

THE
BIG
BOOK OF
SOUNDS
AND
OTHER
STORIES

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Black
Lawrence
Press

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The Wind Catalog

41—*A gentle, late spring wafting with overtones of 2 AM on the stretch of grass adjacent to the University library one block from your dormitory, coupled with a suggestion of someone you finally managed to sit with and say nothing to and hold. Vintage 1990.*

As with anything new and unfathomable, they did not know what to do with the Wind Catalog except laugh at it. While they laughed, a new and updated Wind Catalog arrived. Some of them looked through this one and only laughed in smaller portions at the empty illustrations coupled with neat call letters and elegant descriptions.

103—*A slight, early summer breeze with hints of caramel corn and cotton candy and grease from the axles of small rides quickly constructed and then taken down at weekend's end in the parking lot of the local supermarket every October. Vintage 1979.*

They discover that the Wind Catalog is distributed by the Classic Wind Consortium. There is a website. When they check the website they discover it is a reproduction of the catalog only with an easy-to-use navigation bar and a prominent link to JUST ADDED.

The Classic Wind Consortium lists no address. It lists no CEO or founder. Visitors to the site are assured that sales representatives are standing by to take their orders when a 1-800 number is dialed. They dial, curious. They dial because it won't cost anything. A pleasant sales representative answers. No one knows what to do next. Did they really need vintage wind?

57-58—*Squall. One of our most popular items. For our Down East customers now displaced, who miss the thrill of life on a fishing boat. Chilly and briny, in two sizes. Vintage 1948.*

They agreed the Wind Catalog was an elaborate hoax. They discussed it over their mochas and tofu wraps and during their poker games and church breakfasts. It is impossible to capture and store wind. It is impossible to enslave a gust and keep it on a shelf for a generation or longer. It is impossible to keep a large supply of anything that rushes invisibly, regardless of how keenly it is felt and remembered by the skin. It is impossible to hold and sequester and market and ship and disperse the most fleeting, temporary, and ephemeral element. Air. Not just air but air in motion. Wind is horizontal. Drafts are vertical. Air that carries where it has been and who it has seen. It is not possible. However.

144—*A dry and desolate puff across the desert, hot and bold, popular with our customers poor of complexion and meditative of spirit. You'll feel the relentless iron sun with this classic. Vintage 1925.*

And yet, they reasoned, if the Wind Catalog is not a hoax and to be believed, it stands that someone had achieved the impossible.

A way had been found to preserve, to harvest, to save, to classify, and to vend the winds of the past. Not only had this been done, but someone had been doing it for a very long time.

410—*The Battle of Bunker Hill. No further description needed. Delivered in a fingernail vial. Limited supply. For serious collectors. Market price.*

They took to wondering what the market price of the wind from the Battle of Bunker Hill would be. They took to wondering how such a thing as a market price for wind could exist. They continued to ignore the Wind Catalog's second edition, no matter how disturbed and curious they were. Some of them had spoken of actually spending a few dollars to order something and see what would be delivered and how. They wanted to see the instructions. They wanted to learn a new language. Wind reactivation? Would a special machine be needed? There is always a need for a special machine. That's how they make their money.

212a—*A healthy gust for the first kite of the season, redolent of the dense woods surrounding the hill upon which the kite mingles with other kites, with just a hint of fresh dogwood and deer; your father is with you. Vintage 1965.*

A man named Hellison orders a #35.

35—*A strong lakeside zephyr, northerly, fresh with midnight and prom corsages and charter boat thrusting through the dark waves. On the cold side; give her your coat. Vintage 1987.*

Hellison tells no one, not even his wife. Hellison waits. Hellison has second thoughts about blowing twenty-five bucks on what is obviously a hoax. Hellison waits. Hellison is home when the box is delivered. Hellison is surprised to read the simple instructions: Place this canister in the corner of the room in which you wish to experience it, open it, sit down, close your eyes, and enjoy.

Hellison goes to the guest bedroom he used to use as a study until he discovered he had nothing to study and puts the canister in the corner, opens it, sits, and closes his eyes.

The six of them are emerging from the limousine and are walking down the stone staircase to the river and there is so much wonder in the city tonight and everything is all set and another six are meeting them and how grown-up it is to be tuxedoed and shiny and sharp and the girls looking like elegant Christmas gifts and Sharon is never letting herself be not arm in arm with him and her dress is strapless and her shoulders are smooth and this is the well he's lost count time she's kissed him tonight with her mouth open and all of them are boarding the boat and how rich they feel how elegant and special and rare and no one can stop talking all of us all of us boys are self-conscious we pat our moussed hair and tug at the sharp starchy points of our dress shirts and the girls are as inviting as pillows with satin covers and the boat churns into the Chicago River and the buildings the grand places of living and working reach for the black sky and there is a feeling of I Want This I Want This Always and we glide under the Michigan Avenue Bridge and midnight people wave to us and yes we are special and rare and wonderful and we are out on the lake bobbling along in freedom and release from the land and all of us all six couples maybe seven are finding private spots along the rail and looking out looking out and it is all dark and behind us now the city look-

ing like a land of amusement parks and Sharon is kissing me or maybe I am kissing her oh no this is a mutual kiss these are mutual kisses and they are long and warm and she shudders and my coat is off and around her shoulders and that makes her want me even more and the boat is silent except for the engine pushing us through the black mysterious water along the shore and then soon too soon back to the river and up the stone steps and back into the waiting limousine and back to the expressway and back to our suburb and back to our houses dropped off one by one by one and no reason to think of that now because out here with Sharon in my coat pressed against me and nothing but lips and necks and searching hands and the waves and the endless darkness of the water and the sky and we are special I am special I am rare I Want This Always.

The canister empties. Hellison opens his eyes. Hellison hears a quiet house, sees a dusty sunbeam through the shutter. Hellison catches his breath. Hellison closes his eyes. Hellison sits in the guest bedroom until he hears his wife come home. It is dark. Hellison reaches for the Wind Catalog. Hellison removes his wallet from his pocket and his MasterCard from his wallet and reaches for the telephone.

Once upon a time there was a television commercial for shampoo which began with a beautiful young lady telling us how she used the product and told two friends and they told two friends and they told two friends and by the end of the commercial the screen fills with a mosaic of the beautiful young lady repeated over and over and over and this is what happens in terms of the Wind Catalog once Hellison described as best he could to his friends what he felt when he opened #35.

Did it make you sad?

Not at all.

Not even a little sad.

Perhaps afterwards.

Well that's not good.

Only a little sad.

Sadness is never good except when it is good.

The sadness was minimal.

Then it was nostalgia you felt.

I wouldn't say that exactly.

Then say something exactly.

I felt like I was living in the moment.

Your moment.

It might have been someone else's moment.

But a moment that reminded you of one of your own moments.

There was no remembering, there was living.

And what did you do with the empty canister? Recycled it.

They turned to their copies of the Wind Catalog and bought. Currents. Breezes. Chinooks. Drafts. Gales. Gusts. Mistral. Puffs. Tempests. Typhoons. Cyclones. Waftings. Whisks. Zephyrs. Breaths.

Savings accounts were depleted. Canisters large and small overflowed the recycling bins. They who had never been to Nebraska bought Nebraska wind. They who had never been to Paris bought Paris wind. They who had never been on a motorcycle bought wind rushing past a motorcyclist. They put their canisters in the corners of their rooms and opened the lids and closed their eyes and lived in their moments and emerged from their rooms with new realizations painted on their amazed faces. They became tolerant of small

children. They became seductive to long-endured spouses. They read every section of the newspaper. They drank more expensive wine. They walked. They talked. They wondered.

The wonder, as you are well aware, never ends. A few of them wondered where it was all coming from and tracked the Classic Wind Consortium to a cinderblock building in the Ozarks. They found no one on the premises. The door was open. They walked inside. They discovered thirty thousand square feet of darkness.

We do not care where it comes from or who fills the canisters or if the canisters are actually filled. We do not care. We do not care how they collect what they collect or by what method they collect what they collect or whose idea it was in the first place. We do not give a damn. We do not give a damn who decides that a first toboggan ride in a forest preserve in Iowa circa 1974 (#197) is worth sixty bucks or a post-fireworks backyard circa 1946 (#355) is worth seventy-five or a World Series 7th inning stretch after a light rain circa 1968 (#54a-b-c) is worth three hundred we do not care we do not care we want it we want this we want this always.

They bought and they bought and they wanted more and they waited for the third edition of the Wind Catalog and while they waited they tried new things and ordered new orders and experienced what they never thought they would experience or would like to experience and they wondered. They wondered who was collecting now. They wondered if the unseen and unknown entrepreneurs who had been collecting for the past two hundred years were still collecting, were passing on their knowledge to their mysterious inheritors. They felt that someday in the future they would possibly like to shell out for a canister full of a particularly nice day they were experiencing, or an exciting time, or a romantic time, or

a trying time, or an ordinary time. They wondered if someone was collecting all or as much as they could of the unseen, busy, rushing atmosphere around them, the wind that comes the wind that goes the wind that is remembering. They wonder and they wait for the next Wind Catalog.

We are still waiting.