

THE SURVEY

for Nell del Giudice

The survey is in, let's add up all the numbers.
Now that we know how everyone feels we can
make a fresh start. Sometimes there's a big contrast
between old & new. You react to something
in the past by going to the opposite extreme. You
make up for your mistakes by going in another
direction. It could be that the new is the same
as the old, but at least for a while it "seems" different.
Soon enough the new becomes the old and the guy
in the outdoor restaurant under the palm trees
with his back to the ocean is singing a song by the
Eagles, while the waitress brings us a plate of
mahi mahi and some girls in hula skirts begin dancing
on a stage and someone throws a tomahawk into
the side of my head which is why I look strange,
talk strange, and are having what's known in some
circles as a bad hair day, but which for me is just
business as usual.

THE DESERTED CITY

Here's the door of the church. How much does it cost to get in? There's the priest at the door with a hat in his hand. Here's the doctor with a clipboard, listening to your dreams. Yes, you can pay on a sliding scale, & no, you can't kiss me on the lips when you say goodbye. You can't even kiss me on the cheeks like they do in Paris. Strangers, fucking strangers, they kiss everybody on the street. Sex between doctors & patients is forbidden, or so they think. There's a toll if you want to get in, just put your money in the slot. The correct change, please, there's no money back guarantee. Follow the directions on the side of the package & you can't go wrong. They give you the wrong number when no one's listening. It's not enough money to take anyone to court. Call my bluff if you don't believe me.

We've been in the deserted city too long.

I dipped my cup in a watering hole & fell on my face.

He was frightened of seeing the elephant's penis.

Place an order at the counter & hope for the best.

INCUNABULA

Stay in one place long enough & everyone begins to look like someone else. On the other hand, some people don't need a reason to get out of bed. Absence is like presence, better is worse. You better get up early if you expect to learn everything. He barked like a dog & drank water from a dish. The cows are frozen on a distant hillside. Lights at night beckon, we could be anywhere. I remember when we used to go to the Orchidia Bar, on the corner of 9th Street & 2nd Avenue, after the Wednesday night readings. The 2nd Avenue Deli is now the Chase Manhattan Bank. You better keep your mouth shut if you know what's good for you. The old growth pines at its own expense. The two people kissing on the shade, just a mirage.

THE MILK WAS SOUR

The milk was sour, but I drank it anyway

You must check the expiration date on the container
before you buy it

I spilled the container of sour milk into the sink

The strawberries are moldy, I only bought them
yesterday

It's pointless to ruin your life over love for another
person

You can always go back to the store & get a refund

I ran out into the rain & went to the store
for a container of milk

It's not necessary to wear clothing when you go
to the store

No one in the store notices whether you're wearing
clothing or not

For some animals the ritual pattern of courtship
is a dance of death

Wet streets, the entrance to the bridge, the windows
of stores selling diamonds

Go back to where you started & repeat everything
you said

Once I stood where Mao stood & stared down at
Tianeman Square

And once the wind blew me backwards off the Great Wall

Lewis Warsh