

# 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?

\*

## 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

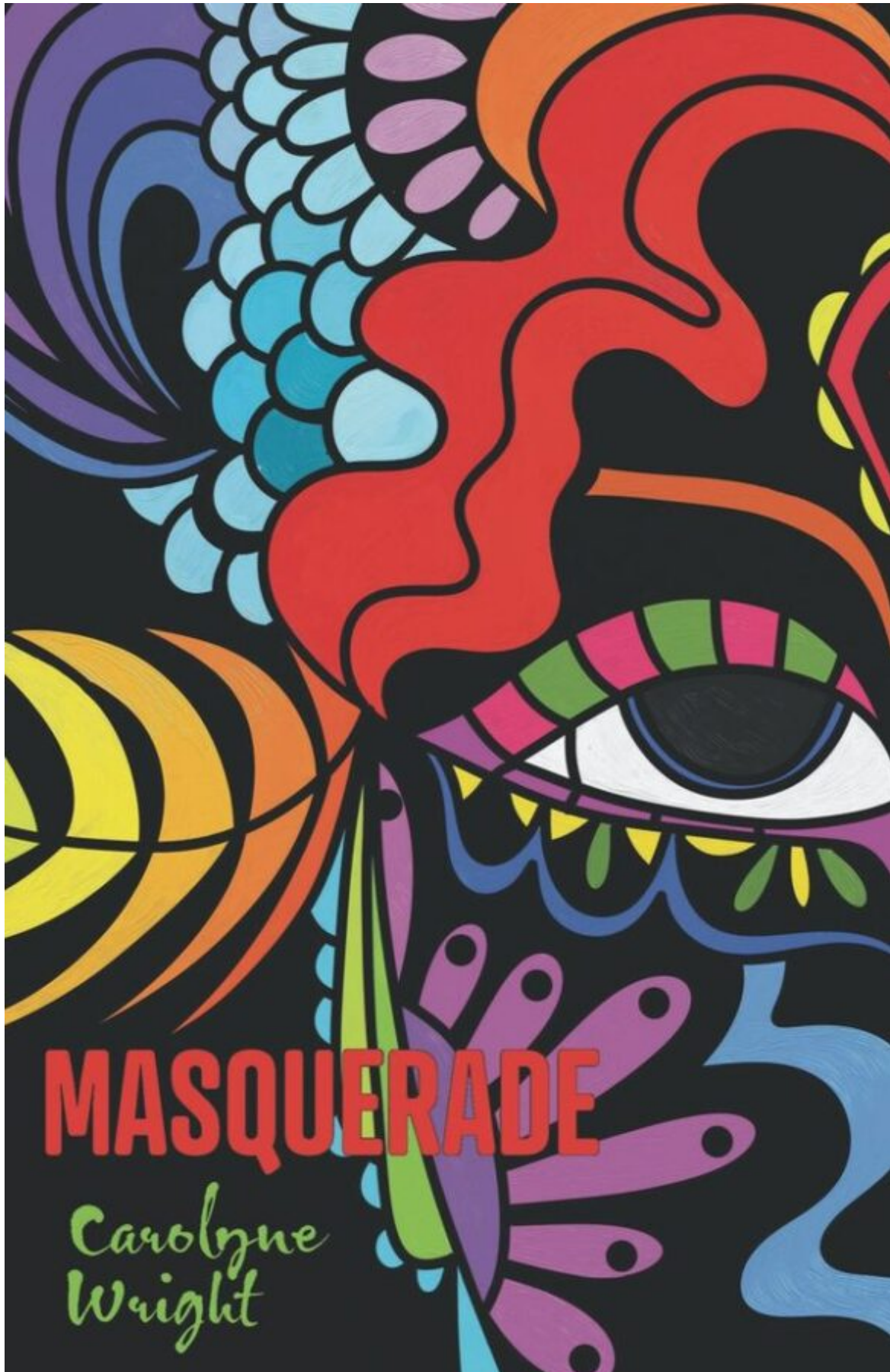
and Finisterre. Little me,  
mistress of no debility  
but my own. You're on your own,  
kid, said the paternal echoes in my head  
when I stepped across the color line.

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

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