the people it faced were all dead. The soldiers had come without warning. On the screen a man and woman kissed: in the center aisle a hand jerked this long after death, then was still. Blood had stopped moving. The actress spoke the film's title. A fartlike sound rose briefly from where most people in the long, dim room lay slumped across seat-backs and armrests, across one another—some adults on top of children they tried to protect; some mouths open, some heads shattered; two women gripping hands, two old women severed at the waist by weapons on full automatic. Blood everywhere: on flesh and clothes, shoes, hair, rings, candy, spilled drink, aisle slope and dust under seats, on walls; as boot-prints of the soldiers, turning, moving back to the lobby. The man on the screen removed his shirt, his near-smile was twenty-three inches wide. Rawanda or Chiapas, Bosnia . . . Sri Lanka, East Timor, Colombia or Kosovo or Sierra Leone, Chechnya. . . . The man there on screen got his T-shirt entangled with head and arms in trying to remove it, because this film was a comedy. It was a film from the United States; and yet this theater was on another continent—with no automation changing reels. So now as this first reel ended, the screen images vanished with no "The End," no end-credits or music. There was simply raw light, and twenty-three corpses edged by it. Blood on them and seats glowed dimly.

Dancing Friend

In the dream my favorite tap dancer wasn't dead. She was—what, in her seventies?, but still could dance. But still could dance. I am what I dream.

In the world of her movies, there was no Depression if you found your way to Broadway. It was more white than black there, behind marquees in black-and-white for ninety minutes. "You Are My Lucky Star," she danced to, and maybe my parents watched it with me in the womb. Her long thighs sent percussion-beats through calves and shoes to floors—which sent them toward me, grinning at videotape sixty years later. Eleanor Powell.

In my dream she danced, and we rode an elevator together. My mother has ascended and descended into death, and I know where every dream of mine will end. In those movies Eleanor's grin was too wide and firm to believe, like actress' eyebrows then, like that glow from no believable source on their faces in close-ups—but she *grinned* through hips, through shoulders, as she tapped and taps into my eyes and ears and navel. . . .

I love a dead woman, and love women when she does that. I am what I dream, and I dreamed her alive and smiling in a bright orange-red coat. We were friends. The woman I make love with and married gave me a studio photograph of Eleanor smiling

through eyes for my birthday. Dee
had the inscription altered by computer
to my name—signed, “*Your Dancing
Friend.*” No one could spin as fast,
again and again, then stop abruptly
like music, like a dream, like life . . .
as Eleanor Powell. “Lady Be Good,”
moved her, and she was. Became
a lay minister after divorcing Glenn Ford;
but I didn’t dream her good or bad.
She tap-danced like a woman shedding
the “lady” from her legs and torso
and between. She danced like Mother
almost laughed sometimes: like I
breathe in the act of love. Like a glow
I’m not able to believe waits above
where all elevators rise and fall.

Marquees of Buffalo

It's night, and the marquees
of movies in downtown Buffalo
sixty years ago are lighted.
My parents inhale the sight.

I am two years old, asleep
on a grandparents' bed. My
brother moves inside my mother's
womb. She wears her leopard

coat, and my father's snap-brim
hat is as dark as his mustache.
As night above the marquees
of downtown Buffalo. Does

she take and place his hand
where the coat is not buttoned
while I turn in my sleep? . . .
Too late to ever ask her,

and my father might not
remember. So: Mother takes
his hand and places its palm
there upon her snug dress.

And they pause; and he nods,
and they smile. Words above
the glow on the pavement spell
titles of stories. In this one

it's night, and the marquees
of movies in downtown Buffalo
sixty years ago are lighted.
My parents inhale the sight.



MARQUEES OF BUFFALO

by Dennis Trudell

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