

Spring 2017

Faces

Arthur Russell

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Arthur Russell

Faces

He was the brother to whom it fell
to sell his parents' house, traveling down
to Charlottesville all those years, to visit
both, then one of them, then just the house.
In the room where he'd read books as a child,
other than the oxygen tank beside the recliner
that replaced the wing chair he had loved,
little had changed: dried hydrangeas
in vases, brocade drapes; an oil painting
of a clipper ship lunging through the sea.

There were secret faces in the abstract pattern
of the wallpaper. He'd seen them first
when he was seven, like the moon behind
a scrim of trees. He froze, pretended
to ignore, then peeked again, and saw
a whole tribe of faces around the room,
with crayon jaws and heavy eyes,
most obscured, in part, by drapes or chairs;

but the one above the radiator,
like an Easter Island moai, was chief
of the faces, the one with whom he'd parlayed
and made peace, whom he acknowledged
when he passed through the room to elsewhere,
who held his gaze when parents fought, to hold
back tears, accused him when he lied or acted mean
to girls, and understood him well enough
to help him draft, as he turned 18,
the articles of leaving home.

When married, divorced and married again,
with a stepson playing football for State,
he returned to empty and sell the house,
he made his phone calls from that chair
beside the oxygen tank across from the
chief of faces, who had a scarred cheek

Arthur Russell

from a raised seam in the paper after
years of darkening radiator heat.

This is how life found him that November,
talking to his sister in New York, to a broker
from Weichert and to Goodwill for a pickup date,
and gazing at the moai on the walls,
like a sort of class photograph.

The cargo of books he'd read was safe within him,
as he lunged through the sea to a harbor of his own.

Linda Fuchs

Learning to Fly

fuzzy caterpillar amber and black
looks up
tall tree, canopy of green
so far away
climbing might take forever
falling quite a danger
caterpillar wishes to fly
but has no wings

"I think I'll just curl up in this cocoon
and sleep awhile"