

Eclipsing the Stars

My Old Country grandma, a Czechoslovakian wild woman, paddles a red canoe with two smooth oars. She wears her sleek brown hair in braids, topped with a crown of squawking orange parrot feathers. Her fur-lined mittens sprout six fingers on each hand and she sleeps with green-headed ducks swimming in soft flannel. A garter snake's yellow stripe circles the soles of her handmade boots, squishing deep in black mud. Flashing her silver eyed charm, she lulls steelhead to sleep, and claims a Czech speaking owl as her golden-eyed friend.

She passed on her looks to my mama, a country western singer who wears white buckskin chaps, electric blue fringe snaking down the sides. Mama sings with a twang that makes you remember everything you thought you forgot rides a steel guitar, blinking stars rolling over the edge. She drives a redberry bus, brown painted monkey smiling off one side, and a wide open palm on the other. Moving with a rock-a-billy band of four bearded men, she's got a trucker for a daddy and he calls her 'My Sweet Sal.'

I'm next in line, a smart mouthed girl-child, leading an army of women with grey, curly hair and wide open eyes. I carry a spear that don't talk back, screech an Amazon war cry anytime I feel like it. My hands pull out misery, easing it off like a rain dwindling down, and I dream in a round purple tent, guarded by a sharp-toothed black bear who thinks I'm her cub. Wearing scarlet high heels for digging my enemies graves, I top off their tombstones with skinny grey popsicles, sending their souls up to Heaven, stuffed fat with old lies.

We dance together, we three Czechoslovakian blood women, and you can see us twirling about on nights when the stars don't shine cause they're hiding behind our round swirling skirts.

Diane Ponti

Before the World

The old man sits before the tri-fold mirror
his starving sticks facing
outward
away from his unsolved mass
laid out before the world.
His bubbling fat
gurgling beneath him,
butter flakes tossing and turning
within him,
yellow bubbles
and pinkish stew
explode in sunspot heat
as he shifts.

The crack marks of stretched flesh
like a dental dam across him
pulling,
a tug of war of hooks and chains
embedded in his knapsack.
His nipples abused,
purple
pulled
tugged by minions
ripping the hooks
itching his eyelids
biting his boils
for a quarter.

His skin drips from his chin,
the white taffy drawing back and forth
as he talks.
His hands are real,
chiseled down
like a rock,
rough
like a statue
enclosed
rounded rivers
pausing,
pushing toward his center,

The old man waits in his easy chair
before the mirror
for a heart attack to take him,
waits to vomit his rainbow
before the mirror
gagging at what he is
what he has done.

He moves,
the hooks bind him,
make him bleed
they stretch the streams
across him
across his globe,
covering him in lipid yellow
liquid
making him squeal,
churning his flakes
burning the hair on his back,
breaking his bare bones
digging into the marrow
releasing him.

The old man sits before the mirror
in his easy chair
before the world.

Christopher Haberman

Poetry

Standing around at the Base of the Platform

I had grown accustomed to standing around
at the base of the platform
with the rest of the crowd
coaxing others to climb the tall ladder
up high to the top of the beam
where the platform sways in the wind.

and once we get someone
up there
on the swaying platform
it's fun to cheer them on
and get them to do tricks
and ask each other
'Do you think she'll jump?'
'Maybe, if we ask her to.'

So I and the crowd begin the chant
to the woman who is high on the platform
'Jump. Jump. Jump.'
and what a good sport she is
to let her body fall from the platform
on down to the awaiting hard ground,
letting herself bounce and splat
letting us all shout out
our glee and envy.

But then,
the crowd soon grew bored
and looked at me
asked me if I would mind
climbing the ladder up high
to play on the swaying platform
so that they could shout at me from below
to go ahead and let myself fall
down to the hard ground
so that they (the crowd) could see
what it would be like
for someone like me
to do the dirty deed
to pacify the greed
of the crowd
at the base of the platform.

Robert A. Hibberd

From the faculty . . .

Learning Translation

I wake under the teal
blue cry wondering
why a jay has flown into my house.
Its voice seems to come
from the knife rack
near s over faucets.
I feel the blue
crest of its cry; a shiny opening pulses
against my sleep-bare skin.
It's not a jay but my yellow green parakeet
imitating her wild cousin
in this time when fall flies in.
My parakeet matches
the yellow-green leaves
integrated on the beech tree outside,
though the caged one has
her own translation.

Just as my parakeet learned jay,
a man I love has
learned the dialect of waterfalls.
I recall his body in
its particular translation of hard and flowing.
When he calls
from those curled places where wet lives,
I follow, talk back
to his anise-scented shadow
with my wild mint voice. I hear crickets
when his arms trail my back.
Some men I know
are land developers. They level,
then name places after what they've destroyed,
just as there are no evergreens
on this street called Cedar.

But here in this blue water-light
of early October
I know my breathing feels
free enough to imitate
the rhythm of that waterfall, his
body, where rocks settle in hollows
and yellow-green leaves ride water.
We meet with the blue-crested sound
of water where it touches down.

Diane Averill