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REMAINS TO BE USED

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THE PIONEERS

We were odd candidates for grandeur, though we embellished everything, let little go to waste. Our lean-to constructions of pocket-lint materials— ticket stubs, rope, the occasional twig and soda pop top— limply resisted beauty, evoking instead a kind of match-struck causality. When things worked, they did as if in a puff of smoke. When things didn't work, we'd grow that much more weary. We slept above the bones of enemies killed in battle, dreaming the dream and nightmare of encyclopedic knowledge. Specimens collected: grinning spiders, raven-eyes blinking in starry skies, scavenging insects beset by monstrous shadows. How did these animals move through their world? In trysts with hustlers, games of strip poker, encounters on the street; sitting ass-flat at the three-way crossroads of boredom, buffoonery and something imminently dire. Waking, we'd find crude analog mechanisms standing in for us, enacting our all-too-human feelings. When we'd fall sleep once again, a microphone pointed at our head, a nearby un-pressed record on a phonograph would be poised to play back our dreams. That old curiosity shop, a crackpot's studio jammed with junk. Peeping through the windows, seeing the midden of plastic prairie dogs and how-to books, miniature tractors plowing rust, metal hobby planes landing on piles of rosaries. What confronted us eye-to-eye like a knowing sibling, like unsettling road signs? It's all coming back again— at break-neck speed, in a procession of empty black galoshes.

Eleanor Antin, *100 Boots*, 1971-73. Mail art piece consisting of 51 photographic postcards.

*Let us begin here, at the far edge of this page,
this continent of far-flung meaning which
presumes your getting lost upon arrival.*

BLACK METAL

Daylight drizzled, after the cathedral had been burnt to salt. Now it's a salve and all the more salient. Last night I was pinned down, pinned high in a corner of a room, my legs dangling. A white door opened onto a white-lit hallway, and I wasn't there. What were those stains on your clothes? Why the stain on the ceiling, too? Our get-away convertible was cobbled from cardboard. And there was an intractable herd of them, enrapt by the funnel-projection on a drive-in screen. Place your hand around my neck, finger the pock-scars and the deep ridge dug by my collar. Fireworks burst above our childhood homes while we are not there. Table-lamps dim, porch-lights blink; the white cord of a phone in its cradle snakes willfully across an unmussed rug. Last night the whole long-awaited, sweaty-palmed event became available: an all-black edition with slick black pages, its embossed spine directing: Don't Bat an Eye. Don't Be That Sentimental. I drew my fingers across its cover, over the impression of a bite, and was touched by something familiar pooled in the crevices.

THE BIG SLEEP

We turned the window sign to “closed” and pulled the privacy shade. A flourish of desk-drawer paper cups and a back-pocketed flask of rye. Her watery eyes beneath the broad brim of her cocked hat. She’d handed me a mystery to solve— a candid entrance, a suspect wager. Okay, but we’ll do it my way. Graft is no new matter. Drowsy porn, allowing oneself to go limp all over. The way her sandals braided around her ankles. The way the greenhouse sweat. When the plumage was revealed as plastic, when the late hour tolled and the exotic bird clucked. There, somewhere, the heart got lost. At night, tooling around in cars, pulling into strange garages. Blue-tiled pools where the water was warm, floating candle lights one by one extinguishing. An elaborate and vacant seaside porch, its wind-chimes tinkling. This is where I want to sleep. This is where the final word on the matter lies. As when the weapon in question is found in hand; suddenly, during the unsuspected ablution of, say, a car-crash.

Raymond Chandler, *The Big Sleep*, 1939.

Howard Hawkes, *The Big Sleep*, 1946. Feature film starring Humphry Bogart and Lauren Bacall.