

# Courting

*Peter Richardson*

## I. Prayer

Bless us as we try to find  
ourselves,  
each other.

## II.

Went to play ball  
on the low hoops on 9th East.  
Got next game with my buddies.  
The team we challenge has a girl  
playing. When we walk on  
the court, she picks me to guard.  
She's tough here, sweating  
and gritting her teeth, playing with the boys,  
not afraid to mix it up.  
I'm a little uncomfortable  
playing defense on her.  
Then I get a pass that leads me past her;  
open path to the basket, I dribble twice and dunk  
the ball weakly. She is behind me,  
and before I can land  
she clips my feet out from under me.  
Trying to twist in air, I break my fall with a hand, land  
on my back. I'm embarrassed and bleeding  
and have no idea what she did  
(snicker? gloat? feel remorse?)  
as I walked off the court applying  
direct pressure to the cut on my hand  
which stayed infected for 2 months  
and left a pink scar.

### III. Rodin's "The Hand of God"

There is no doubt this Hand is flesh,  
a creator of the physical.

Softly curving couple, contorted and still soft  
in their effort to find each other,  
to touch and fulfill, to fit.

The Hand is bigger than their life. Maybe shielding, maybe blessing,  
maybe creating, or it may be that its work is done  
and now it's backing out to go somewhere else.

But for now, it's in the picture, and there is no doubt  
it's physical.

### IV.

4 hours alone with my mind in the car driving back to California  
from Las Vegas. Despair, creating absurd scenarios, hope,  
back to despair.

### V. Prayer

I suppose I'm supposed to be thanking you now.

Right? You've answered my prayers.

I left it in your hands.

Right?

I'm off the hook, away from something unhealthy.

I've suffered

and that is for my own good.

I'm stronger now. I've learned something.

You've got something waiting

in the shadows for me

and I'll be so thankful

when I find out what that is.

Right?

VI.

This woman I see  
every day when I leave my building.  
She walks in  
the door as I walk out.  
Walking smartly, our schedules cross paths.  
We have noticed each other.  
I can close my eyes now  
and see the lines of her legs.  
My mind can take me into a meeting  
with her—stopping her at the door,  
her weighted dark hair, the sound  
of a voice I've never heard.  
But I have no precedent for this.  
I have no name for her.  
At best she is a pronoun,  
maybe a metaphor  
for the distances involved  
in passing by,  
in longing.

VII.

Falling in love with the woman who waited my table at Nunzio's  
who helped me find a Tindersticks CD at Blockbuster  
who sits in the car next to mine  
at the red light.

VIII.

Remedios la Bella is dead.  
So is the young Italian woman  
in *The Godfather*.

She made me angry because of her idyllic  
nature: written by a man who dreamed his appetites.  
Of course that Italian beauty had to be blown up,  
and of course I don't remember  
her name (how could she have one?).

Remedios isn't really dead.  
She is a figure that when stretched  
beyond its bounds  
falls, shrivels, deflates—  
the down after the high  
that's lower than before the high,  
that leaves us with nothing but  
sleep that I rub out of my eyes.

IX.

The trick is going to be falling  
in love with someone  
I actually know who actually knows me.

X.

I am inside a prism  
that reaches out into a point  
straight ahead at my eye level.  
Just outside the transparent parameters  
of this prism is the woman  
I saw from behind at the grocery store,  
dark luxuriant hair, compact body  
and her boyfriend's arm draped  
over her shoulders (he was wearing sunglasses  
which signified an utter lack of style or taste).

When I saw her more clearly, she was  
somehow not so appealing. But  
even if she had lived up to the promise  
of her hair  
I think she would've been outside  
the prism I'm in  
that narrows and narrows  
into a clear-eyed point  
in front of me in the distance.