

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Carolyne Wright: Three Poems

Carolyne Wright · Monday, February 28th, 2022

Round: At First Sight

Through the window's louvered blinds, you
glide in profile across the room, angled
pitch of your hips almost a dancer's
backlit by a single kitchen bulb.
That's all. Through twilight's translucent blinds

you glide through backlight that falls
four-square on the outside veranda where
I hover, waiting for my door to open,
glancing through the next-door window
where you glide in profile, the room

falling in four-square light onto
the veranda at my feet, next to
the studios' caretaker turning the key
in my door, angle of your dancer's silhouette
flooding my breastbone with sudden fear.

Or is it the single kitchen bulb
that silhouettes you in profile
in your studio, a reversed mirror
image of my own next door
where the caretaker turns the key

so that I can step inside my mirror
image in reverse? Next-door studio
where I will live a year beside you.
Fear's light falls on all fours at my feet,
your profile in silhouette, the blinds

half-open. Have you noticed my
moment's gaze that goes on a year
until I step into my studio
and close the door, your image

profiling mine through louvered blinds?

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Blue Triolets

Bright Moments with the Blues and You

Ellis Marsalis on piano every week at Snug Harbor.
 Art Blakey and The Jazz Messengers at The Village Gate.
 One hot night at The Cookery: Alberta Hunter!
 Ellis playing “Syndrome” at Snug Harbor.
 Miles turning his back on everyone in the Arena.
 Terence Blanchard’s first solo at The Village Gate.
 Ellis ending his set with “Zee Blues” at Snug Harbor.
 Sarah Vaughan’s Só danço samba at The Village Gate.

House of Blue Lights

We were writing a book on the blues together.
 We sat at jazz club tables with the candles lit.
 We studied chord changes and the devil’s measure.
 Such big plans! Our book on the blues together.
 On Desire Street, we heard the devil’s engines backfire.
 Aphrodite shimmered onstage in an indigo light.
 We did our best with that book on the blues together.
 We stood up from that table, blew the candles out.

Blue Room

So much love and trouble in that room
 When Aphrodite shimmied between tables in indigo light
 And the devil’s dance band struck up a bluesy tune.
 So many hopes ran into trouble in that room.
 Miss Mouth, you used to call me, Lighthouse Grin.
 You weren’t trying to change me, not those nights.
 So much love and trouble in that room
 Where Aphrodite shimmied between us in indigo light.

*

What If?

The two white cops hadn’t erupted into
 our front room, empty of everything
 but stepladder, carpenter’s level, and the echo
 of a blow? If they hadn’t vice-
 gripped you by your lapidary
 arms, your face gray as slate

and drained of everything but itself?

What if paint scrapers and sander parts
hadn't bulged from pockets of your coveralls,
wood shavings hadn't curled like blond
indictments in your uncombed hair,
the fruit of sweat and troubled
equity, love's undocumented loans?

If I hadn't stood there, hackles
high in shocked homage to the Beast
Within, and when the cops barked
Whadda we do with him
lady?, what if my anger didn't break
the trance, and I hadn't stumbled
upon my own slow diastolic

measure, a single melodic line
searching itself out in darkness
the way lovers once echo-located each
other? If I hadn't startled
myself back into the room?
If I'd answered, Take
him away.

What if they'd read you
your Miranda rights, then shackled
ankles and wrists shrunken in denim
cuffs, and hauled you in
like a flounder at the telltale end
of its camouflage? Run brain scans
in the squad car, and fingered
your wallet flat for jailbait
while I signed their bad actors'
prompt book with your real name?

What if the metal detectors
had flashed red as they hustled
you past lockdown, and Storyville
had morphed to Angola's anteroom
while I sweet-talked the mortgage lender
into buying back the house? Little
me: born out of reach of the 'Nam
and its National Draft, my brothers

burning their high-stakes numbers.
Little me—those shotgun rooms
in the Crescent City's mephitic spring
my only Combat Zone

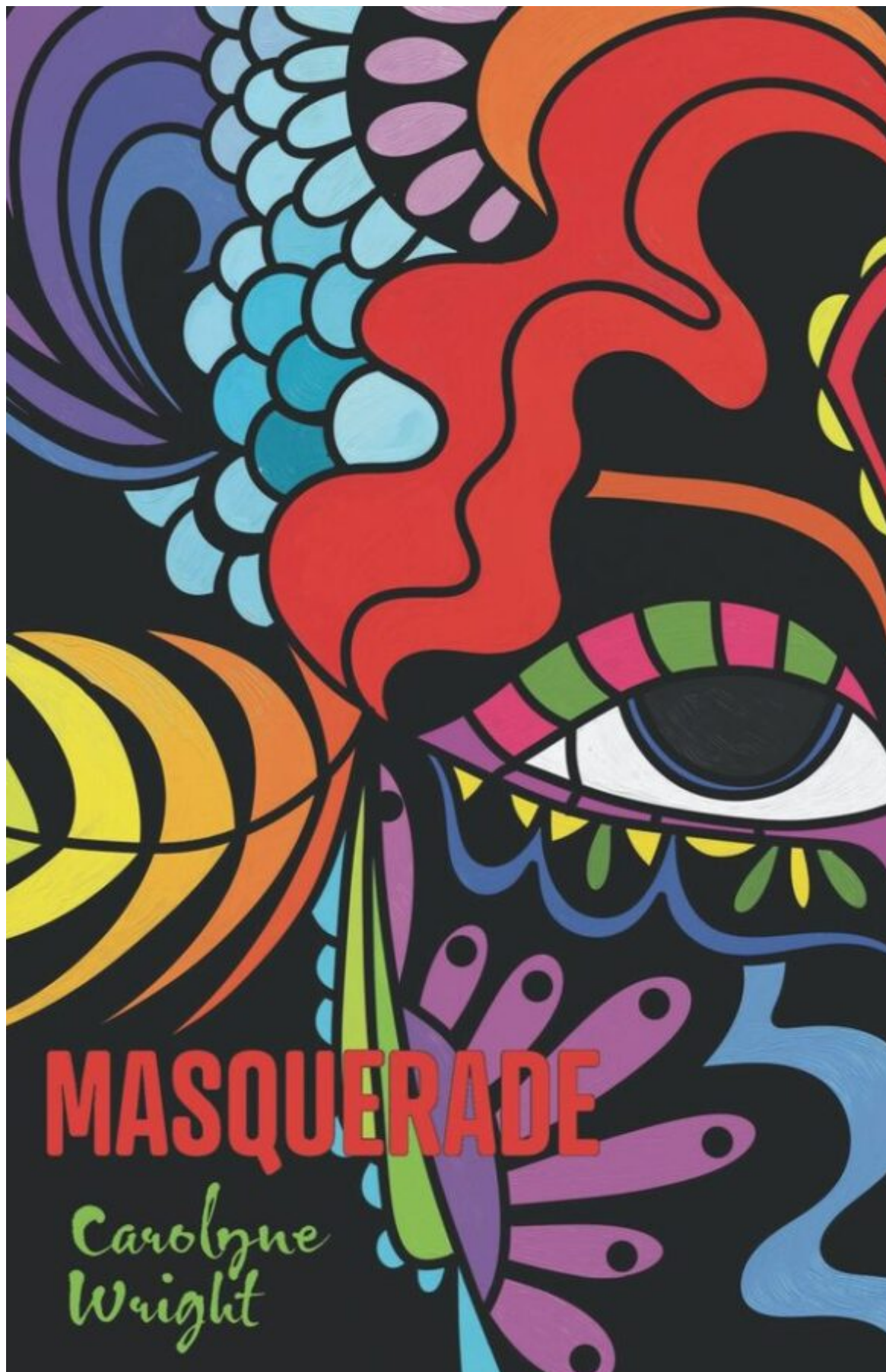
and Finisterre. Little me,
mistress of no debility
but my own. You're on your own,
kid, said the paternal echoes in my head
when I stepped across the color line.

Could I have taken matters into
someone else's hands? Crawled back
from the slammer where
I'd absented you, to pick up
my glasses slapped across the floor
or cry me a river in full view
of the guard towers?

What if I'd settled
your affairs, sealed my own fate
with hell's power of attorney? If
I'd finally sprung you
and we'd faced each other
across the bedroom's bruise-blue
swelter, if I'd held out my hands
with their broken nails, my lucky numbers
extinguished in your eyes?

Then what of your scot-
free metamorphoses, bright
moments in the third-degree
klieg lights? Thanks to me
your rap sheet in the sweet thereafter
shorter than a bebop koan,
all charges against you
zeroed out.

What if? That prestidigitator's
second grasp, the year 2000's non-compliant
heart running its computer simulations.
Where we would be now. Futility's
pushups, absences we talk to
in the mirrors? Or adversaries
in each other's arms, both of us
collecting life sentences like paychecks
on the run?



MASQUERADE by Carolynne Wright

To purchase *MASQUERADE* by Carolynne Wright

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