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Four Parallel Lines

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FOUR PARALLEL LINES

Rose Window

I could live alone in a studio, practicing Debussy's *Engulfed Cathedral* on the piano after my morning walk to the bakery. The sound of those bells would be nothing like the Byzantine chimes of the Greek Orthodox Church down the street. Those people scare me with their love of eggs! I have seen them solemnly carry loaves of Easter bread into the vestibule and never emerge. The sound would be nothing like the clang of the streetcar cord as a passenger yanks to get out. It is a sound you will hear only in those impossible chords, or perhaps if you live in the Paris catacombs and listen to the light of a rose window as it resounds through ten feet of stone.

Pop and Hiss

I could have died years ago, and now my wife would be married to a master chef who can debone a chicken while leaving the flesh intact. They would have a cactus garden full of cholla and one saguaro. They would have repainted the house the same color, but their Christmas tree would be larger than ours, almost piercing the ceiling, with a thousand white bulbs flashing in the living room next to the cabinet, which would contain different CDs, Madonna and Sting. They would have to shout to be heard over the hiss and pop of bacon on the griddle (just enough to add a bit of flavor), and it would only deepen their love.

The First Mirror

I could live in the desert, moving from water to water. For a man to look into his own eyes for the first time—the creation of fire was nothing to that. To lower his face to the surface and drink of the sun and the date palm—surely in the desert one would think of that—the silver, feathery leaves. The disturbance as a coin, or a handful of seeds, was dropped into the pool. Not knowing what would emerge, whether it would come from above or below. At noon he watched a woman stretch to break off a palm to fan herself, and knew he wanted her for his wife, but it was when he saw her image in the water cleaving the branch from the tree that he first knew love.

Taking Note

I could be an owl on the roof of a barn. The dark landscape would be a rippling jewel with a thousand facets, and I would monitor each one with the power of consciousness unhindered by self-consciousness. It would be as if you could hear the conversation of children on a sandlot across the city, how two of them plot to grab the barrette from the sleek hair of the third and hide it in a drainpipe, or you could see the couple across the plaza through a gap in their blinds as he takes off his watch, laying it carefully next to the lamp like a sacred vestment, she cocks her head to one side, then the other, removing her earrings, and you see that both of them are too gentle and ruthless to say a word. No one ever said that God weeps when a sparrow falls, only that He takes note.