The Mitre

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Carole-Marie Doucet
While the tenant was away I slipped upstairs, into his room, investing it completely, re-arranging tables, chairs and pocketing his keys and rings for back-rent.

I read his mail at my leisure. Ransacking the room for hidden things I found in a cupboard rattling with naked hangers his journal — fairly dull, but yielding several humid confessions.

There was little food on hand. I made a simple meal of rice and tinned fish, wine, a single orange for dessert but — no fruit was ever so succulent as in that primed violated silence, like flesh keenly unwilling beneath a pirate.
I slept in my stranger's bed
a little fitfully for the rough tick
of his clock, its alien cadence;
for the imprint
of his narrow body in the sheets,
the scene of his hair, and two
dim smears of blood, dried
where hands and feet
must have been —

No one knew I was there.
Once the old woman
from the room upstairs
knocked — I did not answer and she went.
I heard her amble off, rattling
silver for the rent.

Which I didn’t want.
I’d taken more, eaten my fill
of another’s secret
life, left him nothing.
I occupied, acquired him.
scoured his bones for scandal
The room is mine, he only leased it.
I drink his wine and his health —

LOON IS NO SHADOW

Powerboats quit the lake
by dusk you hear
loons sighing
night breeze, forms
moving in the wood
past the cabin

with supple force, drive
that forms me to the wood
and the wood to me

The loon is no shadow
despite its cry
The loon is not only
the wind it employs

Now with boats silent and absence of man-
made things informing
this wild, admit
you’ve never been
yourself only.
For too long
a painted mime, performing
for coins in the city.
Your words lost in gesture
and symbol, the foreign
slur of morning traffic.
If a tree fell in the city
would the sound be
heard? You’re a stranger
to sound, have forgotten it.
And while you listen here
do not suggest
the loons grieving dusk
in the island’s lee
are grieving, they are not
means to your ends
or your meanings.
The loon is no shadow
despite its cry,
no symbol of spirit

The loon is more true
than the name it inherits

Danielle Efralm

HAPPINESS

I sought for it in the faces of others
and I realized their search paralleled mine
I travelled the world
thinking to find it where I was not
Yet it remained elusive,
always one step ahead of me
— or so I thought.
At times I believed I had found it
but it absconded without a trace
Perplexed at its whimsical appearances
I thought to look within me
and alas, I discovered its crypt.
But the delusion of its evasiveness
was much greater than its discovery
and my sanity allowed me but a mere glimpse
before I, once again,
reveled in the tragedy of its elusiveness.
The Runner

Nine full moons of constant preparation
Seemingly inadequate for what awaits ahead
The day of the race is a memorable one
beginning with a bloody thrust
and a painful cry of reluctant release
No-one knows how long the race will last
It is a test of ultimate endurance
which no-man wins
The course is difficult and hazardous
for it is held in a jungle
of inevitable destruction
The branches of the trees sting the body
as the runner dashes past them
The ground is rocky
piercing the naive feet
of the superficially clothed runner
leaving a trail of crimson liquid
The cuts are deep and painful
as they carve the evidence of all that passes
At every corner,
behind every seemingly natural phenomenon,
beneath the unstable earth
there are inescapable obstacles
with the power to eliminate
a runner from the race
At last the glimmer of the end is seen

the runner has reached
the limit of his endurance
A quick reflection
of the painfully tedious marathon
brings tears to the eyes
now drowned in loneliness
The end is so near,
it is frightening
for no-one knows what exists beyond the race
As each runner reaches the finishing line
thinking they have won
They realize the futility of the race
And as one-by-one crosses the inevitable line
their foolish hopes and dreams are shattered
for they discover oblivion.
Mary Welsh

HIS CALL

She’s waiting for his call again, this time he’s only 2 days late.

The ticking of the clock weighs on her nerves. She winds it up, it gives her something to do, some control.

Each sound, each time the phone rings, her heart stops.

She fears to go out, lest she miss his call, yet she does because she fears to be seen waiting for his call.

Suzanne Desloges

MA TRISTESSE

Ce soir,
Ma tristesse est comparable
À l’ensemble des feuilles tombées
Je suis arbre
Depouillé de ses capacités

Ce soir,
Ma tristesse est comparable
A un piano
Mis au rancart
Pour son antiquité

Ce soir,
Ma tristesse est comparable
À une plante, qu’on arrache à la vie
Devenue une fleur séchée
On oublie son identité

Ce soir,
Ma tristesse est comparable
À l’oiseau de la liberté
Qui pendant une bagarre
S’est trouvé blessé

Il est là, inactif
Cherchant le souffle de vie
Le miracle à la survie
CE CIMITIÈRE D'ANTAN

Ce cimetière d'antan
Où toute jeune
Je venais avec mon père
Nourrir mon âme
De mysticisme
Que dégageait la terre en fécondation
Je me rappele,
Fixant la plaie ouverte, de celle-ci
Que les adultes lui déposaient son enfant
Fruit d'un monde trompé durement
Avec chagrin et gémissement
Et,
Qu'au fil des ans
La terre cicatrisait
Sa plaie,
Couvant son enfant
Secrètement
A un repos éternal.

STEVEN HARRIS

A GAME OF GOLF

So little Caramosque swings at the golf ball with a seven iron, convinced he’s going to hit it to kingdom come, and ends up whiffing completely. He stumbles backwards, set off balance by his swing. Grumbling he takes another shot. He’s so sure that he’s going to land it twenty yards away that he ends up performing what we in the underworld would call “the perfect swing”. And what do you know? Little Caramosque smacks that little sucker so close to the pin that we’re sure if we jump hard enough, in it’ll go.

Afterwards he told his mother: I almost got a hole-in-one, almost. And who are we to argue, we say: Yes, came inches from being a hole-in-one.

Then little Caramosque goes off and tells his friends: I almost got a hole-in-one today. And they all come over to make sure it’s so. We say, well what could we say but: Yes, almost.

Next weekend, I tell little Caramosque, I will take you golfing again. To him, it’s a big trip. It takes a good forty minutes by car, and the only set of golf clubs he can get his hands on is one that someone found at the dump one day. Those are the clubs he uses and I said to him: Little Caramosque, until you get better, you’d better keep that set you got right there. Eventually next weekend rolls around and I march right in to little Caramosque’s house and say: I’m ready to go golfing, are you?

There he is, I see him, set down right in the middle of the floor. Little Caramosque. I say, let’s go.

He looks up at me and says he ain’t going. I ask why but he won’t say nothing but “I ain’t going”.

Well what can I do? My plans for the day included little Caramosque but he won’t come along; I’d have to go alone. But on the way I decide to see if Crazy Sid is in, maybe me and him could go. It worked out that he was, and even though he was the one who came with me last weekend, along with little Caramosque, he don’t mind going again.

That day the clouds hung so low it looked like if you took a hard nine iron shot you could put it right through one of them. Seemed kind of like golfing indoors. Well Crazy Sid put a couple in the bushes and we spent about an hour collecting balls back there that people had just forgotten about. We must have got about twenty of them. Crazy Sid and I split them up — ten each — and went back to the club house.
When we went in to the pro shop, on the desk was a sign: We buy used golf balls. I showed it to Crazy Sid and he said maybe we should ask for how much.

The guy gave us $5.00 each, fifty cents a ball. What did we need with twenty balls, Sid says, we can always get more next time we come. So Crazy Sid and me leave the place $10.00 richer. On the way home we saw a garage sale where this old lady had cleared out this barn behind her house, her attic, and her basement. I looked around and saw an old set of golf clubs, eight pieces, all for five bucks. I thought little Caramosque might like them and my five bucks, well, I got it from golf, might as well keep it in golf. I bought the clubs and threw them in back of the truck. After I dropped off Crazy Sid I headed over to little Caramosque’s house.

He wasn’t home but his mother said she’d give them to him. She invited me in for a cup of coffee and asked me all kinds of questions about the big brother program and how it was I got Caramosque. We talked a while and then I left.

Little Caramosque called me a little while ago and said he liked the clubs very much. He said he polished them about 100 times and washed the bag 100 more. I said maybe next weekend we could go golfing and little Caramosque said his mother said that now it was O.K.

I put on my old deerhide jacket and went down to the 7-11 on the corner for some milk for my dinner. My hair was still in a pony tail from golfing and some kids went hooping and hollering around em I thought I could have smacked them, but they didn’t know any better.

Anyway I figure I’ll pick up little Caramosque about 9:30 and we’ll head over to the course. Maybe the clouds will be low again and me and him can shoot one right up to heaven.
Penny Nutbrown

ONE

One is less than two
but more than none
and I am one.

POEM FOR DANIEL

On the porch, in the rain
we read Winnie the Pooh
and I imagined you
as Christopher Robin
alone in the garden
so far from the house
way back at Pooh Corner
so far from the house
and with night coming on

David Jackson

CYCLOSTYLED

Dat, dicat, dedicat;
And then absconding with mite and chalice.
She closes the book on the Bishop.
A new leaf, a new ledger,
New sermons, new judgements,
New messages and meanings.
But it chastens her to reflect upon just
How repetitious decisions and experiences are:
Cycle after cycle,
Cycle within cycle,
Cycles inextricably convoluted.
Alas, the prologue of the new ledger
Reads strangely like the epilogue of the last:
Absque ulla nota.
Esiri Daflewahre

if you cannot be the snail
crawling in cries through life
then be the mushroom
poisonous in the east but meat
in the west

or
rather be the unicorn
legendary in his phallic horn
elusive in his sweetness

but do not be all at once

for in the murky vegetation of mushrooms
inside of which stands an elegant unicorn
might be creeping a crippled snail
speeding away from the axe of the millipede
ambushing a million goblins of self doubts

because beneath the radiant wash of the moon
lies a virgin raped severely in a swoon
beneath me
i lie in a coma of plural possibilities

waiting

Rebecca Harries

THE BARTER

My child was laughing
when the beasts of autumn,
strange striding-foot creatures
of looking eyes of glass
and pale bodies that offend
my pious red heart came
and knocked on our little
blonde door. Their arms
replete with wares undreamt by me.

An eight-eyed cup winked
opal at me from its silly
gilt. The slender pines twitched
with the foreign scent of crimson
incense, sweet as my child
stretching out his little
green-clothed arms in want of
gifts, rare as heaven,
dear as broken bread.

The embracing vines of our
yellow-blossomed home spoke
to me in warning
tones of dire means and ends.

The beasts are soft. I
cannot meet their butter
eyes, their pudgy noses and
stodgy toes harrow
me but they show
me tiny metal men that dance or die
no wider than my child's eye
and golden toads that streak the sky
whenever they see a humble fly.
And they show me quetzals in a globe of glass
and fires that burn and scorch the grass
and I cannot catch breath and ask
Why they take
my ruddy child between their
pudgy hands and stare
with solemn eyes.

Then the beasts brought forth
a crown of spider diamond
web with magic on the edge
and glory on the rise.
It held my life within its shining cage.

I have no coin
I could not pay.
The beasts are traders.
The beasts with tear-filled eyes
and for the crown
they took my child,
my laughing child.

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Steven Heighton

THE CONDEMNED

Four guards woke him in the dim silence before dawn. And stood by his
cot, waiting.

"Please hurry," one of them said. "We are late."
The man nodded, blinking sleep from his eyes, forcing himself to sit up.

"Five minutes," said another guard, and the four turned and left the room.
briskly, their boots clapping sharp on the hard floor. They would be waiting
outside.

Alone, the man changed quickly into the set of clothes draped over a chair
by the bed. They were simple, khaki-coloured, trousers and a shirt, a thin
black belt. From under the chair he took a pair of boots, black and knee-
high, then sat on the cot to pull them on.

The boots were tight, and he struggled with them, shuddering with the
effort and the cold of the room. Then rose and moved with clipped stride to a
cubicle in the corner, urinated, emerged, and walked along the cement wall
to a small oval sink. There was a mirror above, tiny but polished, and he
shaved before it, then wet and combed his hair.

When he had finished he paused, staring with absorption into his heavy
eyes, following the deep folds that sagged beneath them. Recognizing the
bone shadowed darkly under his pale skin.

After a moment, he bent and rinsed his face and hands in the sink.

When he had towelled himself dry he checked his watch: it was twenty-
five past six. The guards were shuffling outside in the hall, muttering
restlessly, impatient. After a last brief look in the mirror, he walked across
the room, opened the door, and stepped outside.

The guards stood back as he emerged, handling their automatic weapons
uncomfortably, pointing them away from him, down at the floor. Except
one of them, a tall, red-faced man with thick glasses, who carried only a
pistol.

"Please, this way," the tall one said. And started up a narrow corridor,
long, low-ceilinged, damp and grey.

The man followed, his three heavily-armed guards marching beside him
with a quick and even stride. He fell in time with them, the sound of their
steps together in the low hall dull and hollow as a muffled drum.
The five turned a sharp corner and continued along another windowless corridor. The walls leaning close around them seemed to swallow sound, yet the air became warmer, fresher; a door appeared at the far end. Ahead, the tall guard glanced down at his watch, muttered something and accelerated slightly — but it was hardly necessary, they were almost to the door. Then they were stopping before it and the tall guard leaned against its iron bulk and forced it slowly outward.

A widening bar of brilliant light shot into the dim hall, and with it came a deep resonant hum, a layered murmuring as of thousands whispering together. Air poured into the corridor, warm and fragrant, carrying the smells of early morning. As a clock somewhere nearby struck the half-hour, the guards led the man out onto a wide stone platform.

In the open the light was blinding; the sun had just risen over the city, swollen and distorted with refraction — a crimson oval flooding the platform and the great square below it with harsh, uniform light. It revealed an enormous crowd filling the square, swaying and cheering with abandon. The sound was a solid roar that grew deafening as the man moved towards the edge of the platform, guards still around him.

Then they fell back and he stood alone.

For a moment the roar continued, then it changed and took on a rhythm; something was being shouted again and again, it was his name, they were chanting it. And gesturing, waving frantically. Pointing at him Saluting him.

He raised his hands for silence and stepped to the microphone. From the square below a hundred thousand upturned faces watched, obedient.

They are mine, he whispered, so that no one — not even his guards — could hear.

They will do as I ask —

---

Kevin Halligan

WHEN THE MANIFESTATIONS GOT HEATED

Take action you young you able arise,
People must be made to realize.

Charged thus, we entered ‘A Surging Tide’,
Sheltered a few from the worst of each side,

Secreted nine on the walled pebble roof,
Branded all our crowd who held aloof,

Forged passes, twice chartered a boat,
Missioned hard for the old man fasting.

Later it was ourselves we kept afloat.
WITH A GUITAR, VIA JOAN*

Now you're telling me you're not nostalgic
Give me another word for it

You suffered sweeter for me than anyone
I've ever known... you know
knowing me, naturally

How I dread when the evening comes
I cannot be what you want me to be

Look, get my smoking cap and shut up, will you, the jacket too

Your eyes are bluer than robins' eggs
my poetry's lousy you say

so I say yes i say, may I go on reading

You original vagabond you whitewashed phenomenon if I should die today

I'd be mighty bloody glad no question
Cor, look at this.
'57 Volkswagen. Oval window, orig. paint. $3,000 neg. 742-7263

Now you're telling me you're not nostalgic
Give me another word for it

*Female voice lifted from the song
‘Diamonds and Rust’, by Joan Baez.

OFF THE INTERSTATE

From the Texaco we short-cut to Venango along Federal 62 — on the FM a homily in local Polish. our child fee-fie-fumming spiritedly in back — and where the shoulder widened, decelerated for a man, forearm raised, some stranded urbanite.

A sooty Peterbilt trumpeted annoyance; canvas flapped, the man ignored us. A silhouette in transitu snubbed our hood to correct the well-intentioned roadside scene: huntsman's tweed, the leather-gloved perch, a small diurnal bird of prey.
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