

Wilderness House Literary Review 20/1

Ken Massicotte
kmassi poems

Kinship

Beyond the discipline
of housekeeping
in my cinder block dorm the worry rises like smoke
from buried peat.

I visit kin
but row out across the bay alone.
I talked to my sister
but cannot tell her
I'm watching from the water,
waiting for someone to reach in
and pull me up.

Last night --

*a train you hear
in the clear night air*

*the clack and whisper of wheels,
the firefly code of the disappeared*

*no whistle stops
only the whirr of wings --*

like blood, the black night
space beyond the Kármán line
where even satellites will decay.

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It's not always like this.
It's spring
and the leaves are giddy.

But my dreams are alleys
of cell blocks and broken brick;
animal trails
to riverside graves --
epitaphs, clan
I cannot forsake.

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All He Wanted

And at last it was enough. The man simply stood, staring down at his clean feet through the running water. The last of the world's muck was off.

The Conversations at Curlow Creek, David Malouf

All night his thoughts spiked --
the short nun who slapped his face;
his father ignoring him
as he waiting in the field with his gift, the orange;
calling his mother from a pay phone in Marrakesh,
the call to prayer, intimate from the minaret,
in the dying light.

The love he now knew he would never have --his humble father who
sometimes read the Bible, was alone at the end and wanted death to come.
His life would end at dawn --

all the mistakes that had taken him there had started from a feeling he
never understood --deeper than his bravado when he walked into a bar.
He knew no one would miss him --he'd thought of hiking into the moun-
tains and his body not found until spring --he lay still now in his cramped
cell turned to the wall. It was sleep he wanted without the dreams --

the prison nurse diluting the injection;
his parents in the basement cave
kneeling with the unnerved priest,
the whack of rain,
of earth to earth.

It was safety he wanted --the floating as his breathing calmed; curling in
the red dark in the winter wind. It was ice he would fall through and they
would stare through the plexiglass, smirking at his panic --it would be
bright

thick fog, screaming heartbeat, then burying black.

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When Death Comes

After Gustav Mahler: Ich Bin Der Welt Abhanden Gekommen

When death comes like a hungry bird
I will lay in her lap as I learned to do,
feel the anguish of what will come
of what has been.

*It was never an ocean
her heart a maelstrom
whirling dread
body after body
the dirty incarnation.*

When death comes like an angry bird
I will lay in her lap and listen,
breathe her solace
and believe I can swim.

When death comes like a frantic bird –
wings beating fear,
the air thick with prayer –
I will watch for shadows and disappear,
blanket myself as I learned to do.