**Mary Gaitskill**

**MIRRORBALL**

He took her soul—though, being a secular-minded person, he didn’t think of it that way. He didn’t take the whole thing; that would not have been possible. But he got such a significant piece that it felt as if her entire soul were gone. As soon as he had it, he not only forgot that he’d taken it; he forgot he’d ever known about it. This was not the first time, either.

He was a musician, well regarded in his hometown and little known anywhere else. This fact sometimes gnawed at him and yet was sometimes a secret relief; he had seen musicians get sucked up by fame and it was like watching a frog get stuffed into a bottle, staring out with its face, its splayed legs, its private beating throat distorted and revealed against the glass. Fame, of course, was bigger and more fun than a bottle, but still, once you were behind the glass and blown up huge for all to see, there you were. It would suddenly be harder to sit and drink in the anonymous little haunts where songs were still alive and moving in the murky darkness, where a girl might still look at him and wonder who he was. And he might wonder about her.

It was at one of these places that he met her. She was drinking with a friend of a friend. She was slim and elfin, with dark hair, long fingers, and tapered fingernails. She held her drink as if she held a bit of liquid flame. She smiled at him; he smiled back. The friend of a friend started talking about a movie she had seen, a complicated fantasy in which a hero and heroine fall into a hidden world running parallel to ours, and discover that the two worlds are on a collision course. The elfin girl punched him lightly on the hip. “We should go,” she said. There was a loud crash behind the bar. They both started and turned to look. They turned back to face each other at the same time.

They went to the movie that weekend and then to a bar afterward.

It must be said: She should not have shown him her soul. She flashed it again and again, as if it were a bauble meant to entice him, or a hand mirror flashing signals from a dark and lonely place. Everybody knows about dark and lonely places, he thought. But why was she sending these signals without knowing who he was and if he cared to read them? Still, her constant flashing was dramatic and attractive. Images from the movie they had just seen hovered about her. A woman in black strode through the city with a gun; a woman in white fell on her knees before a killer. The camera lingered on her terrified face; the hero pounded on the door.
The girl’s eyes flashed like her bright, nervous soul.

“Do you know that vintage-record store on Sanchez and Eighteenth?” he asked.

She shook her head and smiled.

“It’s got a mirror ball in the window. It flashes over the whole street at night. Your eyes remind me of it.”

She looked down, her small lips in a sweet pinch. Her soul was very visible, and right then, he didn’t care why; it seemed natural and lovely. He embraced her, and for a moment he felt that holding her was like holding a bit of liquid flame.

“I’ll show it to you,” he said. “It’s right around the corner from me.”

She looked up. “Yeah, right,” she said, and the sweet pinch became a pungent smirk. She took her glass and swallowed the rest of her drink with a tart little face. He felt annoyed, but he walked her home anyway.

It was a cold fall night with a feeling of secret pockets and moving shadows. They walked past a park full of human shadows, drunks, crackheads, and vagrant kids, half-visible and half-audible in the dark. Cars rolled through pools of street light; blurred faces and pale hands appeared and vanished, on their way somewhere else. She put her cold little hand in his pocket, taking the tips of his fingers in her grip, and he felt as if he were in a fairy tale where the hero is led into the forest by an enchanted ball of light. She looked up at him and said something, and once again her soul flashed in her eyes.

**Paul Callus**

**THE POET WHO NEVER WAS**

I thought I was a poet who had a pen of gold

With clear access to writing that was mature and bold.

I thought I could go roaming beside the foaming sea

And watch the seagulls gliding to give a show for free.

I thought I was a poet who walked along the beach

In awe I stood and wondered, my hand stretched out to reach

The silver thread dividing the water from the sky

And traced Selena’s features as slowly she went by.

I thought I was a poet who knew what joy could be

On hearing water roaring cascading down with glee.

I looked for inspiration, experienced utmost thrill

When climbing down the valley or up the verdant hill.

I thought I was a poet in charge of heat and cold

But lost my true emotions when I was duped and told

I had to reach perfection to please my heart and mind

By means of imitation. My soul I left behind.

I thought I was a poet who had a pen of gold

But now all of a sudden I’m weary, frail and old.

I thought I was a poet. My pen is of no use.

With teary eyes I whisper to my dejected muse.