

Three Love Poems by a Native

By Maxine Cassin

I. New Orleans

You have to be almost on top of the Mart
to know it's really a crescent,
even though all your life
you have never understood
how parallels become perpendicular
and streets that run for miles without meeting
suddenly encounter each other at the far reaches.

II. Bastille Day

What do we do when the fanfare ends?—
when the last of the musicians
is bathing his feet in the fountain
and the tuba lies abandoned on the grass,
dull and mute.
The band drifts across the square
in pursuit of tones
that rise above the cathedral
and disappear.
The French horn clamors for wine
in a darkened corridor
beside the Presbytere.

III. Jazz Funeral

As they cut the body loose,
he whose footsteps falter
can no longer keep time
to the staccato rain
or the umbrellas' tarantella.
Our pulse is the drumbeat;
the brass band—the sun—
in this city that plans
all its celebrations
under the sky,
taunting Jupiter.

from her book *The Other Side of Sleep*
Portals Press, 1995

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