

Even The Air Has Fingers

by John Olson

We are linked to the universe by an umbilical of art. Wheat undulating at the crack of dawn. Caliban gazing at his face in a tide pool. A nude woman with long red hair taking a sponge bath in a shallow blue pan. Apaches doing algebra in the sand of Gold Canyon.

Atoms whirling everywhere out of exuberant nothingness.

The bee rises from a flower in a drone of labor and heads due west toward the great meadows of Bois-de-Chenes. The universe goes to live in the tiny cracks of a Corot.

The world goes into the head and comes back out in words. Roots, hopes, winches. Imperatives, ruminations, reeds. Zingers, singers, fingers.

Fingers amaze me. They uncoil from a fist into a star of infinite capacity. The handle of a coffee mug gathers three fingers and an opposable thumb in a dexterous hold. It does this by design. As do the stem of a flower or stirrup of a horse. The rail of a staircase rescues the hand from a useless and idle dangle. The fortuneteller tells her cards in lightly handled solicitations of the invisible realm. The nails speak of penetration. The hammer tells me its truth is an idiom of balance. The stars button the sky and the cold air hangs jewels from the trees.

Smiles pull the skin up from the teeth.

Whatever the mind brings from its journey in sleep hatches into articulation.

Anemones are anomalies. The cricket is shiny with fable. Eyes of stone gaze out to the Pacific.

Here I am carrying a paragraph of blood. The tree in it has a living suffering shape. Billy the Kid rides into town on a palomino. We see his reflection in a drugstore window. He glances at a banker and smiles with the brightness of a toothed blade in a Dharma sawmill. The smell of horse manure is mingled with the scent of sage and newly sawn wood and the thick mammalian sourness of milk

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emanating from a dairy. An enormous man with a bald, bowling ball head and no neck and enormous bare arms leads Billy's horse into a stable. Hours later shots are heard from the town saloon. A man reels out holding his hand to his chest. His fingers are flayed. He falls to the dust. The weight of this paragraph grows. It now weighs as much as a thought. Which is to say, eight or nine ounces. Significantly less than the weight of a dead body. And yet somehow curiously harder to bury. Much, much harder to bury.

The mountain pours into space all rock and trees. It brings the universe a little nearer. The sun scribbles its shadows in the afternoon calm. An ugly pig burps on the sidewalk. Even the air has fingers. You can feel them shaking ghosts out of abstract shrubbery. Another body of air sleeps in the solemnity of a courtroom, and grows stale with the futility of speech. Real language is not conveyed by words. It stares back at us from the eyes of the newly dead.

