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Tea Stall

Carl Lindquist

Along the trail, about mid-point between the rivulet and the ruins,
is an ancient tea stall built of wooden poles and canvas,
surrounded by a few log-hewn benches.

The lady who steeps the tea seems as old as the landscape,
her wrinkled face suggesting a map of the cracked land.

She has been here since her first decade,
polishing kettles, choosing the finest leaves, learning to listen
to steam announcing choicest moments for brewing and pouring.

Her name is carved onto each log bench.
In one, or possibly two, are initials of lost loves.

These days she speaks slowly,
her voice a timbre of awareness
that her time approaches.
Every statement mixes confidence and joy and resignation.

Her whole life's summary, every lesson, every experience
poured into terracotta cups.
Calm, quiet steam rises,
resisting all division and enumeration,
holding no intentions, harboring no regrets.

Tenderly distilled,
the tea's natural scent refuses identities, rules, adornments.

On this trail there is no place where breath ends and wind begins.
But one day soon, mid-point between the rivulet and the ruins,
you will find only broken benches
and a smiling stretch of hill.

Broadcast

Carl Lindquist

Navigating the gray fog
of mysterious AM stations
that drift into the south at night
from Cuba and Mexico,
static crackling in accidental chorus
with occasional spurts of stray shortwave,
I allow my eyes to leave the road
and focus fully on the dial,
failing to heed the pleas of the speedometer.

It is sudden.
The car veers to 1500 kilohertz
but I yank the wheel left,
safely centering it at 1000,
just in time to discover an angel's song:

*You've lived your days
seeking places strange.
Being robbed of belonging
is your idea of freedom.
Places known, you find defeating,
and closeness
only imposes itself on you.*

When I hear this voice
accompanied by a blast of Mexican dirge
I know my twisting of the wheel

had reached only 1300 kilohertz.

But distance, speed, and frequency
should sometimes be appreciated
in terms that transcend units.

These days I no longer drive
or fiddle with radio dials.

But I still discover accidental harmonies
carried through the air and shared between realms.

And when they invite me to explore,
I accept, eagerly,

in winged pursuit.

Sweeper

Carl Lindquist

The sweeper's broomstick is deliberately short,
designed by despots to remind her
that her bent and broken back is penance for birth.
Her bony spine bites into wrinkled tissue,
the thinning skin cracking and crumbling
like dry dying earth, crumpled, wadded, tossed and thrown,
bossed and blown about by any breeze or bully who pleases.

But her broom paints primal patterns,
designs disguised to all except, perhaps, wayward dogs
and well-versed wandering sages.
On sidewalks and streets she writes an ageless, wordless story
wherein ends are whisked back into beginnings,
and abundance once again becomes blowing dust.

I sit on sidewalk benches, in a lost and lonely mode,
watching her work until her frail frame
crosses the road and rounds the corner,
dogs on the follow.

I wait until mid-morning, then rise and wander,
wielding notions of who I am supposed to be,
wishing that one day I will be wise enough
to read the curves of wordlessness
and to see the deftly swept strokes
of unnoticed designs before they never fade.

Echoes of Ancient Barking

Carl Lindquist

During late medieval times strange events occurred at the bridge:
Day after day, dozens of dogs clambered up the deck,
sniffing along walls of the Romanesque turrets,
 nostrils bursting,
 ears perked tall and wide like barrel vaults swallowing
 every particle and vibration,
 everything wafting or wavering in the winds.

Dogs sat transfixed, hunched like stone vultures along the parapet,
staring into boulders below the bridge.
 Something unseen and unheard,
 something known only to dogs
 and the bridge's deep, penetrating abutments.

Some dogs remained for days, petrified and staring,
shaggy battlements along the concourse of the bridge.
Others howled at turret walls
for hours until their vocal cords stretched
beyond natural spans and barks faded into wind.
Dogs were forced home on ropes
 strong and tight as bridge trusses.

No one knew why.
But to this day
no dog roams this village

unleashed.

I alone discovered the answer
to this centuries-old mystery,
suddenly one morning
searching for ancient pottery sherds
In the boulders below.
I've never told.

Some bridges lead to trails that twist
and insist on returning to their sources.
Some lead off course or astray,
others to new births and worthy domains.
But no matter how plain the brickwork and the boulders
or the lands and the waters,
every bridge crossed
while holding no expectations, without any hurry,
offers its own Romanesque turrets
and echoes of ancient barking.