



THE FIORETTI

SPRING 1998



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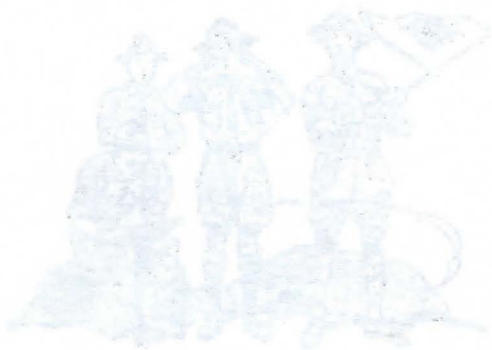
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STAFF

EDITOR/DESIGN

NORMAN MINNICK, JR.

—ADVISOR

SR. STELLA GAMPFER, OSF

DUPLICATING

LARRY STEEB AND ANITA SMITH

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POETRY

THE CONCERT MASTER

His deft fingers moved softly along her slender neck
enticing sweet sounds from her flat stomach.
He drew his bow across her smooth body slowly and
her strings quivered in restrained power.
She lay silent under his chin and the music was quiet.
One slight movement of his arm and her body came alive,
singing the notes of his very being.
He gave himself over to the quick, rhythmic beat;
 one last time, one final note,
and she fell quiet beneath his gentle arm.

—Rachel Spitler

THE POETRY OF MUSIC

Heard the music of the words
Langston Hughes

Heard the music of the songstress
Billie Holiday

Heard them both... The poet spoke
Right along with the songstress as
If he and she were paired by words
And the melody

Heard the poet speak words of soulness
Heard the songstress sing the blues of
Misery

Heard the pair together simmer sultry
Soulness through poetry and music

Heard the poet speak of times only
He could express—bigotry—Racism
And humanity

Heard the songstress sing the blues of misery
Only she must have known—backdoors—
Whites only—drugs—addiction

Heard them both souls of Blackness...

—Dorris L. Potter

BATHROBES & HOUSE SLIPPERS

By indifference,
and a little preparedness,
you too,
could begin again.

Stealing your place,
from the bigger animals.
Baring your teeth,
and pushing others,
out of your way.

Maybe if your fur,
didn't shine too much,
you could eat alone.
And put as much sugar,
in your coffie,
as you want.

—Tim Koberstein

FOLLOW THE LEADER

The summer I cocked the hat
on my head
I led my troops out of
themselves.
They never could understand why
I slanted so.

—Norman Minnick, Jr.

FAITH'S AMUSEMENTS

Even though I turn on a horseless carousel,
music plays like a million happy memories
that ring in my ears like a thousand bumble bees
as I reluctantly kneel to pray on mangled knees.

Streamers drift from a paralyzed ferris wheel
as an evangelist requests momentous fees
that hover above our heads like mammoth trees
and threat to wash us away with the drumming seas.

Balloons lie on the floor of the Holy Man's cell
even though the politician offered up his jingling keys
but fed the prisoner only mushy peas
and dry, day-old bread with moldy cheese.

Keeping my balance as I turn is hard as hell
as I fight this dizzying religious breeze
and try to keep tabs on my moral deeds
even though all of heaven remains make-believe.

—Rachel Wuertz

BOSTON

"But," He said,
turning to his friend huddled down in his coat
their collars turned up against the rising cold
"if I marry...?"

Then he was past me, his hurrying question frozen
on the wind of this narrow street in Boston
where the sun is sending its last offer
across the harbor.

—Emily Nicole Persic

HOUSE MADE OF WHEAT GERM

Grandpa came home from work one day
to find his house a blackened
sinking pile of cinders in the
swimming pool that once had all
the appearance of a useful basement.

He spent two weeks in unwashed
coveralls digging out tools and charred
scraps of pictures, the broken silver
chain his wife never quite managed to get
repaired, and the toy truck with the
heat-bubbled paint flecking off under
the scraping of his thumbnail.

We worried about him.
He moved into a tent in his backyard
and spent his days sifting through
the archaeology of his past.

It was hard at first,
but after a few months
it was as if it had always been.

We had family dinners at my Grandpa's tent.
He was a happy man in his last years.
He said that living in a tent made sense,
it made everything less tentative.
And that had made all the difference.

—L. Atwood

THE PROPHET

He paces at dusk on the shoulder of a highway
that twists and curves like the curls of his hair,
aimless, greasy, and a deep slate gray,
with his crooked thumb in the air.

He believes he was blessed with the gift to predict,
but he seeks visions in the powder above his lip
and in the pills in his pocket.
(It's all part of being a prophet.)

From the branches of defunct overhanging trees
his mind forms fictitious faces
and he begs forgiveness on shaky knees
as they tempt and prod his imagination.

And as he prays for the souls who have deemed him a fraud,
hovering on the horizon, he swears he sees God
bejeweled and robed in unadulterated white.
So he strays from the road, and sacrifices distant headlights.

—Rachel Wuertz

LITTLE BOY

The little boy walks along,
hand in his dirty jeans,
mud on his elbow,
Tears begin the hurt to prolong.

He stares into the darkness
and thinks himself a fool
he's ugly and no body likes him
and he's the dumbest boy at school.

Love and friendship resound in his ear
The world is so loving and caring
He homeless, with so many homes open
The president has even offered him a room so dear.

Why he is sad no ones knows,
Why does he need love?
No one knows,
Why? Why? Why should he belong?

—Stephanie K. Kesecker

ROHE FARM

What they say is true:

You can't go back again,

But I don't think I want to.

I don't want to see how it's changed.

I want to remember it as my farm, my childhood,

Not as the place it has become.

On the way to Grandma's I have to pass by.

I try not to look, but I can't stop myself.

I think the hedge was the first to go.

Those big bushy trees that lined the winding lane,

So tall and overgrown they almost made a tunnel.

How many times I passed through that tunnel:

Kicking hedge apples as I went to check the mail.

Running with my books as I tried to catch the school bus,

Pedaling as fast as I could to beat my brother back to the house.

Now it is just a driveway,

So plain and ordinary.

I can see the windows have changed.

The wide panes of old glass are now small, squinting, practical squares.

So many sunsets I had seen:

Vibrant, clear, country sunsets.

I wonder if anyone even enjoys the sunsets from them now.

I am told the maple tree is gone too.

What a shade it had provided over the vast sandbox.

Farm sandboxes are the best:

A huge discarded tractor tire filled with sand,
And the sand overflows all around forming a vast island in the yard,
The island of so many adventures,
Under the maple tree of so many perches for young bodies.

No animals live on the farm anymore.
I cannot say that I am fond of pigs or their smell,
But they were a sign of life,
And the dogs chased them around the pigpen to show off.
Now the pen is an empty, dusty desert.

Every now and again I hear of something else:

The bee tree is gone,
The barn is falling down,
The swing is rusty,
The playhouse is rotting...

I try not to listen.
I want to keep my memories safe.
My farm, my childhood.

As soon as I left, my childhood faded.

I grew up.

Now it is fading,
My youthfulness no longer there to give invigoration.

Now I will never go back.

I can't go back, just as I can't go back to my childhood,
But a part of it will always live inside me.
My farm, my childhood.

—Mary Ellen Crowe

PROSE

CARRY OUT

It is a long way from the Yangtze River to Kansas. I don't know the exact mileage, but if the miles were years, it would be centuries between the two places.

And yet here they are, this small tribe of Chinese people, hustling about behind the carry-out counter like a bomb is ticking somewhere not very far away and no one can remember when it is going to go off but it might be any time now, especially if someone stops moving.

The steam and sizzle of the grills and woks, the crackle of shrimp and vegetables, the smell of garlic and pepper drifts from behind the counter like the breath of a dragon and from the ceiling a few black plastic lanterns dangle.

Only one speaks English, a young woman with a concerned look on her face like maybe she has forgotten to bring something with her from China and would like to tell you about it and about why she needs it back but she can't quite bring herself to so she smiles a faint smile and points to the menu and asks you what you would like because you see they have imported the culinary treasures of China to this country and are prepared to share them with you even though without the sound of the Yangtze River in the background they know their food will always have a hollow spot deep inside where a soul should fit.

And you thank her and smile and point to an item or two on the menu and she says thank you thank you thank you three times just so she's sure.

Sometime when you are waiting and no one else is around except the three or four cooks hustling in the back of the restaurant

a voice emerges above the exhaust fans, an almost feminine voice singing louder until it fills the room. And the singer turns the corner and sees you stops and smiles and even bows slightly at the waist before fading behind the counter.

And from then on every time he sees you, you look awkwardly at one another and you think how nice it would be if rivers were more portable, if you could crate one up, or parts of one anyway, and ship it across continents and through the centuries and wind it around this small restaurant four or five times so that when you wanted this food you would have to step into a long, thin boat on the far shore and wait as an old man rows, stroke by stroke, across the waters while his children toss out nets for catfish and his wife combs the black river of her hair into the darkening sky as you slowly forget every thing you are supposed to remember until all that matters is the sound of the water and the slowly rising moon and the light in the old man's eyes.

—David Shumate

THE COTTAGE OF MULTIPLE PASSIONS

She spread out the picnic blanket with a giggle and then flopped down upon it like a ragdoll. He crawled beside her, and they began a passionate frenzy of kisses. They were infatuated with the wonders of each other and what they liked to think of as love. They had wandered deep into the woods to be alone to lose themselves in their rampant, dreamy gazes and cheesy pet names. They jumped up again, and he began to chase her through the trees as she squealed in delight. Birds chirped and bits of white fluff from the draping vines of milkweed drifted in the air making the whole thing magical to the point that it would have been nauseating to passing prospectors.

"We had better get home," she breathed pushing him away with a flirty smile. She tossed her blonde hair and said "I left a trail of potato chips so that we could find our way back. Wasn't that a good idea?"

But, of course, her good idea had turned stale, unlike the potato chips that were snatched up while they were still crispy by several opportunistic black birds. They searched and searched for their way back, and finally collapsed in exhausting efforts that had resulted in nothing. His delicate sweetheart began to cry, and she continued to sob and wail until they came upon a rustic cottage snuggled beneath the overhang of two giant willow trees. They approached it carefully, and stared in wonder for, as they got closer, they realized that the house seemed to be made with cookies, cakes, and candies. A Gumdrop fence circled licorice daisies, and the door posts were huge, striped candy canes. Icing was spread onto the roof in swirly layers, and the windows appeared to be sheets of sugar.

They hesitated before they reached the the front walkway of taffy and glanced at each other sharing the thought that something about the scene seemed familiar in an odd way.

The young girl had been dealing with a growling stomach and couldn't help herself but to grab a chunk of the chocolate cake that made up the wall of the quaint little house and shove it into her petite mouth that she stretched open wide. Her lover looked on in horror as she scoffed down the bite leaving her pretty face embellished with crumbs.

As they were distracted, the front door had crept open and a small, hunchback witch with gray hair that fell to her heels appeared on the graham cracker of a welcome mat. She watched them for a moment in silence, for they were not what she had been expecting.

"Hungry?" the witch said sending them whirling around on their heels to face her.

They did not speak, but only looked at her with terror rising like carbonated bubbles in the tunnels of their throats and images of eternal curses on their unborn children taking shape in their simple minds. But then the witch smiled, and although her teeth were a curious shade of blackish green, the couple found something comforting in it and followed her into her bizarre but exceedingly sweet home.

The witch fed them piles of food of the likes they had never seen, and they ate until they could no longer move, abandoning the instincts to be proper that had, up to this point, been a hinge on their pubescent romance. The witch made them each a bed, and with the help of one of her muttered chants, they wasted no time in falling to sleep.

When the young man awoke he found himself locked within a huge bird's cage that hung from the rafters. He looked down from

his swinging place of incarceration to find his darling slaving before a giant stove. The poor thing was dripping with sweat, and flour and grease tarnished her dainty face in such an unattractive way that the young man took the vision to heart and questioned her potential as his future wife. She certainly didn't seem to be making out well in the way of woman's work, and whatever she was cooking smelled as though it would have been better left raw and in the sun. She brought him a huge platter of food and shoved it up at him with a heave and a glare at the fact that she was doing all of the work while he swung leisurely in his little cage.

The witch wasn't far. She had slipped into a silky black cloak and had the hood pulled over her head. She was singing cheerfully, occasionally barking orders to the girl, and reading a cookbook (101 Ways to Prepare Human Flesh), but the couple, in the absence of their brilliance, did not quite grasp the danger that lurked before them like a stingray in a bathtub.

"Start the oven!" the witch demanded and began lowering the boys cage from the ceiling. "Tonight I dine on Roasted Wiesenheimer!"

"I think she means me!" the young man said to his adored one as the witch's plot finally snapped into place in his head. His fragile lover's chin fell to the floor in terror, and she began to belt out her infamous sobs and wails.

"But, I don't know how to start the oven," she whined repeatedly until the witch could take it no longer. With a few choice four letter words, the witch proceeded to stick her grotesque head into the ancient oven leaving her large bottom to sway in the air in order to show the pathetic child how. Finally, the young lady stopped crying and saw an opportunity in the titanic vision that waved before her. She took a desperate glance at her lover, as he

himself had begun to cry uncontrollably, and she found her courage. She placed both hands on the oversized cheeks of the witches backside, and pushed as hard as she could. At first, the witch's stout frame did not budge, but all at once her feet slipped out from beneath her, and the girl continued pushing until the witch was lost in the flames of the fresh lit oven in a hair standing howl.

The young girl freed her sweetie from his place of captivity, and they left the house of cakes, cookies, and candies far behind returning soon after they had gone and tied the knot in the excitable high of their adventure in hopes to make the empty house their home. Imagine their distress when they found it to be inhabited by two chubby children with funny names that had eaten their way of most of the house's frame. The young couple retreated with a sigh, hand in hand, mutually reveling in the odd cognizant air of the whole thing. Something seemed so familiar, but they couldn't quite place a finger on it. They troubled themselves only momentarily, as their brains could not have handled more, and so they carried on in the peace of simplicity and lived happily ever after.

—Rachel Wuertz

WATER LILLIES

The fascination of being difficult.

The girl smiled to herself in the glaring bus windows. Difficult, that's what they called her, difficult. Not one of the beautiful, the cheerleaders, the preppy popular, not one of the outcasts, with downcast eyes and curled shoulders, but silent, tangled-haired and strange. Her classmates mocked her, made cruel fun of her emotionless face and set shoulders, but never ignored her.

Her class had three days in Paris, a whirlwind blur of gilded frames, stone monuments and the Eiffel Tower. The girls giggled with high school humor at robust nudes in rosy hues, and pretended sophistication at Picasso's blunt-faced women. She walked the museum halls silently, often crossing quickly through rooms without a glance, then spending a long moment in front of a carved, struggling marble, an oil-based, arrogant beauty or cold, bronze-cast warriors.

Their last day they spent the afternoon at the l'Orangerie museum, a small building that once grew oranges for the king and now housed rooms of Renoir's, Degas's, VanGogh's and other great painters of the last hundred and fifty years.

The girl walked quickly up the curving stairwells behind her herd of bright-haired schoolmates. She held her back very straight as she walked through the round rooms, and her face held no expression but a small crease between her eyebrows. On one wall, Pierre Renoir's wife smiled down at his golden-headed son, Jean. A thick lock of dark hair fell across her face. The frown in the girl's forehead deepened as she counted the love in every brushstroke.

There were four rooms and she walked through some of quickly and others she followed the perimeter past every painting. She heard the other girls giggling at her silent, blank face; they thought she was weird. She heard her teachers sigh at her lack of excitement; they thought she was difficult. She only kept her eyes focus straight ahead.

Down to the basement they all trailed. There were two oval shaped rooms down there that each held four wall length paintings. When she descended the stairway, she walked quickly into the room and sat on the bench. Behind her the gaggle of girls filled the room with their gasps and exclamations of sudden pleasure.

Across the walls the colors burned, blue, purple, red and white, pink, green and gold in tiny splashes. They filled the shabby, windowless room with light and brilliance. The girl's eyes were wide and blank, she clasped her hands tightly together to keep from reaching out and pressing them across the track of colors. Her body was held very still, even when she crossed into the next room, and sat stiffly in there. In her neck, a frail pulse trembled and pounded and against the white skin of her wrist her veins glowed bright. This room she entered was darker dreams of blue, green, purple, with sudden streaks of rose-tinged gold and white. She pressed her lips together until pain, and sat until her throat burned, then turned and walked quickly out of the room without looking back. One cheerleader raised her eyebrows, whispered and giggled to her blue-eyed friend.

In the gift shop the girls mingled with other crowding tourists for postcards, prints and silk scarves of waterlilies. The girl stood to one side until a teacher felt pity for her and offered to give her money for a postcard. She looked steadily into the woman's eyes, "I have money."

The bus pulled away as the sun set the skyline of Paris on fire. The girl watched her reflection fade in and out of the window as bus grew quiet, the other girls whispering excitement over their new possessions and falling asleep over half-written postcards. In her mind the colors raced beauty, her fingertips burned and her heart pounded fiercely under her ribs. The young woman let her mind slip softly into unconsciousness, dreaming of gardens and paintings and clasped the knowledge of beauty to herself as she slept.

—Emily Nicole Persic

