

## Dara Weinberg

### AN ACTOR'S LIFE FOR ME

"As to the action which is about to begin, it takes place in Poland—that is to say, nowhere."

—Alfred Jarry, *Ubu Roi* premiere, 1896.

I wake mid-afternoon of our one day off  
from rehearsals, sagging as if I had never slept,  
and go to the window. In the city below  
are churches with ceilings of varnished timber  
and people in hooded sweatshirts.  
I don't know what I am looking for any more,  
but I look down as if I knew. It rains,  
the familiar Oregon drone—  
a rain that never stops and never starts,  
that thrums and crackles in the background  
like a guitar cable yanked from the amp socket. I lie down  
with my chin on the couch and my nose on the glass.  
Suddenly, I hear myself, loud as a kettle,  
bawling into the Monday silence  
for a reason that makes no sense to me:  
I weep for the mother I never had,  
the one I did,  
and the one I will never be—  
and the hills of Portland look back down at me.

No response from the dim blue walls  
of my temporary "artist housing," provided by the theater.  
(For "artist," read "vagrant.") When I moved in,  
last month, it was empty except  
for the things that people leave when they leave places:  
a bowl full of laundry change (food for three days  
while waiting for the first paycheck);

unclothed metal hangers, lined up  
at one side of the closet  
like the parallel teeth of a comb; cotton blankets  
washed too often to be warm; a shower curtain  
half-torn from its rings; shelves with no books; a bed  
too big for one person. Too many Mondays where the only  
sounds  
are my slobbering lips over tea-bag tea—  
and I weep for the mother I never had,  
the one I did,  
and the one I will never be—  
and the hills of Portland (this is how you know  
that you're two hubcaps short of a Buick)  
start—I swear to God—to speak to me:

*Leave this city after previews—  
buy a rowboat, find a train—  
and make your way to anywhere  
where no one knows your name.*

*Take an empty sheet of paper,  
we'll play Hangman in reverse—  
one by one, cross out the letters,  
and we'll see who blanks out first.*

*Take the T and make for Poorland—  
Take the R and go to Pot—  
(Broke and hungry—wake-and-baking—  
what's the difference? Not a lot.)*

*Keep on striking out the letters  
till there's only one place left—  
Call it Portland, call it Poorland,  
call it going-straight-to-Potland,  
call it Poland  
(what you will—)  
that is, the nowhere you know best.  
Find yourself another nowhere—or else, find no rest.*

Some of us give up theater gracefully—  
you get older, feel like making some money,  
making some kids, maybe,

and you never make a speech again,  
except at a wedding. But most of us  
have quit more times than a backsliding smoker  
and still come back for another, and another.  
For us, there will always be  
another Tuesday call-time, another table  
papered with copier-warm script pages,  
another cup of pencils, another coffee,  
another play. In time, one window's as good as another.  
The same carry-on bag of worn-out sweaters,  
underwear, and ghosts comes along to every foreign city.  
So what if I happen to spend my days off  
draped over a couch like a drying sock?  
What's another Monday, or two, or three?  
Take away the R and the T—  
may the hills of Poland (*that is, nowhere*) do their worst to me.