The Snake

For a long while
de he could not manage
to bring himself
    upward
to the surface
of the world

the world of fragrance
    temptation
    and torture
the place where the great snakes
lay coiled in waiting

Steve: Sure, I had stuff, lots of it! Sure! A house, wife and kids, and all kinds of things I brought to the house that made noises and broke down. Sure! Lots of stuff!

Doug: What happened to it all?

Steve: What happened? I threw it away, that’s what happened! What do I need that crap for? I don’t need crap!

Doug: What do you need?

Steve: What kind of question is that? What do you need? You need something, go out and get it. That’s what they told me. I got it alright. Lots of crap, is what I got. Why bother to name it. Shut up! What the hell do you need?!

Doug: I don’t need a fuckin’ thing!

Steve: Well good.

Doug: But don’t tell me to shut up.

Steve: Then don’t ask me.

A snake wound itself around him then
squeezing his chest
into coils of pain
fear came because
he had been at peace
briefly
and it had cheated him
and ebbed away

A man went by
a cripple with a crutch
that kept thump-thumping
as he went
It was bothering him
the noise
and grated on his spine
He had been forced to resign

**Steve:** They didn’t “let you go”. You were fired! They fired your ass!

**Doug:** So?

**Steve:** So don’t make it pretty. Don’t fancy it up. They kicked your fucking ass right down the fucking drain!

**Doug:** Yeah?

**Steve:** Yeah!

*It was true of course, but he didn’t have to say it that way....*

*It was a tough place
tough and dark
rough on all the corners
Comfort was no where to be found
It was a place under ground

*The sounds were insane
they were loud
and falling everywhere
like a variety*
of cascading waters
where nothing matters
    like broken platters

“Maybe it was once
a small beautifully shapen thing....”
He said this to himself
because his friend
    had gone off
and he was satisfied
to keep his own company
    and not listen
to the snakes
“Maybe a carved figure
    of some sort
Painted maybe
Anyway
delicate
sure
you can glue it together
    but it’s in pieces now”

The man held his hands
palms up
open
in a gesture of emptiness
    and futility

“Broken pieces.
A beautiful thing like that.
broken. Why, I’m askin’? Why?”

He decides that he must stand up and tries to use the brick wall for support,
and then stumbles forward propelled by the unsteadiness of his legs.
“What am I doin’? What’s goin’ on?!

and reaches for the wall
so he does not fall
A pigeon lands next to him
It flutters closer
and pecks
at the man’s shoe laces
before flying away
The man gestures flamboyantly
with his hand
as if painting
with a brush
“Go away bird”
    he says
“Get the fuck lost”

He sits down again, hard on the stone pavement, and then falls over onto his side. There is a newspaper with the headline and date spinning around, like in an old B movie. And then a calendar with the pages of the month peeling off, and floating away.

Cut to: Interior of a café’. He sits at a table over his ham and eggs, coffee, and shot of rum. He is well dressed, and younger looking.

A waitress approaches.

Doris: (Refills his coffee) How’s it goin’, Doug?

Doug: Doin’ fine. Doin’ just fine. How’s yourself, Doris?

(He twists the shot around with the palm of his hand.)

Doris: You gonna drink that, Doug?

Doug: Nah. It’s my torture, Doris. It keeps me straight.

(He reaches for the coffee instead, and continues with the ham and eggs.)

There is a phone call from his mother:

“Douglas, where are you? Douglas, where are you? Douglas, where are you….Douglas!”
There is a slam across the soles of his feet, and at the base of his spine.

“Douglas, the police are here. They want to know why you are not responding. Where are you, Douglas? Douglas!”

The police are hitting him
   with their clubs
   and telling him
      to move along
but he can’t move
   and is losing his hold again
on the surface of the world

He hears
   the steam hissing
sound of the snake
and can feel
its icy scales
crawl
all over his face
   and legs
   and back
There is icy laughter
that must be coming
from the snake
   his aching legs
   and pain
   at the base of his spine

Steve: You didn’t resign. You didn’t resign, my friend, you were fired!! They fired your ass!

The phone is ringing.

“Hello? Douglas!” his mother says. “Your father wants to know why you don’t pay attention. Your father wants to know why, Douglas. Why? Sit up and pay attention…."

and after awhile
it was just the hissing
    sound
    of the snake
the one
with the colored scales
that were like
sequins
    on the hem
    of a ladies dress
Some of them were mirrors
    reflecting the world
and some were other worlds
that he could not
    get into

The steam comes
now
like colored mist
as if the neon is oozing
    from the window’s signs....

Steve: You know. Signs! Made of glass and neon. You know, “Cold Beer” or “Eat at Joes” Signs, for God’s sake! What are you deaf? What the fuck’s the matter with you?! What are you fucking doing here, anyway?

What if
    the colored steam
    mingles with music
Moroccan flutes and drums
and then
a magic carpet
unfurls before him
beautiful
a beautiful thing
in colors and tassels
that carries him
    aloft
above the world
and then
the carpet turns into
Doug: I know! I know all that. I’ve been there, Doris.

Doris: Where have you been, Doug?

Doug: I don’t know. All over. A million places.

Doris: Gosh. I’d love to travel.

Doug: Not me. I’m stayin’ put. You can run, Doris, but you can’t hide.

Doris puts her hand on her hip.
“You can say that again”
and inclines her head with a nod
They turn in unison

to glance out the window
An ambulance passes by
splashing the puddles of water
from the glaring street light

reflection

and disappears

into the night

The phone rings again.

“Hello, Douglas, it’s your mother. Your father says you can use the car. Isn’t that great? Yes. Like in that story by Hemingway, about the young man. What was his name? Krebs. Douglas? Douglas! Are you there? Are you listening?”

They have gotton him to his feet, but the pain is too much, and he falls again. The ambulance arrives. He wants to reach for something, but has forgotten what.

Doris: You gonna drink that shot, Doug?
The hissing of the snake begins as the ambulance drives off across the city streets, and into the night.