

Fetching

John F. Sherry, Jr.

Installed for years on that great hallway wall
Above the landing leading to the stairs
Of my bright attic office aerie perch,
A print of Le Cathédrale de Rouen,
Façade et Tour d'Albane in weather grey
Instructed me at every steep descent
In the sharp patience needed to paint light.

When I remove my glasses and regard
A world that a mere blink ago was crisp,
The burred blur warming softly as it spreads,
I conjure Monet layering his hues
In hot pursuit of evanescent light
Retouched in recollection over years
In studios and nightmares and cafés.

My Lab loved lingering along the threshold,
Between the worlds of scholarship and sleep,
Her paws and muzzle dangling over stairs,
Her milky eyes fixed far up on the wall,
Rapt in contemplation of the church,
As she lay nestled in the padded mat
I laid for her atop the stairway crest.

To shake things up I rotated the print
And hung a woolen blanket in its place,
A woven Raven and a Knowledge Box,
The Tlingit trickster Singletary pressed
Into a candescent auroral dance,
Hues cool and warm converge upon the disk,
A feral fetal cradling of the sun.

Enlightenment is always drenched in fire
And stolen from the plank house of the old,
Unboxed and borne in beak into the world
So Raven gave the gift of light to men,
The graft of moon, of stars, of sun, of bright.
I learn this every time I flip the switch,
And let the stair rail guide me in the dark.

My Lab, now old, no longer makes the climb,
Can't bask in Raven's brazen act of love,
Prefers the parlor couch beside the hearth.
A terrier tends the stair head in her stead,
Indifferent to the blanket's felted hand.
He nestles in the cushion belly up,
Ignores illumination as he snores.

Some formline totems float in waking dreams,
As art moves through the house and through the world.
Sun spills from carved box and from Gothic arch,
The glow informing animal and man.
Stippled afterimages, impressions,
The warmth of dogs drawn close like a worn shawl.
I've spent a lifetime moving toward the light.

Katoomba

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The hazy shimmer bluing from the micro mesh
Of oil droplets bursting in the sunlight,
Cleansing skin and sinus with a eucalyptus mist,
So quite unlike my own wild space at home.
Entranced by forms inscribed onto the rock,
The shadow of a sky tram spoils
My Raiders of the Lost Ark moment,
Skimming silently across the scarp,
The water swallowing all the clanks and calls
In its steep tumble down the scraggly face.
Breathing ever shallower in my slow ascent,
I mark a forked formation through the leaves,
The tines three towers of stone against the sky,
A comb of many colors in my camera's cluttered screen.
I spy on the Three Sisters from the blind,
Their weird gaze borne on solemn shoulders
Not of dancers but of sentinels set in place
To charm the landscape living in their grace.

I rework an ancient story I've received these past few weeks,
In several forms, from many doubtful hearts.
An ageing shaman shuffling through the bush
In search of food, to keep his daughters safe
From creatures foraging on the forest floor,
Settled the three on a cliff crag far above,
Where each surveyed the world before her feet.
One day a startled sister sent a rockslide to the valley,
And disturbed a sleeping Bunyip, who went searching for the
source.
Sensing his daughters' terror as they stood to be devoured,
The shaman cast a mantic bone before the Bunyip,
Astonishing the sisters, who were petrified in love.
Shape-shifting to a bird, the bone retrieved, then lost,
The shaman fled the Bunyip in a flock of feathers,
Condemned to overfly the great rock pillars 'til the bone is found,
Restoring his lost daughters to the quick.

Descending these blue mountains on a train,
Past Leura, Bullaburra and the rest
Of these small lyric outposts in the bush,
The easy swaying clacking of the car
And sunlight through the window charms my heart.
I have restored stoned children of my own
Knapped sharp as flaked obsidian and as dark,
Their undone consecration of jigged bone,
Whittled by a father's whetted feathers.
Three sons with Bunyip legends stored in dreams
Walled up until Katoomba called. The bluff
Sororal petroglyphs like sirens lured
Another parent hiking through the woods,
To founder on the shoals of memory,
His love as desperate as a shaman's spell.

string theory
John F. Sherry, Jr.

tie separate loadstones to a brace of lines
then set them swinging in a tandem arc,
and watch them try to settle into plumb.
repulsion sends stones racing from embrace,
attraction draws them close enough to kiss.
this brief flirtatious dance is smartly called
by puppeteers that few of us can see.
like fishing with a magnet for a hook,
we levitate above the stuff we love
and gravitate toward the stuff we loathe.
we feel the forces coursing through the line
as we correct the swaying of the pole.
between the yin of yen and yang of yoke,
we hesitate, to savor while we choke.

CARDINAL CUENTO TIANDA

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