

The House

They are building a house
half a block down
and I sit up here
with the shades down
listening to the sounds,
the hammers pounding in nails,
thack thack thack thack,
and then I hear birds,
and thack thack thack,
and I go to bed,
I pull the covers to my throat;
they have been building this house
for a month, and soon it will have
its people...sleeping, eating,
loving, moving around,
but somehow
now
it is not right,
there seems a madness,
men walk on top with nails
in their mouths
and I read about Castro and Cuba,
and at night I walk by
and the ribs of the house show
and inside I can see cats walking
the way cats walk,
and then a boy rides by on a bicycle
and still the house is not done
and in the morning the men
will be back

Doc B

Tom Waits, "What's He Building?", *Mule Variations* (1999)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JaLjwSpZ6Cs>

walking around on the house
with their hammers,
and it seems people should not build houses
anymore,
it seems people should not get married
anymore,
it seems people should stop working
and sit in small rooms
on 2nd floors
under electric lights without shades;
it seems there is a lot to forget
and a lot not to do,
and in drugstores, markets, bars,
the people are tired, they do not want
to move, and I stand there at night
and look through this house and the
house does not want to be built;
through its sides I can see the purple hills
and the first lights of evening,
and it is cold
and I button my coat
and I stand there looking through the house
and the cats stop and look at me
until I am embarrassed
and move North up the sidewalk
where I will buy
cigarettes and beer
and return to my room.

Doc A

Charles Bukowski
Burning in Water, Drowning in Flame: Selected Poems 1955-1973

And so it happened that on many nights that winter, in the cold, large, nearly empty room, I would be awake, often wide awake from the strong coffee we'd drunk. And often I would walk the floor from window to window, looking out into the night, down to the vacant street or up into the ghostly sky that burned with the shimmery luminance of the city's buildings, buildings I couldn't even see. Often I had a blanket or sometimes two around my shoulders, and I wore the coarse heavy socks I'd kept from when I was a boy.

It was on such a cold night that—through the windows at the back of the flat, windows giving first onto an alley below, then farther across a space where a wire factory had been demolished, providing a view of buildings on the street parallel to ours—I saw, inside a long, yellow-lit apartment, the figure of a woman slowly undressing, from all appearances oblivious to the world outside the window glass.

Because of the distance, I could not see her well or at all clearly, could only see that she was small in stature and seemingly thin, with close-cropped dark hair—a petite woman in every sense. The yellow light in the room where she was seemed to blaze and made her skin bronze and shiny, and her movements, seen through the windows, appeared stylized and slightly unreal, like the movements of a silhouette or in an old motion picture.

I, though, alone in the frigid dark, wrapped in blankets that covered my head like a shawl, with my wife sleeping, oblivious, a few paces away—I was rapt by this sight. At first I moved close to the window glass, close enough to feel the cold on my cheeks. But then, sensing I might be noticed even at that distance, I slipped back into the room. Eventually I went to the corner and clicked off the small lamp my wife kept beside our bed, so that I was totally hidden in the dark. And after another few minutes I went to a drawer and found the pair of silver opera glasses which the theater director had left, and took them near the window and watched the woman across the space of darkness from my own space of darkness.

I don't know all that I thought. Undoubtedly I was aroused. Undoubtedly I was thrilled by the secrecy of watching out of the dark. Undoubtedly I loved the very illicitness of it, of my wife sleeping nearby and knowing nothing of what I was doing. It is also possible I even liked the cold as it surrounded me, as complete as the night itself, may even have felt that the sight of the woman—whom I took to be young and lacking caution or discretion—held me somehow, insulated me and made the world stop and be perfectly expressible as two poles connected by my line of vision. I am sure now that all of this had to do with my impending failures.

Nothing more happened. Though in the nights to come I stayed awake to watch the woman, letting my wife go off to sleep in her fatigue. Each night, and for a week following, the woman would appear at her window and slowly disrobe in her room (a room I never tried to imagine, although on the wall behind her was what looked like a drawing of a springing deer). Once her clothes were shed away, exposing her bony shoulders and small breasts and thin legs and rib cage and modest, rounded stomach, the woman would for a while cast about the room in the bronze light, window to window, enacting what seemed to me a kind of languid, ritual dance or a pattern of

possibly theatrical movements, rising and bowing and extending her arms, arching her neck, while making her hands perform graceful lilted gestures I didn't understand and did not try to, taken as I was by her nakedness and by the sight on occasion of the dark swatch of hair between her legs. It was all arousal and secrecy and illicitness and really nothing else.

This I did for a week, as I said, and then I stopped. Simply one night, draped again in blankets, I went to the window with my opera glasses, saw the lights on across the vacant space. For a while I saw no one. And then for no particular reason I turned and got into bed with my wife, warm and smelling of brandy and sweat and sleep under her blankets, and went to sleep myself, never thinking to look through the window again.

Doc C

Richard Ford, "Privacy", *A Multitude of Sins*, 2001