

Unusual Woods

by Gene Tanta

Unusual Woods

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Ugly Accent:

XV [Yes, puppy dogs are cute and yours in no]

Woodland Pattern Book Center's Poetry Archive:

XIV [Suddenly, I will make miracles in the attic.]

Ploughshares:

XXIII [Your hair blown back by hope]

Part 1: Unusual Woods

- 6 I [Dear machete, dear solace:]
7 II [Where the ladies draw water, I wake up cloven whispers.]
8 III [In the darkest creases of my skin little acorns grow]
9 IV [I would rather live in the nearness before this time,]
10 V [The moon overhead, the root burls of desire below;]
11 VI [My devils work where the meat sleeps on my bones;]
12 VII [I yawn and stretch out my body, I grow cross-eyed]
13 VIII [I told them to find God in the fields]
14 IX [I was sunlight waiting on the bus, a fragile egg of nothingness.]
15 X [Draw the curtains, make the widows forget.]
16 XI [I am no calf slothful to the knife]
17 XII [Demur as a switchblade, I retract nothing]
18 XIII [Lorine, your faceless dolls await.]
19 XIV [Suddenly, I will make miracles in the attic.]
20 XV [Yes, puppy dogs are cute and yours in no]
21 XVI [Dear Nephew, I beg of you to take your startled daylight]
22 XVII [Who among the lowercase gods in full beard has not poked]
23 XVIII [Broad sheets of flame, demon tongues]
24 XIX [Dear Tacitus, she was crushed by crowds in the moonless,]
25 XX [Fear labors in mysterious ways, o fiery one.]
26 XXI [You never could play]
27 XXII [Down when I'm dead in my grave,]
28 XXIII [Your hair blown back by hope]
29 XXIV [What I saw, I gave a filthy tongue to.]

Part 1: Unusual Woods

I

Dear machete, dear solace:
I have failed to heed your last ghost-wail
under black waters
one centimeter out of lantern light;
I have flit my last sleepy kiss
as you dry;
famously, I have signed my last autograph
under your skin;
I have laundered
your fluorescent two-way eyes
inside my stairwell ...
Still the bones stick out of the poor
and someone's heels are silhouetted there.

II

Where the ladies draw water, I wake up cloven whispers.
Through alabaster horse teeth,
I offer you my azurite face
usurped and sharpened to stare into
and be a snake of pearly breath wafting
above the head of Adam's son, wafting above
the virgin Eve he left behind
dilated. He lay naked sleeping,
un-coerced by spats or miracles or anything.
He lay naked beyond the shadow of a doubt,
supine, spot-lit to an even goldenrod
through the bamboo that minces everything into evening.
Is this the promise through the valley ...

III

In the darkest creases of my skin little acorns grow
and grow. Such streets are swept by coughing people
and drunken people. Mustafa demands more from the deep well
to sweeten his daybed.

Mustafa, your surname past the ossuary taproots
braided into lovers' knots of knowing full well
a thing of beauty is a thermostat forever,
leaves mating on the wing
with death.

All the more to embolden your tongue with
to lap in the Emperor's pond of lovers' tears.

Mustafa cuts under the Eucalypt: a fool and his head are soon parted.
There is no other way to skin a tourist.

IV

I would rather live in the nearness before this time,
one centimeter out of nobody's business,
but I can't.

In the middle of squat night,
I would rather
blend with the stone than dig out the dead.

I would rather lick your dovetail joints
than rip an old bootstrap
digging out the dead.

I would rather piss in the desert moonlight
than give you a hand.

I would rather weep under iron fittings
than burn in the nearness before and after this one.

V

The moon overhead, the root burls of desire below;
silence in unusual woods.

I've got the authority-figure up on a lathe
puffing his brier pipe in the open air.

Over there,

the tight sex-kitten in jeans with her feet
swinging of laburnum and acacia.

Silence is a rhythm
that burns my tongue.

The fire marshal warned me against myrtlewood
but I fantasized with the gentle speech
of the mountain laurel floating on its back.

What I cannot hold, I blot my insides with ...

VI

My devils work where the meat sleeps on my bones;
my rocking-chair matches their labor with a sigh.
My devils eat at the Peacock's ugly feet.
My leathery thunder
on butterfly tables lay. Jesus cut a graceful figure
high up on the cross: his jet-black widow's peak,
a drawer of new ideas.
When the physics of his bones could no longer hold him up,
we developed the curbed cresting at such a time as this.
We smell the blood of English children
playing kickball in the yard; the barred windows say: stay.
I'll be the horse-joint fluid in your split-second whirl.
You can call me every cloud in the book.

VII

I yawn and stretch out my body, I grow cross-eyed
from the fishery stench. The roofer is late
from his second job of feeding his own flesh
to a hungry murderer
in Dante's personal vision of hell.
It weighs on him. Vehement raven before hale,
he squirms under the armpits
of the devil, stuffed with sisal leaves and sea salt,
and the opened mouths of gouty flesh-children.
The traditional information of night
plugs our ears with cornmeal polenta.
If he dallies down deaf in no amatory flame,
that's what the devil does.

VIII

I told them to find God in the fields
and on the path to overtake me before I reach Segovia.
Later, we fathered an argument
near the fireplace. All morning I had gathered chickpeas
in the garden. After sunset,
blindfolded by night, beloved,
you let me suffer
the sweet cauterization of fashionable men. Now let me
neither bathe nor count my wounds
but permit me to get mine.
Stammering and unknowing, I toiled
on a hillside among the aqueduct stones and workmen.
Chris, I'm down to the white meat.

IX

I was sunlight waiting on the bus, a fragile egg of nothingness.
The birds in the eaves added up to oak, ash,
little painted furniture survives. My sweet mortician
brushed my cheekbones; my feet were round or somewhat flattened
as light flattens water.
Someone chased a Grizzly through a forest-fire on TV
but I saw as through jewels.
My mortician has a joint brow, terrible stubble, and
an emperor's pond of lovers' tears.
I am a pond of lovers' tears
on sunflower-and-tulip inset panels surrounded by common brick.
Wide-mouth sunlight rimmed me silver etchings
and my eyes dripped ice-water.

X

Draw the curtains, make the widows forget.
Blackest day tastes and sings him
until sunsets withdraw their undying love.
Likewise, elders beat it
when the sky darkens with locust song.
Your beauty stinks of holocaust hair
and holocaust clothes.
There is a linger to the dead,
the whispered odor of hard-used animal,
tending toward the floor.
With wild mulberry grief,
she swears unkindness upon the urban air:
my steed no longer knows my name.

XI

I am no calf slothful to the knife
bellowing an oath of learning
circled in fleet flame, not a flock of wrens fighting
over leftover bits
in the early morning eves.
Coins are made for tossing up feeling good
not for envying the dead.
A shaft of smoke
and sentiment runs through me,
runs through us all:
the profile of a mean horse-driver
with his cold hands and hot whip
passing us slowly on the stone-cobbled streets.

XII

Demur as a switchblade, I retract nothing
in the one-way mirror of your itchy eye
and then we'll talk
over my footnotes. One morning,
the dream crawled down from the attic
into a great scroll of smoke
because a historian has got to eat, write history,
and eat again.
Walking at a smart pace,
trust your feel-good step,
your theories of the grim
awakened by the morning sun doling out the light
until the pretty flowers bring flowers.

XIII

Lorine, your faceless dolls await.
In that roadless-dark
the milliner hung herself. The museum photo
fades to black. Black Hawk,
blood-soaked, blood-blotted
peninsula light, northern country quite
rides the river trees down
and drinks in reflection.
In the pilgrim photo
you are all elbows and voiceover
under the passing dressmaker.
I miss you. I carry the longing with me.
Drink and drink of it.

XIV

Suddenly, I will make miracles in the attic.
I'll do the chicken drunk as hell.
It's spring for everybody else too, you know.
Lean in, *liebes kind*, speak into my curls
bitter little nothings: I am a garbled razor
thinking its way across your throat.
Your spit tastes like spit in your mouth
and your tongue is bite-size. Listen, I
didn't mean it that way. I'll make you make it make sense.
I let the sorry out of the bag
and stuffed you in instead and sold you to the gypsies.
With your no-nonsense hair, *mein liebes kind*,
please take me back into your hot, hot mouth.

XV

Yes, puppy dogs are cute and yours in no
exception, madam, but don't pretty please me inside
your bolted boxcars. You may not like it
but a quiet screw behind closed doors
will clear up that complexion. Tongues
are in the open mouths of fire dark and sharp
as sword blades: dark, madam, and sharp,
are also the crossed-out stars that just won't quit.
Where the night always tastes of human flesh,
I stir and question mark the ashes
charred into a pyre burning in reverse. As if! As if!
Specks fall on our shoulders, light enters our flesh,
you look away as the thick and semifinal snow falls on.

XVI

Dear Nephew, I beg of you to take your startled daylight
off of me.

Fear not, for the teeth with which you chew
will be counted by the waves as favored tokens.

When cicadas start to lose their voices
in the dark pit of history

and your love for me no longer sprints,
but ambles through the eras,

then shall sunshades rescue us like a flea, a holy grace
and provost to all newly married couples.

Fine, how the light was bright and played the scoundrel
atop the oaks. No sunbath after cold-bath

to look upon the cloud of death nearing the scientist of Vesuvius.

XVII

Who among the lowercase gods in full beard has not poked
his nose into your pot
against the garlic sauce
to only minutes later
play the soggy cat upon the roof
till you give in
and feed him
whatever you have on fire?
Ash and pumice fire from the blackened sky settle.
Clothes turn to scales and run teal
and purse up in the heat-vale as drake down does.
Helmsmen, to lessen others' panic,
ask for their baths.

XVIII

Broad sheets of flame, demon tongues
larger than I stand before you,
lick and suck our lengths and midsections
with saltwater tips
on the unfavorable shore
now more vivid in the nighttime,
in the open and strong tremors.
With pillows tied to our heads
for protection against the falling rock,
the smell of sulfur in the archived air
revives him:
then the flame that does not touch his body
but takes up all the rest.

XIX

Dear Tacitus, she was crushed by crowds in the moonless,
in the cloudy night, in the unlighted rooms above us.
She was a little amber swash through charred oak barrels.
Sellout panic brimming over the house seawall,
yet another monument to collapse.
Dazed as I was, nothing seemed to stay put,
stones failed to block cart wheels from rolling; I scolded the dawn
for being lazy but the dawn stayed lazy.
When the shoreline grew afraid of the land, uncle, I wrote
on how during the mother-frightener night I felt depthless fear.
Uncle, my sole and greatest consolation
was that the world was ending with me in it,
dwindled to lurid smoke in a faint fog as after an eclipse.

XX

Fear labors in mysterious ways, o fiery one.
The story of labor swings
and makes our terror run on time.
Our terror runs in the exciting corners of language:
burn alive if I catch.
The police hound on my trail
asking over all the wrong graves
with his teeth,
sniffing out my flinching heart.
A coal-black wretchedness,
a wormed-over wretchedness
stumbles into a woodlot. That's right, hand it over:
the gold shivers in your mind.

XXI

You never could play that thing
worth a goddamn
so how humiliated you will feel
when you watch me
eat you later
with a plastic fork and knife.
When the good knives are asleep
in the kitchen drawer,
we'll listen to the bad knives
slightly tremble.
We'll watch
the moon light up our bandages
and frighten us to death.

XXII

Down when I'm dead in my grave,
leaving all
my cigarette butts
in her lily yard,
not a word
before I talk to you.
It goes
without saying.
It goes
without saying.
It comes and goes
without saying
like a strange tongue in my mouth.

XXIII

Your hair blown back by hope
and teased by failure,
you want to do math like bricks do math.
Hold up mirrors to gods by the baker's dozen.
Knowledge becomes a layer,
means a look,
a tilt my skull to better
seesaw from this to back
to finishing for a kiss,
to lean on the fall of your hair
my thumb and forefinger:
like the rain
pooling gain by plurality.

XXIV

What I saw, I gave a filthy tongue to.
The outpost officer at the border
said he liked my poems, his hand resting on his gun.
Dirty, you bet it was dirty! I buried
a couple of ancestors with my tongue this morning
before retiring it live out
the fair remainder of its days
strolling on the beach listening to Bach.
I licked my fur slick with it,
up and down and sideways, until I vomited
a brownish muck on your trousseau.
Gentlefolk knew me by the cyst on my left testicle.
Ruffs threw stones at it on their way home from work.