



The Beautifully Worthless

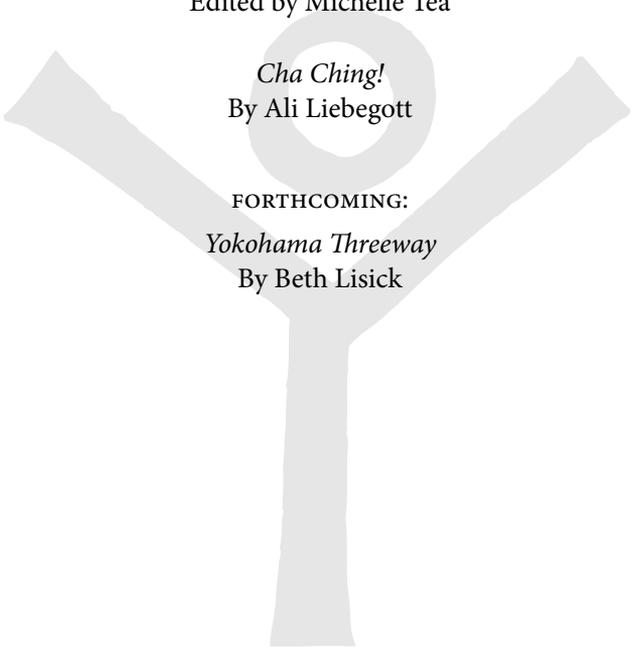
Ali Liebegott

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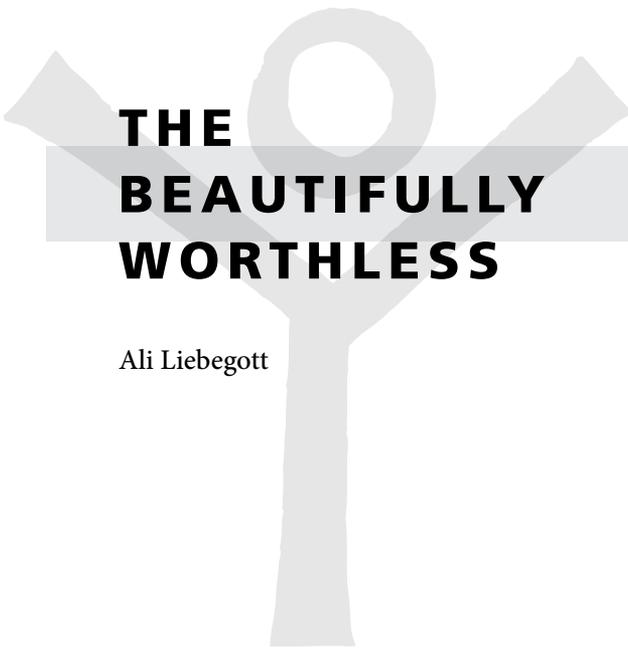


City
Lights



**THE
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CITY LIGHTS SisterSpit

San Francisco

Lights

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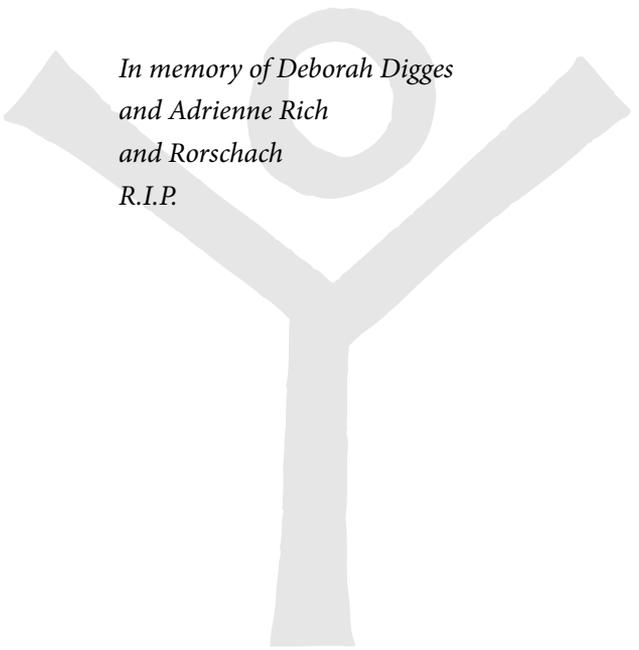
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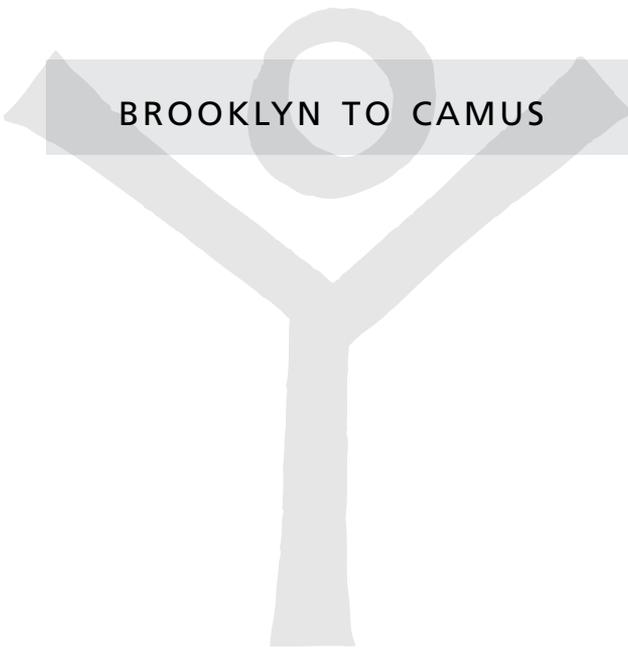
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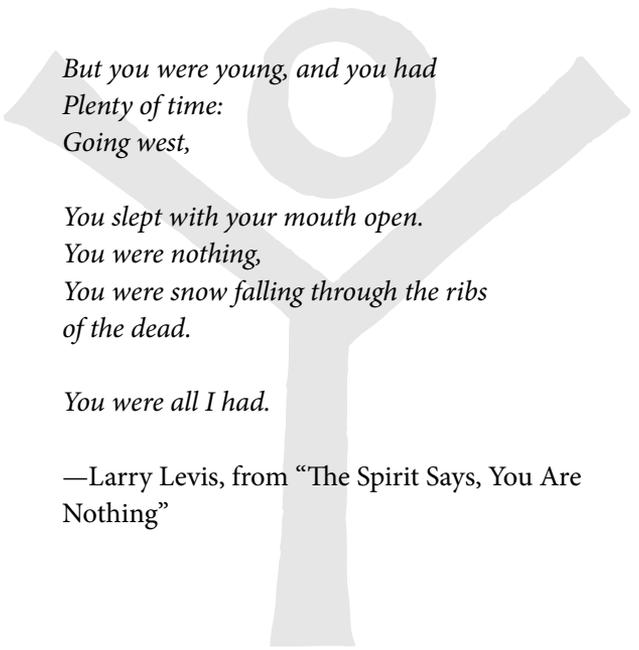
*In memory of Deborah Digges
and Adrienne Rich
and Rorschach
R.I.P.*

City Lights



BROOKLYN TO CAMUS

**City
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*But you were young, and you had
Plenty of time:
Going west,*

*You slept with your mouth open.
You were nothing,
You were snow falling through the ribs
of the dead.*

You were all I had.

—Larry Levis, from “The Spirit Says, You Are
Nothing”

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Sometime in October

When I packed up the old place I didn't want to throw anything out because I wasn't sure where my birth certificate was and I didn't have time to look for it—so I dumped everything into boxes, trash bags and pillowcases. The matchbooks and pennies came from shaking the top drawer of a kitchen cabinet into a box. When I lived in Yonkers and was the brokest I've ever been in my life, those pennies saved me a couple times—bought me coffee at 7-11, and once I didn't have enough pennies on my lunch break from the pet supply store to get a kid's burger at McDonald's, so I hid in the warehouse behind the stacks of kitty litter and ate the staff donuts. By the third jelly donut my head was spinning. The rest of my boxes were filled with eighty percent trash—dirty Q-tips and coffee-stained napkins. There were matchbooks from bars I had gone to five years and 3,000 miles ago. Everything I own could fit in the back of a pickup truck, but three out of ten boxes are filled with matchbooks and dirty Q-tips. I want things to be different in this apartment, but I don't know where to begin. So for now, I dumped all the matchbooks and pennies in a duffel bag and put it under the bed.

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Still October, Still Sad

I can't stop dwelling on the fact that I moved a box filled with matchbooks and pennies. I wrote down on a slip of paper, "matchbooks, pennies" and hung it on the wall so I wouldn't forget that I packed up the trash in my life and moved it with me to a new apartment. I could knit a sweater out of all the dog hair on the floor. Once my nonsmoking art teacher told me one of her students painted the most beautiful ashtray. She said, "Now someone who can make an ashtray look beautiful is a talented artist."

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One Year Later

I had to take everything off my walls, all the newspaper clippings about people being bitten to death by rats and cures for gay dogs. I pulled down the paper that said, “matchbooks, pennies” too. I’ll do anything to stop being depressed. I could be like those people who build bombs out of horseshit and plastic pipes. The women in jail told me how they light their cigarettes off the spark from rubbing a Brillo pad on a battery. And when a child gets trapped under a car, there’s always a frail mother powered by frantic adrenaline who manages to lift the car off the ground with her bare hands. People fight diseases every day. Who gets to live a happy life, who gets born with a brain that works, it’s so random, right? You’re either destined to be a heroin addict or an accountant—you can’t predict or prepare for life.

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I wish somewhere buried under feet and feet of dirt
answers for the unanswerable slept safe and unharmed
just as the heart of the penny dangles, drunk and teeming
unnoticed to most, inside the copper-green edges of its
decomposition.

And I wish one night I could dream the name of this town
where dirt shrines hope for the desperate,
where the pine-needed ground shifts and fidgets—
this place that has waited years for me to plunge
the straightedge of a spade into its dirt belly
and birth the gifts it has kept so long.

And the gifts, if ever unearthed, and I could stand before them
their sight would hang my hand midair over my mouth
before I would be brave enough to pick the first one up—
a tiny glass bottle filled with oil, that when dropped
one drop at a time, could turn the insignificant into significant,
change the blank inside of a matchbook
into the most sacred diary, and a dirty penny
into a tool to count the dead.

If I did dream the name of a town that could save my life
then the next morning I'd wake high on adrenaline,
run to the drawer in the kitchen where the maps are kept—
and stand stiff in front of the atlas when I realized
the name of the town I dreamt was before me in the index.

Afraid of a dream that seemed more like a prophecy,
I'd lower myself slowly, inch by inch, down
onto the couch covered in dog hair, and sit there stunned
until the cigarette in my hand burned to my knuckles.

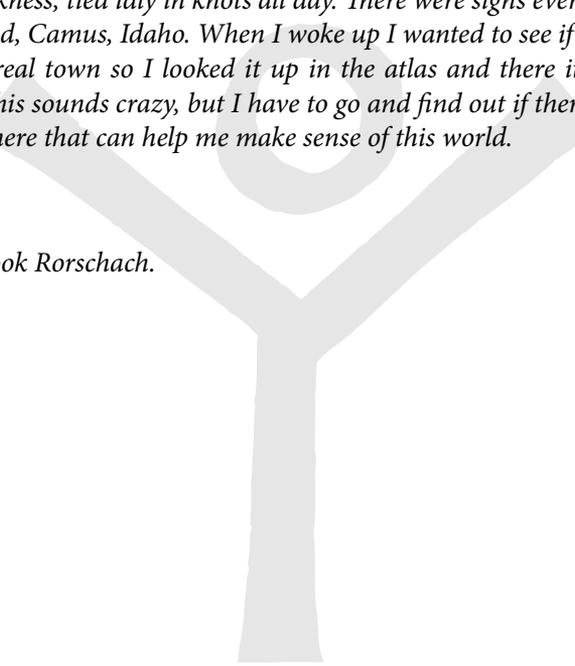
Only then would I rise to pack a small bag of belongings, snap
the light shut in the living room and rush my dog, Rorschach
out of the house and into the truck. I would tell no one
where I was going in case it proved a bust, only leaving a short
note on the kitchen table for my girlfriend that said,

Dear Lamby,

Last night I dreamt of a place where sadness could be ripped in half, and sickness, tied idly in knots all day. There were signs everywhere that said, Camus, Idaho. When I woke up I wanted to see if Camus was a real town so I looked it up in the atlas and there it was. I know this sounds crazy, but I have to go and find out if there's anything there that can help me make sense of this world.

xoxox

P.S. I took Rorschach.



City Lights

It's not just that I dreamt the name of a place

that housed books filled with lost equations
to explain the mundane and the heinous,
but it was the actual way I flew through space
that urged me to believe in the town I went to that night.

It wasn't the normal kind of dream flying
where, in the middle of panic and heart-pounding retreat,
I remember I can fly, and get a running start and do it—
no, I flew too fast to be alive, awake or dreaming,
and I was scared I'd been taken, angel hands under each
of my arms, and lifted off somewhere I never believed in.

If it was true that I died that night when I fell asleep
then death felt good, like I was in a city
where no one walked or took the subway.
Instead we all took armstrokes the lengths of our bodies
and pushed the velvet edges of water down
from our heads to our hips. We were all dead, swimming
underwater, euphoric and silent in an afterlife public city pool.

While I swam through space, me and everyone around me
moved with the undeniable giddiness of being high or about to
come.

It was that feeling of how your body gets abducted inch by inch
nerve by nerve, until finally after burning and want
and want— the white sheet gets thrown over your brain,
like it's a chair in a mansion, during the months no one's there.

Regardless, it was the good kind of dead—like if a lucky few
stumbled upon a cave in the middle of their rainy, jobless city,
but not just the luck of finding the cave, but the word
that doesn't exist for what goes beyond luck,
when around one wet and dripping cave corner
their feet stop short, and they see a blue-green pool
cupped in cave-hands, and held out to them.

Dear Lamby,

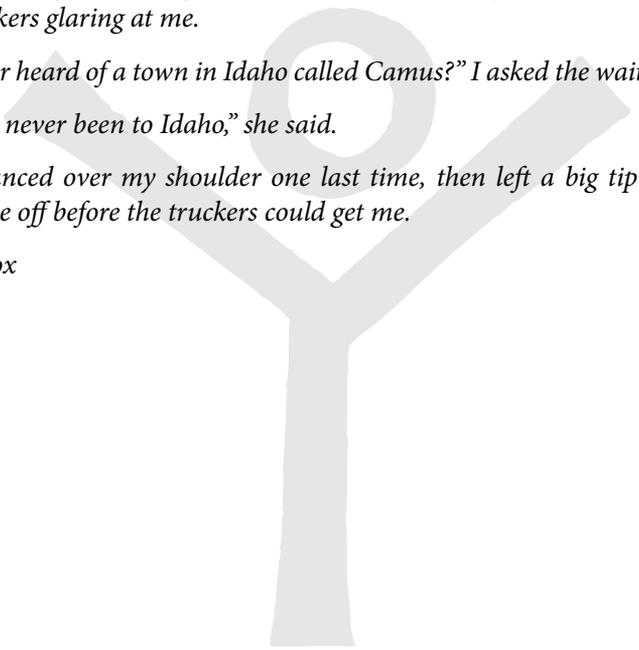
Saw this cute diner so I pulled over for a bite to eat. Inside, I had this feeling I was being watched. When I turned my head I saw these truckers glaring at me.

“Ever heard of a town in Idaho called Camus?” I asked the waitress.

“I’ve never been to Idaho,” she said.

I glanced over my shoulder one last time, then left a big tip and drove off before the truckers could get me.

xoxox



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The next night, the chest-high bricks of a well
sat across a field from me, I walked over, looked down
and dropped parts of myself, knowing I would drink
them again someday—what I'm saying is,
I wrapped myself in maple leaves, tossed myself
toward cleaner water and broke my own surface.

It's not always like this, the dreams—strange and poetic
holy and calm. Last night it was a bar where sleazy men pushed
hundred-dollar bills down my dress—everyone laughed,
let's leave, I kept saying,

but my girlfriend wanted to stay,
so in my frustration, I broke a pint glass
on the bar and swung the jagged edge at my wrist,
the blood paused a moment before it spilled out the white gash,
and like always, before I swing a broken glass at my arm,

there's a moment where I hesitate,
not really wanting to.

So you can understand a little better,
how a disgruntled waitress might pack her dog
and few belongings and head for a town
she dreamed the name of, searching for something to break
the spell of monotonous, morbid night speak.

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