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Kudzu

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Three Poems · Patrick O’Leary

Kudzu

“(Kood zoo) n. a fast growing climbing vine of China & Japan, now widespread in the southern U.S. . . .”

You saw Atlanta’s rampant topless bars; you did not notice it. But one day like a cobweb in your face, it’s everywhere. The great creeping Kudzu. Oblivious to gravity it takes both stoop & wall, festooning drooping phonelines like tattered forgotten laundry. Upwardly mobile Kudzu, mongoose of the South, FDR’s final solution to soil erosion. Imported from the Orient, it has politely cornered the market. It plods relentlessly to inevitable green victory, like a silent flood, like Sherman’s March, like a Faulkner sentence that doesn’t know when to quit, like a suffragette parade: it may be pretty, it’s not nice. It overstays its welcome, oversteps its station; it cuddles perfect strangers & clings to any kindness. It has no reservations. Given an inch it’ll take a yard. Kudzu. To uproot it would denude the red heartsoil of Dixieland—it would require a Constitutional Amendment. It would spur the rap of gavel, the drawl of endless tangents, the cornpone filibuster of bureaucrats. But Kudzu won’t bow out; it will prevail. For it creeps along like a coma, like acne, like
an interminable joke, like a fad
that defies predictable lifespan.
It grows & grows like a rumor,
gathering nuance like a legging
gathers burrs. Forget the meek, UFOs,
ignore the trickle of wetbacks, invading
swarms of killer bees. Beware, instead, the
great, long-suffering, ant-strong, enduring
patience of Kudzu. It wants not to pillage;
it wants to be your neighbor. At dawn it does
the plant equivalent of jumping jacks.
At dusk it hums the glories of the Root.
At night it dreams a budding rhapsody
of Historical Determinism.
One day in Wisconsin you will be safe
on your patio, barbecuing steaks,
armed with a spatula, the grind of mowers
mulching tidy sod, the distant not quite
harmless laughter of children, the whispers
of underground sprinkler systems. You'll think:
I am alive. You'll feel: blessed. You will
revel in the boner in your bermudas.
But as you smell the pungent smoke & flip
the sizzling T-bone & stroke your cartoon
apron, you'll chance to see a shimmering lip
of green sprawling over your picket fence.
Funny. You've never seen it before. "Honey,"
you'll call. "Comere & take a look at this."
It looks . . . so pretty. It looks . . . resolute.
It does not look like revenge.