

Louise Peterkin

Indiana Jones and the Narrow Escape

How could you ever be the settling-down type?
For once, this is you being totally honest;
you hold my gaze, my head in your hands like a holy relic.
It's not just the lifestyle: the rolling boulder
over a rope bridge rickety mine shaft coaster
of it all. It's the nature of your closest shaves; your nightmares
are of confinement, the walls closing in like autograph hunters,
a ceiling dripping spikes... No matter that it's me
who's got you out of a few jams...
Don't laugh! I may have stepped on the off-switch
accidentally but if I hadn't you'd be *Panini* by now!
If you must know, my therapist says I should dump *you*,
that this relationship has beset me with a most singular anxiety.
Sure, there are things I could do without. Nazis.
The constant threat of kidnap and peril. Being hurled
from one far off locale to another—
Shanghai to a throbbing Moroccan market
without so much as a change of clothes or Imodium.
It's just that each time I think this must be the last, that—
please God—you must be done.
But there's always another treasure, some ancient booty to discover.
Haven't you learned?
Those who have witnessed first-hand the guilt of the uncanny,
who have brought the spoils to their lips, they've all melted to a puddle,
crumbled to dust! You should know by now,
there are things we mustn't meddle in... Oh yes, I forgot,
it isn't the prize. It's the chase. The quest.
Can you not just live in the moment?
Even on a plane I see your mind's eye wandering,
winding a trail through an aerial map in leathery tan,
wishing away the miles, tossing whole continents behind you.
What is it about commitment that scares you—even more than snakes?
Perhaps it's the stillness, sitting in your chair like a knight guarding the Grail,
watching the slipping of time in the drifting motes. I remember

that precarious dangle—the top of the tomb sealed by villains,
Ker-plunked with shafts of light and the floor alive
with serpents. Writhing. Seething. You were terrified.
At the time I thought I was too. But now I look back,
I could have hung like that for eternity,
just you and me between above and below,
holding on to each other, holding on to the rope.

Whale

Three days. Three nights.
Echoing a pious little number
through the art installation of my bones and organs.
Delirious, the honed metre of prayer
gave way to feverish incantation,
the *O Fathers* to cries for your *Mother*.
But after a spell you discovered a casket,
a freight of toys and fine wooden carvings.
You rubbed the figures together in the dark.
One of them, dry enough to spark,
blossomed into flame.
Hunched, trembling, you bubbled
the salt from my water,
trailed a flickering light along
an arc of molluscs, glittering clams
hanging like bats
from my pungent cathedral.
You shucked and you sucked,
then scratched three tally marks on my insides with your knife.
Ingrate. You think at God's command I spat you out?
Don't flatter yourself. I just couldn't stand
your pacing anymore;