

## THE CHASTE STRANGER

All the sexually active people in Westport look so clean and certain, I wonder if they're dead. Their lives are tennis without end, the avocado-green Mercedes waiting calm as you please. Perhaps it is my brain that is unplugged, and these shadow-people don't know how to drink martinis anymore. They are suddenly and mysteriously not in the least interested in fornicating with strangers. Well, there are a lot of unanswered questions here, and certainly no dinner invitations where a fella could probe Buffy's inner-mush, a really complicated adventure, in a 1930ish train station, outlandish bouquets, a poisonous insect found burrowing its way through the walls of the special restaurant and into one of her perfect nostrils—she was reading *Meetings with Remarkable Men*, needing succor, dreaming of a village near Bosnia, when a clattering of carts broke her thoughts—“Those billy goats and piglets, they are all so ephemeral ...” But now, in Westport Connecticut, a boy, a young man really, looking as if he had just come through a carwash, and dressed for the kind of success that made her girlfriends froth and lather, can be overheard speaking to no one in particular: “That *Paris Review* crowd, I couldn't tell if they were bright or just overbred.” Whereupon Buffy swings into action, pinning him to the floor: “I will unglue your very being from this

planet, if ever ...” He could appreciate  
her sincerity, not to mention her spiffy togs.  
Didymus the Blind has put three dollars  
on Total Departure, and I am tired of pumping  
my own gas. I’m Lewis your aluminum man,  
and we are whirling in a spangled frenzy toward  
a riddle and a doom—here’s looking up

your old address.

*I heard Jim read to an overflowing crowd in a lecture hall at Smith College In the late  
80s. He always had perfect timing, but it was hard that afternoon to hear over the  
laughter and spontaneous outcries. Jim had to pause longer and longer after each  
line. I still remember the sound in the room—the shock, the near delirium—when Jim  
delivered this poem.*

- Alexandra Kennedy