

MODEL CITY

ALSO BY DONNA STONECIPHER

POETRY

The Reservoir

Souvenir de Constantinople

The Cosmopolitan

TRANSLATION

Ascent by Ludwig Hohl

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MODEL CITY

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may be found on pages 91-92.

MODEL CITY

“We are waiting for a form of town planning that will give us freedom.”
— Le Corbusier

Q:

What was it like?

Model City [1]

It was like slowly becoming aware one winter that there are new buildings going up all over your city, and then realizing that every single one of them is a hotel.

*

It was like thinking about all those empty rooms at night, all those empty rooms being built to hold an absence, as you lie in your bed at night, unable to sleep.

*

It was like the feeling of falling through the 'o' in 'hotel' as you almost fall asleep in your own bed, the bed that you own, caught at the last minute by ownership, the ownership of your wide-awake self.

*

It was like giving in to your ownership of yourself and going to the window, looking out at all the softly illuminated versions of the word 'hotel' announcing their shifting absences all over the city.

Model City [2]

It was like driving out of your way to visit a model city built next to an iron ore mine, a paragon of city planning, its well-spaced streetlamps casting small cones of light upon the darknesses of human life.

*

It was like arriving in the mostly abandoned model city and being unable to discern the features that make it a model city, for all its features have been incorporated into other cities, because they were so model.

*

It was like driving down the boarded-up main street of the model city with your windows down, and suspecting that you have come to the wrong model city, that the new model city, the right model city, lies far off.

*

It was like standing in a cone of light cast by one of the well-spaced streetlamps of the wrong model city, mined of all its ideas, its boarded-up windows hiding long-forgotten aspirations for a model life.

Model City [3]

It was like passing by a small shop under an overpass one afternoon in an unfamiliar part of a familiar city, and noticing that every single article for sale in it is blue.

*

It was like stopping in one's tracks outside the shop of blue articles and leaning in to gaze closer through the window, over part of which is reflected the blue sky.

*

It was like gazing transfixed at the blue articles, at the sky-blue, royal-blue, forget-me-not blue pencil sets and T-shirts, hairbrushes and egg cups, detaching themselves from the reflection of blue sky.

*

It was like knowing that you would never have passed by the shop in the familiar part of the city, and that familiarity with the blue shop will only make this part of the city even more — perpetually — unfamiliar.

Model City [4]

It was like seeing a fox one day right in the middle of the city — a real fox, not a taxidermied fox, nor a fox logo, nor a foxy person that one might want to sleep with.

*

It was like stopping and staring at the fox, along with all the other people walking down the street, all stopped in their tracks and staring in astonishment at the fox.

*

It was like watching the real, soft, cinnamon-colored fox, the only object moving in the landscape, moving silkily along the overgrown median, darting glances over at the people standing on the sidewalk, staring.

*

It was like the concentrated attention placed on the fox's perplexing appearance deflected by the fox, who keeps moving down the street, headed to a fox den known only to the fox — dark, liquid, solvent.

Model City [5]

It was like riding in a taxi through the streets of a foreign city and finding your gaze drawn to the 'Zu vermieten' signs in the tall windows of the Belle Epoque buildings.

*

It was like imagining renting an apartment in one of the Belle Epoque buildings and thereafter belonging to the foreign city, no longer foreign yourself, looking out your tall windows at foreigners riding by in taxis.

*

It was like thinking about the psychological space of the rental, taxi-like, offering a blank segment of the city in which to unfold your own foreignnesses and domesticities, about the hard beauty of the rental contract.

*

It was like looking at the 'Zu vermieten' signs and thinking about the organizing principle of the window: organizing light and air, inside and outside, volume and surplus, belonging and not belonging, opaque as glass.