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Thom Brucie
Desert Café

During the energy days of my hot youth
I owned a desert cafe in Arizona where
long-eared rabbits and desert tortoises
dined with sympathetic pleasure.

Once, after prolonged meditative apprenticeship,
I performed the walk of the scorpions,
a success similar to the combined effort
of walking across fire barefoot and walking
over rice paper without sound.

This high point of my career was greeted with apprehension
by my parents who immediately cut my stipend
from ten thousand to five thousand dollars a month,
an amount regrettably incapable
of continuing the support of the desert cafe--
a situation she deplored.

Good fortune allowed me to sell the investment
to an ex-partner of Barnum and Bailey,
who, by simply adding the rattle snake mating dance
to the weekend entertainment,
turned the venture into a profit center.

Afterwards,
in the late night,
the melancholy whistle of the
east-bound train echoed off
the hot sand,
startling the jack rabbits
and disturbing the patient rest of the tortoise.

I wanted to jump the train
like in the 20s
like in the movies
like Arlo Gunthrie
and folk-legend hobos

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and hippies
and bank-robbers
and John Wayne and James Bond and Dumbo
because I needed to prove to her
that I could do something right
jump a train
run a cafe
keep a promise.

Promises are big, she said,
they last a long time.
They're energetic like the hare
long-suffering like the tortoise
meaty and stable, patient and pure,
should not be spoken without thought
must reverberate the heart
are not circus performances
or profit centers
do not survive stipends from the outside.

Of course, I said,
because I did not wish to hear those words, those weights,
those painful desert truths.
I heard the moon-howl of the long train
the eerie night-whistle
blasting through the furnace-heat
the stifling dry hot wall
of empty sandy lonely
howling space between us.

I bought a ticket
and studied the melancholy whistle;
and the rattle of the boxcars
drummed monotonous.
I boarded and sat next to a window

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touched my ear against the cold glass
and did not allow my eyes to cry.
Inside the train you can't hear
the desert whistle
don't appreciate the rumble and rattle of the wheels;
you just look across the
gray dust and the silver of the nighttime
squinting, riding safely,
looking forward,
seeing past.

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A Carpenter's Eye

Virgil said, "A good carpenter always stands back and looks at his work."

I thought he was old and tired.

I was young, spirited;

I didn't need to take a rest and call it looking.

He made me stop often,
every time his breaths became effort,
and I resented his interruptions
to my work - until one day -
I actually saw the lines of two walls
meet in a perpendicular
and my vision grew more acute
than a plumb bob and a level.

I experienced the eye of a carpenter
the eye of tension and forgiveness
the eye of precision and error.
He taught me that if a wall is
already out of plumb
build the new wall to match it.
That way, no one looking at the new work
will recognize the difference between
one and the other.

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The imperfections of the world
if pointed out
call unto themselves the gravest of indignities -
weakness, sloth, failure.
These attributes of daily bread
need no headlines;
they are fortresses unto themselves
for the aim of the eye is truth
not judgement,
and caution reminds us
that we are not always plumb.

Occasional Events Of Loving

childhood, like an earthen tongue,
lapped us up
and rolled us through
saliva nights
until,
like the foamy lips of
the uninhibited sea,
our empty mouths
drank exhaustion after exhaustion
like the smile of an
iridescent twilight,
hung, ceremoniously, like a candle
of new wax melting away our youth,
and glowing with embarrassment
engorged with passion
heated like feline stretching
stars for eyes
and ears fragile like whispers,
we finally looked upon ourselves
to see in each
a moaning face
held firm
between
the left-hand of misery
and the right-hand of bliss.