

Theo Kessel
Give and Take

IN BED HE LAY LOOKING THROUGH THE DARKNESS at the back of her neck. She asked him softly if he ever felt like he was missing out. Missing out? On other things, on other moments. Maybe we hold each other back. He breathed cautious and wide eyed looking at her tangled hair, hearing her murmur rise detached from her body. He thought about when he brought her home to Seattle and how he'd been most excited to show her the market downtown. He watched her hug his mother and pet his dog in the kitchen that he had eaten breakfast in every morning before school for fifteen years but he was impatient to whisk her down Pike Street, show her down the steep cobbled hill from 2nd Ave and into the throbbing bustle of 1st. They walked by the hollow iron pig statue where, as a kid, he would stand on tiptoe to drop pennies through the slot on its back and hear them thunk into the belly. Past the fish mongers where he would come and watch with a child's reverence the grizzled men, in big rubber boots and slick aprons, hack at the salmon on big white boards. They waded happily through the throng stopping to look at figurines of sockeye and eagles hand carved from pinewood, to scald their tongues on hot cider. He remembered his mother showing him how to blow cool air through pursed lips and watching it hit the steam. Finally they emerged from the warmth of the bustle, out from the protection of the market building whose faded green shingles ran along the horizon. Alone, together, they stood on that bluff above the Puget Sound. The wind white capped the water and the islands seemed to vibrate in a wild expanse. Skyscrapers, like unimaginative stalagmites, erupted in a gray cityscape behind their backs and they stood red nosed in the bluster, dwarfed by the openness in front and the towering behind. That spot was home for him, where the city bled into the sea. Sweaty covers strewn, hot night air, he reached out for her in bed then took his hand back. On that city overlook he had felt the stamp of her presence indelible. They looked at each other, chins down in collars, eyes peeking up, and laughed wordlessly with the cold. He watched the corner of her eyes crinkle as the wind blew them wet. This place was hers now, too. Across the bed he rubbed her shoulder gently in question. He wanted to draw her close into him. His breath caught, his heart pounded. He feared her now. He feared the real estate he had signed over to her so willingly, so happily, so recklessly. A release of responsibility it had been, then, to have another be his keeper. She shuddered her bare shoulder away from him and mumbled about cold hands and tired. Everything he had was in her name. He tried to picture the market, how he went as a kid to see... no, he only saw the crinkle of her eye with the islands behind it and the city glinting in it, all hers now. She couldn't have given it back if she tried. He could hear her laugh mix with the rush of the wind.