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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 Wangechi 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