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ODALISQUES

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odor of a nude woman
sometimes, odor of a man —William Carlos Williams
[Refrain]

Anonymous song
Somewhere in the trees

Somewhere in the trees
A cricket sings

A cricket sings
Her grip

She wrings
Somewhere in the trees

Anonymous grip
A cricket sings
At Night the Garden

At night the garden fills with crooked men
Escaping men, men without trousers, men in suits
Seeking pleasure with knives that glint in the eyes of squirrels
There are women, too, although I have never seen a woman’s
Shadow bloated in the lamplight—three shadows
One for each lamp close enough to touch skin
I can only imagine

At night the garden howls at the crooked men
Trees shake their leaves
Flowers hide their fragrances
Sleeping birds in the bowels of trunks
Sharpen talons in the glint of moonlight
Their yellow eyes

At night children run through the garden
Antelope-like, fearing the wind,
The splash of nocturnal fish, the low-hanging branches
But most of all the crooked men
Who stare with gurgling stomachs
And malfunctioning amygdala

In the twilight I watch men’s
Backs break in the garden of lust
Songs Between Innocence and Experience

I have seen reflected in a woman’s face
Terror I thought banished to an ancient age
And knew for an eye-second
My double-fraternity with Cain

Frightened I leapt for shade
Began impromptu sketches of a seedy trunk
Representative of no-woman (“her nothingness”)
From which owls flew out and the nerve-wild limbs of trees
Spread ant lines on the wind

I milked the source of poison for a cure
But found it coded in a thousand tongues
So split my own
As my yellow eyes
Drank the blackened blood

There’s so little that makes it possible to stay
Awake to the minor perils of a face
I’ve etched the grimace countless times
On benches sat upon by weary men
On headboards marked by iron scents
And all the etchings…
No more than a ram’s horn writhing at a monolith

In a dream
I ride bareback through a reign of crocodiles
Identify the alligator’s smile by the tooth
Trace wrinkles from the nymph-barren growths
Quickly distinguish sinew by its sound
The Syrupers

The sap grew thick
The marrow turned hard as amber
Until nothing bled out even in the spring
When the syrupers came
With spigots glass jars
Rubbed the bark clean
Drilled and found nothing
Left what looked like gun wounds
To see one only had to squint…

Lemon

There are moments of such lucidity
The whole sky trembles as it does near rain
Moments ecstatic moments
When I hold in my hands a lemon
   Its skin a yellow nub
Porous as a man’s face
Rub wet
One bulb so easily held

Remember only
How smallness aches in the belly of a lemon
Its smoothness—
There was nothing of him that was smooth
Odalisque I

In the corners as the edge turns
In a room that now resembles a dark hospital
I watch as if watching a dancer through fog
Captured by a drawing of a woman by Matisse

Hers is a slightly two-looking face
Just slightly enough that it’s one to one eye
We warp her in our assumption of symmetry
Until it breaks
And we scatter in all directions

Her chair is a chair in no space
Her legs unreasonably thick
It’s a conic body
If not a comic body
Like that of a mermaid
Both sculpture and portrait

Her haircut
Is the lost wig of a founding father
With an authority
Made female by her breasts

She has a flat spectral hand
Like those of the Italian saints
And her pants have a pocket
In which one can keep nothing

Her vocal cords extend so far from her neck
They become a triangular bulge
Like a beard
Or even a tumor
She has been singing with such force
Sunday

Communion was communication
With the legs cut out
She licked a stamp
Chose a sham address
Dove day wasn’t dove day at all it seemed
Wooden. Pew’s hard press
Amenable
So she said ‘amen’

Two-tone

Today I worry
That the best analogy for music
Is that of a motor
Whirring the double-current
Spraying one after another diminished chord
Against an empty enemy
The eros of erosion let loose and wild
The Best We Can Do

Best that we keep to the bough’s bend
The bend of the earth
To bend also
Bend and spread in all directions
Keep taut upright
Like a knife in wood

Yes best keep to the bough’s bend
The bend of the earth
To bend also
Enter the vertiginous dance
Through the see-through curtain
As ghosts enter
Circle the stage
And pose at the center like a doomed island

Underwater
The pressure so great
The sky trembles
Like a dove….
From this also bend
And keep to the bough
And the earth
Odalisque II

She infects the eye with unequal longing
Even the most moonlike
Bannered, glittered by celestial touch
Arms open slightly
In familiar trance
Proof the unmoved mover moved

In pursuit
Of the unrecognized
Taste of the known substance
At which our most guttural
Desire fails to be named
Mistaken for a customary movement
Removed of all discoloration
The most cultured image of a primal satisfaction
Viewed on the schedule of malingerers’ fancy
.... what human remains?

What the rapt eye knows
What the swollen eye knows even while it swells
Re-enter
Enter through the skin
What human remains…

She sings
But her song is not of courtship
She sings
But her song is not of lust
Her back
Her neck
Her nose
Her mouth….

Veins on a pale arm
Bones on a pale arm
Midnight

"And the deer can dream through the eyes of the horse" — Federico Garcia Lorca

In these shadows
Even the slightest movement
Has exaggerated strength
Fascicles of bronze tighten
To uncanny stills
Drift the diagonal dance
Blink red the lives of nymphs and their makers

Horses half aluminum
Half buzzing steam
Hum redly on the throttle of work
While a clipped doe dreams of metal
Splayed on the mineral road
Odalisque III

The fleeting self of purple windows
Became her only mirror
Soon she recalled more readily the torsos of
Trees than her own blue
Seven remaining ribs

She spoke so rarely, so mutely and with such pinkness
Her surprise-accent never fully smoothed
And she kissed with such banal frequency
By day she noticed the flavor of her own mouth

The Blue Hour

In the squinting dawn the forest bares her navel
Swallows littered in a finger stream
Pressed from the ocean like a worn digit
One heaven above, one heaven below
Both touched by grace and a nailed eye
In the gleaming dawn the forest bares her valence

She trims the broom
Rakes the fields of stone
What grows grows slowly from the marrow
Up and in all directions
Through the living bone
Odalisque IV

There is movement and there is love
And the avoidance of love
As it rises up the back
Away onto the vase
Out of windows to the sea’s
Double body in blue
Green. There is movement. Breast
A lost foreground of perfect
Straightness. Experimental
Deformation such that no eyes meet
Essential lines

The woman returns from blue
Into another blue reminiscent of fruit.
Compared, as she is always, to another half
A room away. I’ve painted over the same
Canvas in new light
Her same mouth
Fuller until the purse
Rattles cold change

She is steady
And when trance piano
Plays from another room
The whites of her eyes
Sway black grey
Dull as hands
Char

Char in circles and circles
Over the words under a cat’s black paw
Under the door over and under and through
The interior sap of words and their shadows
Blind with a thousand roots
Paw at a tree with hooves

After the Collages of Wangeci Mutu

The second-hand witness
The recyclical ease of shape
The hair of the daughter in the hair of the sister unfurled
And the thigh in the mirror is the thigh in the breast of the bed
The snake in the navel with the cord stretched out so wide
It wraps like vines around the thickest trunk
And saplings bend so far in search of light
They burrow back into the ground they breached
Then double-rooted seed another go