

Desert Poems

Brandon Marlon

Simoom

Billowing desert winds,
sand-laden and noxious,
rumble in storms across shifting dunes,
overrunning puny oasis palms,
scattering dwellers toward wasteland hovels.
A translucent curtain of dust
deposits itself on hapless nomads
caravaning along obliterated trails,
insinuating prickly sprinkles
into human eye slits and camel nostrils,
a peppery shower of stinging grains
courtesy of infernal Iblis,
whose piquant breath insufflates wilderness.

Sirocco

The wall of heat steadily bakes a meaty feast
leavened by the yeast of sculpted dunes,
setting the table for preying guests
reliably punctual and full of appetite,
scarabs leading beetle armies to dung pellets
as worms and maggots overrun middens
and lanneret talons gouge dried gizzard
from the bonemeal of whelmed vagrants,
reaving then leaving lesser gristle
to the starved cravings of sallow jerboas
driveling at remnants of the gobbet banquet.

Sahara

The ocean of sand is a powdery boneyard,
designing and insatiable,
concealing in its bowels the muffled remains
of innumerable stragglers, warriors, and vagabonds,
their blood slurped by parched mounds,
their flesh devoured by indigenous birds of prey.
Surd figures digested within the unsifted nadir
restlessly lament their unenviable ends,
sighing like dromedaries whose ordure adorns the surface,
wary of predatory ghouls defiling skeletons after dark,
gasping for the cerements of a decent burial,
mutely bemoaning forsaken dignities.

Golden Youth

Ann Howells
for Mark

A photograph of you:
Pisa spread out behind like a picnic
on a blanket, as you hold up that tower,
the typical tourist shot, but you,
you've really put your shoulder to it,
bent knee, other leg fully extended,
toe dug in as if you try out
for the role of Sisyphus.

Another shot, that little *ristorante*
off the plaza: dark hair, easy ways,
a one-sided smile like the young Elvis,
you lean back, swirl your wine,
as *signorinas* tumble over themselves
offering *antipasto*, *minestra*,
costoletta di vitella e fettucini,
refill your glass as though you are
The King himself.

You shift personas easily, hermit crab
abandoning exoskeleton, its very bones,
for another: one day periwinkle,
one day whelk, commandeering
whatever shell fits, never displacing
or displeasing anyone. You are
the perennial guest charming all and sundry,
comfortable in mud or manse. I can't
fault you for this; you have no greed
or malice.

I've seen you nonplussed only once,
on that little Vespa in Rome.
Anonymous in a helmet, you were simply
another disoriented American
unable to charm. You are companion,
friend and idol. Let us sit at your feet
we implore; it is our privilege.

Stillborn

Martha K. Grant
For Edward

Thinner than matchsticks,
the tiny fingers curl
in a pink question mark
frozen in time.
By way of answer,
I ease my own finger into
his birdlike grasp—
as though he expected this
all along, this one
exquisite moment
what he'd remember
for the eternity into which
he was prematurely thrust.

Surprised at the soft flexibility
of his fingers, I stroke
the underside of them,
the half inch from palm
to fingertips, over and over,
as if beckoning,
watching his fingers spring back
into that questioning curve,
beckoning.

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