

PETER BALAKIAN

THREE DECADES

Pol Pot called 1975 the year zero of his reign—
the year he would purify his enemies—

the year we followed Gerald Ford
into the U-haul of the GOP

that year I dreamed of green wind & auroras & falling orchids
& the dissolution of OPEC

as it floated off the black wave of the Persian Gulf.

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On a terrace on Greene St.
in July '75 I could see the pylons of the World Trade towers
through the cracks of buildings

half-drunk on a chaise . . . looking up at the sky of smog and milky way
the pin pricks of light filtering down on the chiasmic streets—

& it floated down—*cyclonic zero of the word*—
a bitten-off, hyper Lowell-phrase
of winter in this city when the steel of things wrapped the air,

floated down and down.

A permutation of a political moment—a pure clear word—of 1953

as Ike's ascension seemed to signify something old, something new;
as one good liberal put it "if we wanted a bald golfer in the White House
we could have elected Ben Hogan."

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It came back to me . . . December
on the ice at Rockefeller Center

when I first saw my face floating on the cold smooth surface
beneath the colored lights and great tree
and the faces plastered to the glass of the shops and restaurants.

I floated in the December air into the absence of the new era
as Kennedy's death began to sink into the nation.

At night when my parents were asleep
I flicked the dial to find half the stations snowy
or the picture slipping beneath the horizontal band,

the faces of Oswald & Ruby faded into
the whiteness of news lights and tabloid pages.