



ON A CAKE OF ICE
BY FRED WOLVEN

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ON A CAKE OF ICE

BY

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Dedicated
in memorium
to my father
William Kenneth
1907-1969

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POETRY REVIEW IS A MEMBER OF COSMEP

A WET CHEEK, A SPRING DAY

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a spring grey-clouded
May morning

bees swarm in
neighbor's young birch
while onion soup
dribbled through
my two-day beard

a summer breeze
moisture-ladden
titilating leaf movements
and causing
Kamikaze flitting
of an electric wire
abandoned tattered
box kite

I spent the afternoon
in a corner of the
museum garden
scribbling
in my notebook

the refrain of
a black mass hymn
altering my thoughts
disoriented recollecting
the old beekeeper's
fatal seizure about dusk
and his daughter's
hysterical shrieks
foretelling his death

they found
wild flowers of Rome
inside his ring

C&O FREIGHT

4
bearing down on my
consciousness, whining
past, winding thru
a Michigan forest,
vanishing into a stand
of jackpine.

'THE NIGHT HAS INFINITE

eyes'
 & the most profitable
often seem impossible

 one bird
soaring / my daughter
 wishing
sees him

 diffused thru
my tissue I enter
 K.'s journal :
pits /
 torture / despair
focusing -
 in sun-pained heat /
 violence /
 their laughter -
my mocking terror

fingers coupled
 pleading I
break peelings
 skeptical -
the absolute is there
but nearly incomprehensible

THE NEXT GO-ROUND

5

Dark eyes,
decades' drenched
in an old
strong-boned
Black woman.

In a hotel
next to an Irish bakery
I move in dark waters
knowing the islands between
me and the small girl
in a white dress
walking over the park bridge
as I watch from the window.

AFTER

an unhappy love affair
I am a clown
bad luck
"artistic decline"
forlorn & desolate
I walk across campus
over muddy & uneven ground

the complex truth
never catches up
with the moment

my papers
destroyed by fire
my water-color
looking more like a
flower arrangement

I smashed brushes
on the steps
of the New York Central
& walk over the bridge
into Island Park

'IN A QUARRY

of silences'
sitting all afternoon
in my backyard
with its puritanical trees
I listened for
a noiseless wind,
watched a thrush
doze on a bush,
and remembering
Lowell rebuffed the president
I took another step
in creating my poetic creed
and laughed from the belly.

'SOFT, BUTTERY MOUTH'
--C.P. Snow

she sat apart
a smiling face
a kind of honesty
rooted to a yellowed stone bench
she puffed up
my unrest of longing

walking through the windy street
down the block through dark trees
I kicked a tin can into the gutter

the sun was still above the top of the apartment building
last night's rain dripped from the branches
and she

with a 'soft, buttery mouth'
became a realized image
in our moment close to each other

MI PADRE DUERME

rain
 roads
 June shower-dusted
rain
black cemetary flowers
rain
 moist vineyards
 alluvial soil-based
rain
with its strange violin solitude

Mi padre duerme.

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BREATHING IN THE DARK ON A CAKE OF ICE

details of newly-married life
form a milky substance
a vaudeville act
the bleat and whimper
of a number of years without money

when i finally reread Blake
in the birdless mist
of a dark morning silence
managing the motion of stone

the stucco streaked
cooled
cracked

my mind
mollusk-like
sluggish, boneless, soft-bodied
locked in an unfamiliar stream
and
the window-frames
breathing in the dark on a cake of ice
reciting jingles to each other
develop the sensibility
that 'this is a particularly dangerous business'

IN AN AIR OF RECKLESS BRAVODO

8

in an air
of reckless bravodo
he
edged along a
shattered glass littered footpath
through thick undergrowth
lining the river

attracted by
faint sounds of lutes
too-willing imagined instruments
he emerged
a live creature
complete with
electrical skin and glaring eyes

BORED WITH MYSELF

& my inability
to limit myself
I remembered
the lyrical quality of childhood
the quaint picture books /
the strange sometimes tragic
farm chickens /
the raving lunatics
who gathered at mothers

now
envy & jealousy
always enter into
those watery moments alone
which I am unable
to repeat or communicate
when without their 'nobility of poverty'
I move through child's play
to the recognition
that I am not a Christian.

"PERHAPS THE SAME GIRL IS YET LIVING THERE"

9

news of childhood:
a brick bench greenness
watch-like chestnut trees
clumsy forgotten houses
of different-sized spiders

pale young girl
a child
a transparent lotus
soft as early snow

listen through the afternoon rains
and thunder in ruby-colored
cloud-dishevelled air
to songs of the cricket
the strident melodic cry of night

POEM ENDING WITH A LINE FROM DURRELL'S "THE TREE OF IDLENESS"
for gary snyder

heat of the half-cooked burnt-pudding sun

pebbles
 cracking under callused
 cement-stiff heel

dirt-filtered sand
 aged in scum
from tide and squall waves

near identity
in the grass-coated dune

 twenty minutes to
 an east coast Athens
 along a cobblestone street

"Silence of lips and minds
 which have not spoken."

CHILDREN CRYING ON THE STAIRS

10

a real bird flies
above the wet grass
morning shutters are flung open
early spring fragrances
burn in the mind

walking a narrow bricked street
in the urban renewal area
I moved through one scene
of our Roman tragedy
watching
children crying on the stairs
between the darkness and light
of Sunday's, Monday's, Tuesday's,
and Wednesday's dawns....

ONCE YOU UNDERSTAND YOUR OWN DRAGON
YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE AFRAID ANYMORE

"I lose and find myself in the long water
---Theodore Roethke

wind slits
a restless forest of Tuscan pines
under the high black sky

the cavity of an old tooth
brings the near pain
of my cardoor-slammed fingernail

i sit in a chair in his home
watching through a weather-stained window
the jam-jar fill of new-fallen night rain

from a belly of reason
anguished thoughts that might have been
ooze
no roses in my mind

my father slept in a tideless night's
shadow of death
i won't be afraid anymore
once i understand my own dragon

NO ONE LAUGHS ABOUT IT ANY MORE

11

"Wherever death may surprise us, let it be welcome"
--Che Guevara

hanging around the streets of Paterson
waiting for unemployment checks
occasionally standing in the sun

one fellow dials his radio
switching station to station
crackling static. . .

"Hey, Transistor, turn that damn thing off!
You really cut me with your flippin'."

"May, go stick yourself!"

two young guys, wearing yellowed t-shirts,
scuffle on the sidewalk
one starting to rough it up
gets a broken nose
when the other guy
losing his temper
smashes him in the face

other fellows ride by in a car
circle the block
stop 'n talk
when two more leave with them
the remaining stoop-gutter gang
speculates on what they're up to

a scrub woman yells out a window at her husband
to get up & give her a hand with some rugs
he yells back an obscenity
but goes

neighbors laugh . . .

moving along the street through gutters
in dizzy caterpillar-like patterns
my desire to survive is revived

now when speaking
its in the embarrassed tones
of a dehumanized animal
when I joke
'no one laughs about it any more'

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