

MAN AND CAMEL

On the eve of my fortieth birthday
I sat on the porch having a smoke
when out of the blue a man and a camel
happened by. Neither uttered a sound
at first, but as they drifted up the street
and out of town the two of them began to sing.
Yet what they sang is still a mystery to me—
the words were indistinct and the tune
too ornamental to recall. Into the desert
they went and as they went their voices
rose as one above the sifting sound
of windblown sand. The wonder of their singing,
its elusive blend of man and camel seemed
an ideal image for all uncommon couples.
Was this the night that I had waited for
so long? I wanted to believe it was,
but just as they were vanishing, the man
and camel ceased to sing, and galloped
back to town. They stood before my porch,
staring up at me with beady eyes, and said:
“You ruined it. You ruined it forever.”

From **MAN AND CAMEL** by Mark Strand

Published by Knopf 