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Circolo Della Caccia

Peter Davison

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was something I'd once flail with a hairbrush, later something I wanted to kiss. Someone said, "Don't you kiss your brother goodbye?" and I was afraid that the past was coiling too quickly, felt it around my neck. I am trying to alert you to a slippery fact: that every night passes once of course, but you can usually choose where to sleep. Try that chair in the spare room. It may still be very lonely there, but you will recall tonight quite clearly then, and the sequence of surrounding dreams. If I calculate correctly sixty times three-sixty-five brings me well over twenty thousand, that many nights. I would like to remember a very great deal: even a short life has length, a short life, backwards.

Circolo Della Caccia / Peter Davison

(for Douglas Allanbrook)

Italian butchers love the shooting season.
It lasts at least six months, some places longer.
Thrushes, larks, and other speckled singers
hang up to ripen, dangling by their bloody
beaks, eyes glassy, feather coats bedraggled.
Any old bird who makes it through the season
has lasted out a war—the hunters number
twice any army Italy has mustered—
and this produces natural selection
for songlessness or silence in the woods.
Just scuff your shoe on any gravel walk
and thickets are vacated on the instant
with a desperate scramble and a chirped alarm.
Then hours go by without a glimpse of a bird,
just distant songs of sex and altercations.
You wonder why the hunters mightn't shoot
the swallows that patrol the city rivers
hell-bent as bats, or bag the swifts that twitter
above your head at cocktails on the terrace.
Though songbirds of open spaces, fields, and mountains

are hunted down, fair game, to turn on spits
and freshen the mouth's appetite for wine,
I once for three acts watched a sparrow flutter
around an opera house's chandelier
while every eye was fixed upon Mimi
and no one noticed the bird until he dropped
dead on the stage abaft of the soprano.

With Ripley at the Grave of Albert Parenteau / Richard Hugo

He is twice blessed, the old one buried here
beneath two names and a plastic bouquet from Choteau.
He lived his grief out full. From this hill
where Crees bury their dead to give them a view,
he can study the meadow, the mountains
back of mountains, the Teton canyon winding into stone.
I want to say something wrong,
say, this afternoon they are together again,
he and the wife he killed by mistake in the dark
and she forgives him. I don't want to admit
it's cold alone in the ground and a cold run
from Canada with a dog and two bottles of rye.

Say he counted stones along the bottom of the Teton
and the stones counted him one of them.
He scrubbed and scrubbed and never could
rid his floor of her stain.
He smashed his radio and the outside world
that came from it, and something like a radio hum
went on in him the slow rest of his life.
This is the first time I knew his white name.

We won't bring him real flowers this afternoon
jammed with the glitter of lupin and harebells.
This is the west and depth is horizontal.
We climb for a good view of canyons and we are never
higher than others, never a chief like him.