1975

Town

Gary Soto

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Recommended Citation
Available at: https://doi.org/10.17077/0021-065X.1787
An old man said he's not the father.
Watchmen demanded to see all the papers—
the baby cried. Sheep blocked the road.
Three cars, a Porsche, Triumph and a Ferrari
pulled up. Three men stepped out
and three women, more graceful than angels.
They asked for directions. Fingered lambs.
Give us some money, the watchmen pleaded.
They gave them Dior perfume, a fur coat
and a check from the Bank of England.
The three women stood quietly,
glancing at the stars.
What about that bright one?
There was white frost.
In the hut, the little voice fell silent.
A Porsche, Triumph and a Ferrari
on a trip, humming like dragonflies.
Shepherds told the herd to move on.
Is the child dead?
Children never die.

Translated by Nicholas Kolumban

Town / Gary Soto

When you looked back
The blind whose pupils were just visible
Under a whiteness, and yet
Fading like twin stars,
Opened their hands
And you turned away.
The town smelled of tripe
Pulled from an ox
And hanging—
Smoke, fruit wrinkling
Or bearded with gnats.
The streets shone with rain.

After the rain
You wore the heat like a shirt,
You drank until your mouth
Hung open and no longer

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Bothered to shrug off
The flies.

Back at the room
You laid under a slow fan
Only to get up
And watch from the window
A pup snap
The ankle of a woman
Carrying bricks. She kicked the dog
And went on.

Again you turned away
Afraid to think that it was night
And along with the poor
You would sleep with spiders,
Dust in your throat
And going down.

Hoeing / Gary Soto

During March while hoeing long rows
Of cotton
Dirt lifted in the air
Entering my nostrils
And eyes
The yellow under my fingernails

The hoe swung
Across my shadow chopping weeds
And thick caterpillars
Who shriveled
Into rings
And went where the wind went

When the sun was on the left
And against my face
Sweat the sea
That is still within me

Rose and fell
From my chin
Touching land
For the first time