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Published by DOCS@RWU, 1984
Sheryl L. Nelms
Montana Wind
winter incubation
walking the field

Krzysztof M. Ostaszewski
examine your doors and windows
I speak to you of flowers

Laurel Speer
Vodka is a Product of the Wry Life

Eugene Micheals
Dutch Boys

Contributors
Charles Bigelow

Pulpit Man

pulpit man?
suddenly, cloth
where I knew skin.
guilt wraps its fingers
tightly and leads us
on strange trips,
but a pulpit as
the pot of gold?
you never raged in hell,
breathed fire, chewed
on bloodstained hearths —
but, the mirror
had you in its trance.
wasn’t one you could resist.
watching you spin your
charm, glistening in black,
your glazed eyes
reveal your vision.
Charles Bigelow

Suit Of Armor

its happened again;
life swells inside you,
sapping your strength,
a cloud of despair attaches itself
to you for the duration.
trying to ignore it,
is like ignoring the daily headlines.

it is my fault.
lustful sword swinger;
I created this aberration;
thrusting into you unshielded,
spilling my seed selfishly.
acting out of instinct
like a salmon on my way upstream.
withdrawal, end of commitment.

it was going to be different
this time around. yet I
find myself shying away,
as though you have
become an incubator; off limits.
I wanted to share as they do
in magazines, on T.V., in books
written by modern day romantics.

slipping into a costume
of crusty ambivalence,
I act as though
my job is completed.
treating you as though
you should diet,
encouragement and compassion seem to have disappeared as I don the suit of armor.
Deb Dennis

nighttime (in paris)

it's 3:00 am
the streets are stone quiet
turned into themselves, so functional
they have achieved spiritual transcendence
like colons.
my friend and i walk, communicating telepathically.
no cops
no fruitstands
no grinder shops
everyone's inside
practicing their death scenes
for eight hours or so.
amazed, i see how clean the world really is —
everynight bankers and murderers get another chance
to be themselves.
lying prone
stations tuned to the pink noise of riverbands and lily pads
under warm blankets if they're lucky,
the human race is a habitual place
following one leader — the sun.
hats off, not being moms and dads for once
each night we dissolve to a less than solid state
instinctively assuming our true nature
lying in bed
sick home from school, watching psychic cartoons
awaiting the big treat:
getting to sing backup vocals
in The Great Double Helix Orchestra.
Deb Dennis

The Tapestry Room

One could die here from too much religion
the life force muted by thick cloth.
Only birds and vines provide the motion of nature,
even the unicorn, a mutated phallus
is white, unaligned, and still.
How mundane to sit before a loom
the day making pictures before you,
your own progress measured in inches.
How Labour creates and steps aside,
an invisible signature of effort,
practically (but hopefully not) eternal.
Weaving as penance,
in a land where all roads come and go to the King.
Entering here, one smells clay dust, olive oil, camel's dung,
the first days of the freemarket system
when people still gathered around the fountain to flirt and trade.
All this has been slowed into cloth
by a woman, probably,
with old and skillful hands.
The testimony of intersecting thread:
someone lived while doing this.
The tapestry room is not separate from The World.
Deb Dennis

Resisting the Eyes of the Summer People

There are those
who treat others as pieces of flesh
on the slave market no one talks about.
There are those
who use the knife every relationship provides
to twist and pry a foothold
in order to become a skyscraper
standing atop the shoulders of an assassinated heap.

Each year in the Spring,
it seems most cruel because we’ve just come off winter
and have no reserve of money or patience,
a whole network of people come here for our water and nightlife.
They are The Other.
Their decadent power goes unchecked
they push and clench and babble and strut and buy
and we go underground with our guerilla anger
and they become our enemy
in the wargame of Summer.

Back in time once, no, everyday
men wearing teeth and colored stones scream
to warn of Those in white linen
who make deadly holes with air from sticks.

And somewhere: They outlaw music and dancing.
closer and closer
the Thermidore comes
now we teach the children
now we teach the children
Mortal Insult

Like another person,
a ghost confronts the body,
at once intangible
and living electric.

It crackles through house:
fantastic phantom
slams porch door,
could kill the kittens.

Flash —
it stands beside you
denying that smash
of latch and jamb,
the feathery fall of plaster flakes.

Friends whisper away;
you're the only one there.
A chair creaks its rock
remindfully.

Pillows, blankets
can barely comfort
the sick insect of the stomach
left to creep.

Talk to it,
Gestalt practitioner.
It smokes into a drawer;
room is forever charcoal.
Air smolders,
ones you love close doors quietly.

You are only setting the alarm clock,
swallowing your lost
lost,
eating your sour.
Glimpses

(ERVING)

Partially unfaced from the fog
they come to their job as sneezes
and phlegm-release and dry coughs
and the dim-lit end of a cigarette.
Like planes passing through clouds
they move in and out of the fog
in motorcycle jackets and cottons
totes and dungarees and flats
blouses and T-shirts and culottes.
And then they disappear
into their work and the morning,
unnoticed but for these fingers
that pulse the pen to remember
them as people, mill people in a fog
on their way to the loading docks
and racing engines and air brakes
or sounds of machinery and buzzers.
People. Mill people. Earthly angels
walking to work through cloud-like fog
rolling in rhythm with smokestack puffs
on a sleepy July morning of unseen sky.
Michael Hood

Ice Fishing
(Becket)

In his red-brown beard
In his beige woolen cap
and checkerboard jacket
with hands stuffed in pockets,
he sits in his chair
and dreams of trout
filling up his fish basket.
Twice he removes himself
to tend the ice fire
built to keep him company
and warm his big hands
which he blows air into.
He is happy alone,
skims the skin of the pond
with his construction boots,
oberves the distant details
of hockey voices and ice ballet,
and then returns to his chair
and waits on his trout dream.
He is happy, alone.
Thomas Kretz

A Sonata To Fill An Empty Hall

My number one friend, a famous author,  
Has taken to the sea to save strangers,  
Leaving me fondling familiar pages;  
Andante.

My number two, a doctor, keeps jogging  
Towards those who have a more obvious claim,  
While I sit nursing stillborn marathons;  
Adagio.

My third and final friend, combination  
Of all combustion, sum of all the stars,  
Flickers, flying from me at dazzling speed;  
Largo.
Along The Blue Nile

"Nudged by Aeolus, the boat drifts amongst the silver islands of the Golden Archipelago..."

Frank Podzimek

Drifting along the Blue Nile
With her Golden Retriever almond eyes sleep
Amidst petals falling from garlands
Touching her hands—opened
In remembrance of days
On the jasmine isle called Lesbos.
Clapping hands! Shouts Ole! Ole! Awakened...
To attend, unwillingly the dying of the bulls.
Jon Lavieri

Scratch

When arsonist turns
his desire to manic fact
only part of the house goes up.
Instinct blocks its own retreat,
its voice as close as the back
of your head, "Logic and desire
couple like odd numbers, sweet thing.
Once the loaf's been cut the rest
slices easy.
Passing the match
as far as left to right
is a major detour."

It all comes back
sweating out drugs in the burn ward:
the echo of timing,
the match dropped to
shake hands with caution,
the warning on a pack of smokes,
the old wooden floor.
Jon Lavieri

Eudaemonics Class

Professor, quick —
show us—
we we just discussing . . .
today’s meeting . . . last nights . . .
eclipse of flesh.

We shudder to thumb the
catalogue of your knowledge.

“Dear Class,

Chapter nine. ‘In which the thin boy
shows the guys his new blue tattoo.’ On
my knees you little porpoise, now we quiz
your capacity for begging.”
Jon Lavieri

Five Frenzies
(for Anni)

Sisters and daughters vary
no more than rocks, hunching
at this evening’s meal.

Wind gestures them into
its sudden home. Horseshoes
at different depths, haze for sand-bags.

At least they will pick plenty of mussels.

To snap would be to freeze
them in liquid tracks, hold
tide at ankle and wrist.

A male is on this horizon,
gender intruding feckless, ripping
seams in their lush communion.

Never father, husband, part time
brother; the corner
at their round meal table.
Jon Lavieri

Fads of the Elderly

In the event of alluvion
we must get other places to stand.
The serpent distends itself,
becomes a temporary enemy
dropping hints instead of bombs.
We seemed to have missed aging
in synch with the trend of ethics.
Each of us stakes out a corner
to work from:
“Wanna learn the way of water?”
we snigger at young girls
walking out of church.
We want to be the old bugger
with the neck brace,
always good for a laugh.
It was late afternoon, the trade winds were dying, and aboard the yawl *Polaris* Captain Jake Riggins was stretched out fully clothed on a settee in the main cabin. The smell of alcohol and sweat permeated the air. Captain Jake, overweight and breathing hard in the tropical heat, brushed at a fly that had landed on his nose. Still he didn’t open his eyes. He was waiting until he could determine if his head hurt; rolling his head slowly left and right, the early indications were promising. A strand of his thin reddish-brown hair caught in a cushion button and tugged at his perpetually sunburnt scalp. Wincing, he brought his hand up, then felt his face.

“Mother of Misery!” he croaked, startled by the several days’ growth on his chin.

Confused, he put his hand down and tried to figure what day it was. The month must be March, he thought, because he remembered crossing off the days in January and February before tearing those pages from the calendar he kept pinned to the bulkhead by the navigation station.

Two months without a charter and now into a third! he thought, cursing his ill luck. I’ll have to call that xenophobic agent in New York and find out what the hell is up. The Krauts and Frogs would love it down here. If she’s waiting for some icehead in Minnesota to ask for the good ship *Polaris* we’ll surely end up with nothing in our lockers but yams, plantains and cheap Carib beer. I swear the only thing she ever did for my health was give me an ass to kiss!

The boat was in sad shape. That much was clear. And he was indeed already broke. He could smell the brackish water in the bilge and the dank odor of mildew in every pillow and cushion cover. *Polaris* needed a new suit of sails, the radio was out, the bottom covered with barnacles, and the
engine was a hug and a kiss from the grave. Worst of all, he didn’t have one lousy E.C. to pay for repairs.

One good week is what we need, he thought. If that Foster-Daily bitch doesn’t send somebody soon, I’ll can her butt and find us an agent who will. What a cryin’ shame! This boat’s a beauty. A classic. Long leaf pine planking on oak frames, mahogany cabin and teak decks—she’ll outlive that old whore by fifty years. Never should have signed a contract with a hyphenated old cunt anyway.

There was almost a smile on Captain Jake’s face as he considered the many ways he could terminate his contract with Foster-Daily. Perhaps a phone call from the marina in St. Thomas saying the only way she could save the listing was to bring her white bottom down to the Caribbean and blow every boat nigger in Avery’s yard.

Naw, a phone call was too expensive, especially for a vindictive high-stepper in New York who had her hair done twice a week, plotted her appearances at Michael’s in the hopes of seeing Woody Allen perform in his sanctum sanctorium, and who was feeding all the good clients to the prissy young skippers low enough to flirt with her at the annual charter boat show in Tortola. Maybe a letter would be better. He could draw a picture of an erect penis ejaculating the words: Fuck off. That seemed more to the point; he liked the simplicity of it.

But the problem remained, how to get customers? They’d been living off the cans stored in the bilge for weeks now. They all were rusted and the labels missing. When Captain Jake and Helen first started chartering in the Caribbean they used to finish each season with what they called a “mystery meal.” They’d gather the unidentifiable cans and throw them into a big pot—usually pinto beans and asparagus spears. Then it was a silly joke, but a mystery meal now, alone, would be pitiful.

The fly returned to Captain Jake’s nose, and he let it walk around a few seconds before taking aim at it with his hand. If he could feel the individual feet as they padded around the big pores on his nose, that would be a positive
sign. Still he didn’t open his eyes. One step at a time. He felt the feet tickling their way up to his brow, and raised his quivering hand to slap at it. But of course the fly was gone. His reflexes, he realized with increasing sobriety, were impaired by a hangover as big as the state he’d left twenty years ago. Was that Florida? No, that had been a short stopover between the beer distributorship in Michigan and the lazy, sun-drenched charting life in the U.S. Virgin Islands. He was in St. Thomas, wasn’t he? A quick look out the porthole would tell, but the pain in his head made that small act impossible. He thought upon it. No. He remembered an old woman at the market in Antigua. She had looked at him with an evil eye, a maljoe, and the memory had worked its way into his subsequent nightmares. Was he heading back to the Virgins, still in Antigua, or somewhere south of the Leeward Islands? Beyond the maljoe woman weaving baskets, his mind fogged into a featureless seascape of white. For all he knew, he could have been in South America.

Perhaps remembering what day it was would be more helpful, so he focused his sodden mental powers on that enormously difficult task. If he knew the day, he might learn where he was and what he was doing drunk on the settee. But it wasn’t going to be easy. After twenty years in the tropical sun, knowing the day of the week or month was about as important as knowing whether he’d been drinking Manhattans or Gibsons the night before.

He couldn’t put off opening his eyes much longer. He’d been sleeping too long already. The cushion below his head felt rock hard, as if all the blood in his brain had seeped through the tissues into a cavity at the base of his skull. The vibrations of his heart made it throb like a migraine against the juncture of his brain and spinal cord, sending dull impulses of pain throughout his body.

Captain Jake rolled onto his side and knocked an empty bottle of Cruzan rum onto the cabin sole. The sound of the bottle hitting wood instinctively made him open his eyes and reach out. The sunlight cut into his retinas like
laser beams, and he rolled back onto his shoulders, covering both eyes and letting out a groan. He couldn’t have been more stunned if he’d been shot with a thirty-odd-six.

“Helen!” he yelled. “We got any aspirin on board? Sweet papaya. My head hurts like a sonofabitch!”

There was no answer. He waited a moment and then called again, “Helen? Are you sleeping?” The old bag, she was probably sacked out in the forward cabin, snugly refusing to answer his pleas for help. She was like that—clamming up with the old silent treatment whenever he yelled at her or got drunk or did any of the thousand and one other things that made her angry.

“Helen?”

Maybe she had gone ashore in the dinghy. Would she remember aspirin? Or more importantly, a can of tomato juice for Bloody Marys? He could tell that this was going to be a Bloody Mary morning—a nip of the dog that bit him was his only hope. A few bloodies, a nice big steak, a smoke in the cockpit and then more sleep. Tomorrow he’d be his old self again. Then he’d give serious thought to calling Foster-Daily and getting some charterers down here. With any luck, he’d have a few days to clean up the boat, maybe even scrub the teak decks and varnish the booms. Of course they’d have to sail to Charlotte Amalie where most of the Virgin Island charter boats hung out . . . if he wasn’t already there . . . or in Antigua two days’ sail away . . . or wherever else he might happen to be. He never kept a logbook, so that wouldn’t help. The question of which island was a knot he couldn’t untie, but he had faith that the answer would be self-evident as soon as the pressure in his head subsided. No matter, the people at Sun and Sail Charters might let him borrow a car, maybe even haul out on credit so he could scrape off the barnacles and paint the bottom.

“Helen? Where are you?”

Still there was no answer, not even the rustle of a bed cover. With a very conscious effort he lifted his hand off the cushion and began massaging the corners of his eyes, then with his lids shut, the iris, whites and finally, the whole eye.
There was a technique to drawing out the blood that collected in the cavity at the base of his skull; he imagined the stimulation on his eyes and temples would promote a capillary action the way water moves up the veins of a plant. Unfortunately, he could see that today it would require an awful lot of rubbing. He used the grease-stained palms of his big hands in a rotating motion on the sides of his head. In Grenada the people had a saying that dark rum caused hangovers and white rum left a man clear-headed. Funny, it never seemed to make any difference to Captain Jake; but then he presumed that the people of the tropics had different body chemistry.

As he lay on the worn settee rubbing his head, the realization slowly dawned that Helen wasn’t there. If she wasn’t on the boat, and if the dinghy was still tied to the stern, then either she had fallen overboard, gone for a swim or... what? The truth was elusive and painful, but gradually he began to remember their last conversation, which he repeated out loud.

He raised the octave of his voice to imitate Helen: “Jake, listen to me. Twenty years is enough. Sell the boat and come back with me to Michigan. You’re going down the tubes. White people weren’t meant to live in the tropics more than two weeks at a time. The boat is a shambles. We’re out of money. The dream is dead. We haven’t seen the kids in two years. We have a grandson we’ve never seen. Please Jake, there’s still time. Jake, if you don’t leave now, you’re going to die.”

Here? You gotta be kidding! This is paradise.

He put one hand on his heart just to be sure, but couldn’t feel anything. That didn’t mean much however; he never could find his pulse. The conniving woman had tried to trick him! He sat up with a jerk and let out a startled groan. “Jesus H. Christ!”

When he opened his eyes he was staring at a round black face peering down the companionway hatch, his fingers clutching the bottom of the hatch sill. Dreadlocks framed the young man’s head, dangling beneath a purple, red and
pink knitted hat, and grinned like the Cheshire Cat, causing Captain Jake to wonder if he’d woken in Wonderland.

“Who the fuck are you?” he growled, pressing the sides of his head to keep the blood from rushing out of the cavity too fast.

“My name is James, Skip. I de mate on Lida over dere. We lookin’ after those little charter boats. We been anchored ‘bout a day and see no one board dis boat. Think maybe you sick or dead, so de copp’n send me over to check you out.”

“Well, as you can see,” Captain Jake grumbled, “I ain’t dead yet. But ’fore the day’s over, I’ll probably wish I was.”

James looked at him quizzically. “You was makin’ some funny sounds, Skip. Maybe you havin’ a heart attack.”

Captain Jake lay back down slowly and closed his eyes. “I don’t have a heart,” he said miserably. “If you don’t believe me, come on down and feel for yourself.”

James looked around the cabin to see where he could safely put his feet. “Okay, Skip. For your own protection. Whoowe, what a mess you got.” He dropped down lithely onto the cabin sole, picked up the empty bottle of rum and put it in the sink. “You know, Skip,” he said reproachfully, “bad drink kill you jus’ as dead as a bad heart.”

“You’re telling me?” Captain Jake shuddered. “This island rum is poison. But it ain’t killed me yet, so I guess I’ve developed an immunity. Hey, do me a favor. See if there’s any aspirin in the head—in the cabinet behind the pisser.”

James stepped cautiously over the mess on the floor, not taking his eyes off the big man lying on the settee next to him. “In here, Skip?” he asked, opening the door at the forward end of the cabin.

Captain Jake mumbled an affirmative.

“Nuthin here, Skip. Looks like you been robbed.”

“The top shelf,” Captain Jake directed.

“Jus’ some old wet band aids.” James stepped back into the main cabin. “How long you been drunk?”

“I ain’t drunk,” Captain Jake said, rubbing his eyes with
the backs of his hands. "But I been drinkin'."

"Now you're talkin', Skip. You get sick in here?"

"Hell, I ain't puked my guts but twice in my life, and neither time was on a boat—it's unseamanlike."

James hopped over the broken glass, crackers, underwear and moldy magazines on the sole and stopped by the companionway ladder. "How long you stay in Carriacou?" he asked, knowing that Captain Conte would want more information than just the description of a hungover drunk.

The question made Captain Jake pause. Carriacou? Was that what he said? Holy shit! That was five hundred miles south of St. Thomas, and the only stop in between that he remembered was the market in Antigua, the only face that frightening contortion of the malgré woman wearing a battered derby hat.

Well, he thought, shrugging to himself, stranger things have happened. "How long what?"

"Carriacou," James said softly, flashing a toothy smile.

"How long Carriacou. He wasn't accustomed to thinking in terms of days or weeks. His clock had been on "island time" much too long. "I dunno," he said at last. "Maybe I'll go to St. Vincent and get some charters."

"I seen you up dere," James said, snapping his fingers.

"I know dis boat."

"If you saw me in St. Vincent, I guess I was in St. Vincent."

"You had a woman, too."

"She's around somewhere," Captain Jake said, wagging his head to loosen the glot of blood in the cavity.

Halfway up the ladder, James turned and asked, "Your radio work, Skip?" He was anxious to be gone; they had work to do and James knew Conte would be getting irritable waiting, but he had to know.

"No. Why?" Captain Jake opened one eye suspiciously. The Grenadines were a bit far south for drug runners, but the wise skipper stayed alert against petty thievery, and a VHF radio was part of the insurance plan.

"Nuthin, Skip. Jus' thought you could give us a call if
you get sick again, start talkin’ funny like you was.”

The kid must have heard me talking to Helen, thought Captain Jake. If he didn’t feel so bad it would be embarrassing, but what difference did it make now? Helen was gone, back to Michigan, to snow, the gloom, the grandson.

When he heard the sound of James’ outboard motor whining back across the expanse of water between the two boats, Captain Jake relaxed the grip on his head and sighed. He found a cracker on the sole and ate it, but his mouth was too dry to swallow. He sat up with his eyes closed, swung his legs over the side of the settee and groped for a glass in the sink opposite. Two glasses of blind-pumped water only started to moisturize his desiccated lips and mouth. It occurred to him that if he only stood up and opened his eyes, he would be able to see James’ boat. The Rasta had come aboard without permission, a bold intrusion that in some places could get a man shot without question. It should have bothered Captain Jake, but it didn’t. His head hurt. Helen had disappeared. And anyway, James hadn’t seemed the type to stick him in his sleep.

He decided against looking, preferring not to open his eyes again until they could look upon the light of a new day. The sun was getting low and because there wasn’t much kerosene in the lamps there was no point in staying awake in the darkness.

Lying down again he unbuttoned his shirt to liberate the full expanse of his perspiring belly, found a pillow wedged in the corner of the settee and turned it over to the least dirty side before sliding it under his face. His head ached, but the capillary action must have been working, because it didn’t hurt as badly as before. Helen bothered him, more because she hadn’t left a note than because she was gone. Perhaps there would be a message waiting in St. Vincent.

On the other hand, he did have a plan, and that was comforting. In a few days he’d scrounge a few supplies in town—or better yet, from Lida—then hoist anchor and sail the sixty miles northeast to St. Vincent. If he left by six or
seven in the morning he could make Cane Garden Point before nightfall. It would be a point of sail with the wind close to the bow, and though the boat would heel a lot in between the islands, he could get her to self-steer most of the way.

Just how to deal with Foster-Daily was still unresolved. He was leaning towards a threatening letter pasted up with words clipped from newspapers and magazines, and the thought brought a satisfied smile to his hot face.

He was quickly in a deep, snoring sleep, and never heard Lida's big launch powering in and out from the shore. Nor did he hear the sound of reggae masking the grunting noises of the crews as they strained to unload crates they'd painted to resemble portable ice chests, or the talk of the young Vincentians as they sat watching on a log by the trees smoking holy ganga herb and feeding tapes into their big chrome music box.

Once during the night, the face of the maljoe woman made him wake up sweating. His head was clearer and he felt sufficiently recovered to climb into the cockpit to urinate over the stern rail while simultaneously looking at the moon. Over the years this communion had become a pleasant habit for old Captain Jake, and when he occasionally slept straight through he woke in the morning with a strange sense of loss.

Stumbling below, he hardly noticed the silhouetted spars of the schooner Lida or the smaller boats anchored inshore.

The idea of sleeping without Helen was strangely familiar, even acceptable now that he was sobering. Perhaps it was because months had passed since they'd last made love. Somewhere between the dreams they once had had together in Michigan and the cavity in his skull that was his alone in the tropics, he knew that one day it would come to this. He could read it on the faces of the cold, white moon, and in the sound of his own aging voice.

He heard the sound of a truck as he was climbing into bed, but even if he had stopped to look he wouldn't have
seen headlights, nor the crates packed with Russian rifles lifted onto the truck and driven up the winding, dirt road to the ridge, then over to the construction site of Oceanic Development’s resort on the southern bluffs.

When Captain Jake Riggins woke the next morning and rubbed the sleep from his eyes he saw that the mother ship and her brood had disappeared as suddenly as the Greek navy had left the Trojan shores.

The face of the young black mate from *Lida* he attributed to the demon of drink, and let it fade from his memory with no more thought than the last shot of rum in an old label-less bottle.
The Treehouse

The treehouse takes up space
around the willow. The willow sways
as if nothing has happened. The boards
are no more warped than their first
winter in the yard, shiplap, nailed tight
to 2 x 4’s, bolted to posts sunk in caliche
two feet deeper than our tallest child.
The single window hasn’t held a face in years.

I would go back and build it all
again, splinters in skin between my fingers,
the hammered thumb, the buzzsaw whining,
sawdust spinning in my eyes
like pollen, the children taking turns
as each end fell into their hands like gifts,
willow limbs swaying thirty feet long,
accepting the house like the ribs
of a hoop skirt. Built to last,
we called it, our children swinging
from the rails, climbing the roof,
able to touch willow limbs
higher than they’d ever reached before.
Rattler

Coiled in a fist of rattles
the old boy stares us down.
Mine, his tongue insists,
weaving like a baby’s fork,
eyes on the verge of tantrum.
Mesquite leaves dangle
overhead like a mobile,
stipple the light on his back
like diamonds: Mine.
Sheryl L. Nelms

Montana Wind

it rushes up
through the dry grass
pushes the antelope
over the ridge

drops off
the limestone cliff

rolls along the slope
through the scrub cedar

rattles the branches
shakes a nesting
turtle dove
into flight

riffles out across the Rosebud River

catches in the thorns
of the plum thicket
rimming the bank

and lays down
dying

moaning it’s wau ya pi song
winter incubation
the brown cockleburs cluster
down the bent corn rows
stick up through the powdering snow
like some conjunction
of porcupine eggs
just laid
walking the field
I flump across the field
enjoying the sound of my
jeans slap slapping
the thick purple
of alfalfa

but with each stride
I dislodge the bees
from their pollinating probe
of full blooms

leave them strafing

a honeyed buzz
behind
me
Krzysztof M. Ostaszewski

examine your doors and windows
examine things around you
for two reasons
there’s still time to do that
now is the time to do that
the world around us won’t last
we’ll see it disappearing
open windows will be important
open doors will be even more important

examine your words
you’ve lost some of them
but then again you’ve found some of them
this is the time
it’s not too late
the unalterable will alter
we’ll be left with the unknown
although we’ll learn it before
and this is the only time

Seattle, October 28, 1981
Krzysztof M. Ostaszewski

I speak to you of flowers I want to see flowers in words
I tell you about birds I want to see birds in words
but the words abandon me and brush against your lips

Nowa Wieś Szlachecka, July 20, 1980

Translated by Wojtek Stelmaszyński
Laurel Speer

Vodka is a Product of the Wry Life
(Don’t cry my scentless little camellia)

But I’ve given up the exquisite.
It’s so pointillist,
so Seuratian.
Do you know how much
his Jatte fetched
in its first lurch to the art market?
A week’s pain and table wine.
What good does it do
giving up your life to thinness?
My tits are big and fat now,
the nipples 7 inches and pink.
I have no trouble placing them in palms.
My tiny eyes that peer like blue aggies
from marble games
bounce hope to the bottom of my vodka glass.
How ugly you’ve become
under my orange sun.
Eugene Micheals

Dutch Boys

Elsa shuffled between the tables. Ladle and arm dipping, stirring and splashing from the pot crooked under her arm. I watched, amazed by her tolerance and stamina. Disappointed that her casserole wafted no steam from my plate. Across from me sat a girl. The only one present, and American. She was precocious, but I enjoyed the company.

"Matty?" She asked.
"Yes."
"What were you thinking about?"
"There's nothing to think about."
"Pay attention. You might discover something. You know don't you, that they're honoring Elsa tonight."
I nodded yes. Then began to eat.
Once finished, I pushed the plate away, turned to face the podium. The podium student was the senior class president. I had watched him the night before, dancing on a table in the campus bar. It was an all male campus, a technical school where the uniform of blue blazer and white ascot was an enforced requirement. Such restraints prompted a standard of extremes when it came to juvenile meddling. At the time I didn't drink, and except for occasional dates with the girl, had spent many a lonely night in the europe of my room.

The podium student began to speak, and the others, now satiated, began to listen. They were rambunctious, as usual, flinging slices of bread, pats of butter. But it wasn't until one student started banging the table with his mug that the room exploded.

They were all banging in unison, in short loud clomps, chanting Elsa Elsa Elsa. A cheer rose up as she stood before them, her black polyester uniform smeared with the evening's repast. She was sweaty, fat and timid. She was tired,
patient. The din began to recede.

She leaned into the mike, a sheepish grin firing the red in her cheeks. The din began to swell. She tried to speak, her clumsy hands fumbling with the mike. They cheered only louder.

She couldn’t react, cringing for a simple thank-you before she went on her way. They wouldn’t have it. She was Elsa, the obsequious cook that never served without smiling, never failed with a shove if you barred her way.

A second student approached the podium. He was carrying a large bouquet of flowers, dodging wads of bread as he moved forth amongst his peers. He offered the flowers, receiving a hug that brought all to their feet with applause. All except me. Until I was hoisted by the two I had sat between.

Once standing, I was relieved to hear the softening of applause. I could sit again. I could stew content in my homesick broth of isolation. I could lambast the pueling, spoon-fed, lot of them.

I began to sit, was hoisted again as they began banging the floor. They were banging in bursts that matched the growing thunder of their now unified claps.

“Clap!” Cried the girl. Her eyes daffy with the torpor.

“What?”

“Clap. Stomp. Let it out for chrissakes!”

Let it out. Why not? Tip the scale. Sink in order to rise. Escalate. Attain the birdseye.

“Birdseye!” And I was stomping so hard that splinters of shock quivered the length of my shins. Stomping all of table one into a dutch casserole of plasma and flesh. Then all of table two. Then three. Then singing. They were singing. Five hundred strong. And in English. So I sang with them, the harsh resonance of their teutonic inflection surging into a wave for the meek, unsuspecting Elsa. A wave ridden at its crest by the voice of an unlikely American, too far from my home to realize I was caught in its center. Immersed in the ridicule of a lyric I would never fail to recall.
Why was she born so beautiful
Why was she born so tall
She’s no fuckin use to anyone
She’s no fuckin use at all.
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