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Hunger in St. Petersburg

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Three Poems · *Joshua Clover*

HUNGER IN ST. PETERSBURG

Did we live in a building above the river?
Why shouldn't the bees have done business?
Was it broadcast?
Was our building's stone countenance colored blue
like some buildings to the south
& everything to the north?
Wasn't that blue the blue named after the city?
How did the neighbors heat their bread?
Were there many Lenins
of bronze, iron, anthracite & chaff?
Wasn't our honey the best in the world?
Were there many scenes with old machines,
exposed for export magazines?
Who lived in the buildings by the river
behind the blue facades which made of the river a dim reflection?
Could wattled couples afford to wail
inside each other like mercurial children
while the bees necked in the pollen-theatres?
Did they never change the name of St. Petersburg blue?
Did the bees of St. Petersburg do different work
in 1919, in 1967, in the winter I turned thirty
without a lightbulb to my name, without a lumen,
without filament or fire,
in the 99th decade of the unraveling millennium?
Who's counting?
Who warmed the angular bones behind each blue face?
How did the Finnish sweeten their bread then?
Why were there no fathers in the stories we told
around the burning television?
Was there a minute beyond the radius
of the animated blank flame
when there was no spy in the house of memory,

when we didn't know we were dying anyway in our unseemly bodies,
pale assemblages of lean meat & wire & foolscap
in the static blue of the Republic?
Did the news denationalize the swollen combs?
Which history could we slather in secret across our thighs like come?
How much honey could we smuggle the reverse direction
through the Finland Station?
What color were the buildings by the river before?
Who wants to know?

RILKE'S APOLLO'S TORSO

We cannot know his real sun versus
this proximal museum phosphor. And yet
the white on his belly might have been us,
Apollo's luminous come. That this wet

slick might be the west's cradle of life
makes you sick. Vandal, revise the obscene
myth of his groin. You must change your knife.

We cannot know how many—a thousand or so?—
torsos pass as the lucent (if dead)
body of god. Rock's hard to ID without a head,
a luxury you lack. You must change your clothes.

We cannot know lots of stuff. In brief,
deus ex machina ex faux marble sex machine.
The ecstasy part is easy. You just change your life