

Songs from the Edge

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I
I. After the Fall
Two arms have I,
two legs, two feet,
two eyes to gaze
on all I meet;
two ears locate
the speaker's site,
each side I know
as left or right.
Inside, two chambers
take in blood,
and two pump out
the crimson mud;
two lungs, two kidneys
in me nest,
but on my ribs
lies just one breast.

This isn't how I
looked when born,
but one was bad
and from me torn.
It makes me sad
to see me so,
one side a breast,
the other, no.
But deep inside
I am aware
this is a lesser
cross I bear.
What is to come
will far worse be
than seeing this
asymmetry.

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II. Chemo and Gould

I lie on my side like a shell on the beach,
 legs curl in a spiral, head bent to my knee,
 as I slumber, the tide slowly rises and fills
 every angle and curve
 every corner and sac.

The sea, Mother Ocean, with thick, turbid waters,
 will rob precious dust and leach salt from her daughter.

The tide, now advancing, made bold by a tempest
 that visits these waters in too frequent cycles,
 disturbing the nap of this storm weary traveler,
 testing her stance on a buffeted shore:
 approaching waves beat her,
 retreating waves drain and erode flesh
 wherever a portal they breach.
 The storm, like an engine
 with deafening beat and cacophonous shrieking
 is bursting my head, laying blood at my feet.

Through such madness and howling, I think I hear Glory:
 crystal percussion, delicious and light.
 I attend to this song and its rhythmic precision,
 forgetting the tempest, ignoring the storm.
 A song so seductive, expressive and lyric
 made warm by the voice of the exquisite player.
 He sings from a shore where no hurricanes howl
 and the Ocean is gentle
 with warm tides to wash him
 and zephyrs to cool him.
 No storm surge, no blood pools,
 just sleep, plenteous sleep.

To gain such surroundings would I join the minstrel.
 Were I to let go and flow out with the tide,
 would the storm lay me down on his safe, distant shore?
 So close, I can touch it, (my knee starts to buckle) so real I can see him.
 He studies my posture through cavernous eyes,
 awaiting my fall as his song beckons: rest!
 Exquisite musician, you
 sailing the heavens, I
 must join your chaconne and travel the stars. . .
 but not now, dearest comfort, not yet, great companion.
 I'll stand and hold fast to each stick on the pier,
 and I'll shudder as gales tear the flesh from my soul.
 Yes, I'll stand in this place, and these storms I'll survive,
 for I, unlike you, will sound best when heard live.

III. Transplantation

Frozen seeds raised from slumber,
in viscous suspension
that causes its chalice of white
to turn silver with sweating.

Through mist, a hand reaches
to force the cold slush through my heart
where it thaws, giving life
to omnipotent forbearers.

Past lungs, neck and head, they swim
homeward to spawn. Some seeds
lost in the tumult. A few, precious
few find the marrow bed.

The icy elixir is
searing my core; stench pervades
every pore and it sickens
the angels who soothe me still.

The vile juice conceals its
rescuing power: it is
my sole hope. This foul fuel
from my past is my future.

IV. Acts

Who is this man?
Whose hands once pressed
A young and fragrant flesh
To coax its anxious passion forth,
Now mop a tepid brow
And cradle a rank and bed-sore frame. . . .

Who is this child?
Whose laughter rings
Across the swamps, the hills and fields,
And smiling image hovers
Above the unhappy indisposed
To bless the failing heart to strength. . .

Who is this friend?
Once dressed to play
In sharing give and take,
Whose quiet vigil guards the weak,
Who washes sanguine, soiled garb,
While asking but a hand to keep. . .

*And they were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other
tongues
As the Spirit gave them utterance.
The multitude came together and were confounded
Because that every man heard them speak in his own language.
And they were all amazed, saying one to another,
“What does this mean?”*

V. Restoration

Snow is falling,
beautiful snow,
each flake unique and delicate.
They gather, they stick,
they grow in number.
Winter's frost
bared the earth,
now her snow
caresses the land.
Its rough places,
smoothed,
valleys quilted
in snow.
Copious snow,
storing promise
that thawing will
nurture the Spring.
Res miranda!

Smug in my relative
leukocytosis,
washed in joy and delight,
I smile,
I glow,
I rest me content.
Road winding
before me,
I'll travel tomorrow.
Tonight's quiet
I savor.

If intellect dwells
in the brain,
if love is what
comes from the heart,
then it's strength
that grows in
the marrow.
O magnum mysterium!