

1975

Onlooker

Michael Cuddihy

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An elf owl. His voice
Calling out
Like a rare, old coin left years ago in an attic
A large one cent piece, green and moldy
In its dark wooden box—
Uncomplaining, like the blind woman who gave it to me.

She said I was going to be famous
Some day.

I can hear him, the elf owl, his voice nearer now
Calling and calling.

Onlooker / Michael Cuddihy

Hours
Slouched in my car
I've watched through the barbed wire
The horses. Their quiet
Feeding me.

In pairs, tails sweeping
A neighbour's
Face. Horseflies,
Whole swarms of them scattered.
The lean flanks
Twitch, the faces, each one
So close.

The sun's
Acetylene now—
Steel welts on the new Harvester
With its plough attached,
The oats moist, golden
like old gold churned in among the dark furrows,
Enriching them.

Seven years.
The feelings we discover
No words for. Listen.

The wind, gusts
Blowing off the mountains,
Blue peaks half-hidden
In snow. I shrug
Under this old wool
Sweater, leaning
My weight on the window handle.

Bark / Michael Cuddihy

Grotesque. All those anxieties eating their way out as we get older. Your old governess, remember, the way she wore her woolen stockings—all knotted and rolled, like the veins in her legs. Always tugging at them, out of breath, one thigh straining against the worn upholstery. And the elephant's foot your favorite cousin brought you from Africa for your tenth birthday. He set it down in your bedroom, your eyes astonished at how rough its wrinkles were, the coarseness of the inch-long hairs. Stiffer even than the brush your father used after he had forced your tiny fists out from behind you.

Afternoon: Rillito Creek / Michael Cuddihy

A tall girl in a red windbreaker. Ducking as she enters the stables, a little awkward, her arms full of hay. The sun feeds on her close-cropped hair. Inside, two horses stamping. Charcoal blue mesquite, a haze of blond grass. West, along the river, cottonwoods, a whole row of them, sightless, gaunt. One every fifty yards, leafless, like a line of dead presidents, their roots stopped, curling back on themselves. The horses are outside now, snorting, the shadows of their long heads combing the stubble, back and forth in the rusty light.