

Locust and Marlin

Also by JL Williams

Condition of Fire

JL Williams

*Locust
and
Marlin*

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for James Iremonger

in whose heart I've found my home

✿

for Stewart Laing

poet of space

And the shapes of the locusts were like unto horses prepared unto battle;
and on their heads were as it were crowns like gold,
and their faces were as the faces of men.

—Revelation 9:7, *King James Bible*

The surest sign of wonder is exaggeration. And since the inhabitant of a shell can amaze us, the imagination will soon make amazing creatures, more amazing than reality, issue from the shell.

—Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*

Heron

Imagine a great silence
whose wings touch no branches.

Imagine a space demarcated
by lack of sound.

It flies very low to the water.
It stands very still when it lands.

Its strange beak opens.

November's Song

They took her down to the river,
held her mouth for pouring in.

The light through leaves.
A day like this.

Success can't be defined by whether
milk comes out of the milkweed's
squeezed bud. Or downy messages.
Honey from the honeysuckle's slid prick
sometimes touches the tongue.

A kind of music invented that day
of scattered leaves,
the bashed song of her hair.

A Tender Still

It was down by the river.
It was down where the fish get gutted
after being slammed on the boat-side.

A drowned mouse made
the world seem very big.

I kneeled, nearly, to see him.

The dirt was mucked
with leaf matter, half-dug roots.

I wanted to blow
life back into it but
the body was an old thing.

The river flowed.

Like Phaeton

1

There you are crying like a dog.
How does a dog cry?
Sliding on its ass to the sea,
sliding on a slide of tears and dog water,
sliding down sawgrass slicked to
sliced edges glassed with dog salt, diamond-hard
edges like fingernails that could cut glass.

There you are crying, throwing your tears
to one side and the other,
throwing tears to break them against a brick wall
so in slow-motion tears explode into globes,
each globe a glass ball flying through air
reflecting your gesture of frustration your arms
cast out at your sides *your face contorted*.

There you are crying like a dog,
feeling you're sliding down a bank toward the sea, afraid,
frustrated by the fact of your crying cuz a man
shouldn't cry, a woman or a dog
are the right sort of creatures for crying, for weakness, for
emoting when beaten but
wasn't it a woman said that to you in the first place?

Suddenly, mid-tumult, you remember
your father crying in a room of books,
books packing walls on shelves of oak,
his body a recognisable shape
outlined by shafts of sun
flickering with each shudder of pain-torn core.

2

My dad started talking about a chopper.
I licked my lip, first-furred, savouring
the salt-tang, lemon, margarita.

Wanted a cigarette, knew he wouldn't
approve. The bartender joked
with a local at the end of the long bar.

It was that kind of summer
when sunset mixes with the fake light
in the room, makes everything *glowing*.

He stopped then, said he couldn't... go on.
It jarred, the image of him
hanging, laying his eyes on, something.

3

He.

He. He.

He does not have the hair from your dream.

He does not have the skin you imagine.

He does not speak
as others do.

He does not stand long in the light
but walks away toward the source of it becoming
less of a figure and more of a point
around which light flickers.

Learning to Love the Present

And I can't *not* think of the remorse of Oedipus,
—Frank Bidart, *California Plush*

This time, when you fall down, get up again.

I mean he's going to knock you down that's
his job that's what he gets paid to do we all
have to make a living *isn't that weird*. There must have been
some time when you could have found food in the forest but now
it's the flashing bulbs and the *gnarl gnarl* of the men in the hats and
that's your blood rolling past your eye on the mat but
can you hear that music?

It sounds like
yeah

Coney Island, the girl with the pink balloon, no
I know we're not there anymore but here she is smelling of
rubber and cotton candy and cotton panties washed in
water scented with lilacs,
also that seaweedy smell from sitting on sand.
Look how her eyes go all wide and owl-like when the freaks
parade by,
the bearded lady and the two boys attached at the waist and there...
just round the corner of the hot dog stand by the Ferris wheel,
your father playing the mandolin
and a monkey with bells round his tiny ankles, dancing.

Get up. Get up for the next blow, friend.

Spirals

Life in each stone,
as bright as ours,
that much is known.

Like a bone
some marrow powers
life in each stone.

For that atoned
there will be flowers.
That much is known.

The sparrow flown
past all our hours.
Life in each stone.

With each rock thrown
we threaten towers.
That much is known.

Try lying prone while rainfall showers.
Life in each stone,
that much is known.

Flutter

They broke open her ribcage
to let out the birds.

The birds were mostly black...
some brown, some grey.

The birds flew up like a cough.
They fell like stones.

Across the valley, a boy broke open a stone.
He examined the crystal interior skin and wept.

She came up behind him.
She laid her hand on his chest.

By reaching around him he felt
her blood purple hardness.

The heart in him cried,
“Cuh-caw, cuh-caw, cuh-caw.”

Resurrection

If I were a snail inside its shell
and winter came with all its howl
then hell I'd bury myself in mud

and build a wall to keep the chill
where it belongs in water's heart
and sleep for all the months of dark

until the black slime told it's time
and then I'd crack the seal and rise
as if reborn to bathe in sun.

Were it so easy for a man.