

car and got out with her paint box, watched closely by an old woman who stood about twenty yards away, wearing a duffel coat and a pair of rubber gloves. The woman stared as Harvey held the stencil to the window, outlined it, and filled it in. "This is really a good spot," Harvey said. "It's visible, it's..."

"Hey!" The old woman in the rubber gloves was approaching. "What are you doing?"

"Oh, this is going to be a landscape," Harvey said amiably.

"That's graffiti," the woman barked. "You can get arrested for that." Hoping to calm her down, Harvey pulled out her Beautification map, which had a reproduction of one of her bucolic ovals on it. "I don't care—you don't live here, we do," the woman said, brushing the map away. "We don't want it! If the cops come round here, you'll get a ticket. You gotta get out of here!"

"All right, I'll wipe it off," Harvey said, and did so with a swipe of her palm. The woman scowled until Harvey left.

"If somebody doesn't want me to do it, I don't want to do it," Harvey said as she drove off. "This has never happened before. Well, we'll find another space." Back in Williamsburg, on North Ninth Street, she stopped in front of an abandoned brick building, its windows shuttered with sheets of metal. Harvey chose a brown metal panel under a rusted fire escape. She made her oval, then consulted a book of landscapes to find a good one to copy.

A man walked up. He was compact, muscular, and evidently very angry. "You people have a lot of fun!" he said. "It doesn't fucking matter to you if it's not your fucking property. You're fucking vandalizing other people's property!"

Harvey held out the picture of the landscape she intended to paint. "But it's going to be beautiful," she said.

"It's not fucking beautiful. This is not your fucking property. I'm fucking calling the cops!"

"Fine, I'll take it off, and I'll come back and restore it to the way it was before," Harvey said. She wiped the gesso off the brown metal sheet, then beat a retreat to the Volvo. "I'll restore it to exactly the way it was before," she said. "Which was brown, with graffiti."

—Liesl Schillinger

POSTSCRIPT SUSANNAH MCCORKLE



"For all we know / We may never meet again. / Before you go / Make this moment sweet again. ... / Tomorrow was made for some, / Tomorrow may never come, / For all we know." A few months ago, over a so-so bottle of wine in a tranquil garden in Washington, D.C., Susannah McCorkle was praising Sam M. Lewis's lyrics for their directness. She had included "For All We Know" on her new record, and I was praising her direct way with the song's directness. Now the song is too bruising to hear. In the middle of the night on May 19th, having placed a will on her desk and a note in her pocket asking anybody who discovered her body to look after her cats, Susannah jumped out the window of her apartment, on West Eighty-sixth Street.

The thought of this gentle intelligence falling sixteen floors in the windy darkness is an evil thought. What affliction of her heart demanded this fatal remedy? Immediately, the explanations began to appear. Her record company had dropped her; she had been warring with cancer; she was lonely; she was depressed. Causes for despair, all, but Susannah belonged, or so I had believed, to the "Good morning heartache, sit down" school of her idol, the great stoic thinker Billie Holiday, who disarmed despair with familiarity, even with hospitality. Susannah seemed to inhabit a universe that often wounded but never warranted bitterness. In a recent letter about a "fledgling romance" that she had decided to "transform into a friendship," she had stoutly remarked, "I continue to expect to find my soulmate by not looking for him at all. Life has so many other pleasures." And in her music, too, Susannah seemed to have found a way to live with disappointment, to manage disillusion by making it lovely. (Consider her tenderly wised-up rendition of "Weren't We Fools," an undeservedly obscure song that Cole Porter wrote for Fanny Brice in 1927.)

Jazz singing has rarely prospered so richly from sweetness of temper. She was a doll. Her breath-beautiful, unexpectedly

intimate, and fiercely discriminating voice was forever patrolling the frontier between girlishness and womanliness. The imp ran gladly with the vamp. Susannah was not a blues singer, even when she sang about the blues. Her achievement was based, instead, on an extraordinary intuition of the musicality of language.

With a scholar's strain and a poet's liberty, she studied the words that she sang in their meanings and in their sounds, until meaning and sound became indistinguishable; and in this way she made speech into an experience of the senses. Susannah was certainly the most literary singer in the history of her art. She knew many languages, and translated from them. She wrote stories and learned articles about the traditions of American song—most recently, a fine exploration of the work of Irving Berlin. And she was working on a book, a big, delightful mess of a manuscript that was a memoir on its way to a novel, about her adventures in the nineteen-sixties, as a cool, delicate American chick prowling the Piazza Navona. It was a vivacious journal of a young woman's openness to the world. I recall her happy giggle when I told her that she should call it "Innocence, A Broad."

On her last visit to Washington, Susannah wanted to talk about books more than about songs; she holed up in her room with "The Education of Henry Adams" and a pile of old Faber & Faber volumes of poetry and the catalogue of the Wayne Thiebaud retrospective. She reported a little grimly that her situation as a singer was becoming very difficult (how could it be anything else, I thought, for somebody so utterly lacking in vulgarity?); but the impression of a foundering woman vanished when she reported cheerfully on the musical workshops she was conducting for children. Susannah conferred upon friendship the glamour of romance. She was finespun, without spin, a genuinely lyrical being, a heroine of the inner life born of city life. And then she went and smashed all these blessings on a Manhattan sidewalk. "I believe that no man ever threw away life, while it was worth keeping," a philosopher once observed. By what reason, this certainty? In an existence of illusions and mistakes, suicide, too, may be an illusion and a mistake. Life is worth keeping, for all we know.

—Leon Wieseltier