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BONES' FIRE

by barry eisenberg



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"No, Tom, I won't be rich, and I won't live in them cussed
smothery houses. I like the woods, and the river, and
hogsheads, and I'll stick to 'em too."

Huck Finn to Tom Sawyer

THE ADVENTURES OF TOM SAWYER

with love

solstice

the first three stanzas of SOLSTICE should read:

bits of light break into beams
hush the power to its source
that twists streams of thought
through the hilly woodland, chapparal
and grass-covered strata
of disfigured seas

bird-sound
and then another lights from limb
to limb "they're coming!
they're coming!" screams stellar jay

and woodpecker makes a laughing
"oh i eat ants and acorns
and poison oak berries! i am
the earth! i am the belly
and the mouth and i like to
spread it around!"

bits of light break into beams
hush the power to its source
that twists streams of thought
through the hilly woodland, chapparal
of disfigured seas

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the wind too is a bird that musics
where mushrooms have eaten me
with their strange humor they laugh
at nothing i can see
in voices i cannot hear how they love
the leavings of madrones and rain
that falls when the huge bird sails
round from the south

deer nuzzle them in dreams and are startled
by shapes of fear feet make
of fallen leaves hearts are
quail wings beating
night-eyed spirits hover

and the dead have cast
bone and feather cairns
at passages into other worlds
real suffering flesh
bears its muttering lamps

my prayers are wasps
at the windows of light
at the deadly windows

my prayers are the pipes of brown towhees

my words are packed buds
trees moss cling to

and no more than chores
and daily practice

may the old poor return
and be welcome
and bless these lives

one january morning

allow clouds to be
floating minds of horses
tearing grass with their teeth

allow the sound of snow
to powder trees, meadow
clover and the stream

allow blue jay's squawk

one january morning cradle prisoners
exiles, men and women in need the human
machinery hurtles its noise through time

into heaps of rust, mountains allow
even beer cans lay among the trees
flowers yet to blossom

allow the hungry to be fed
at least in spirit
and all creatures glory
in their bodies' labor

before God
this is nothing

this is my life
allow it

call it loneliness
call it what you want
by will or fortune

or fate drunk on guitars
and summer breezes you might wear
this body once

the treasure

when you're too poor
to fix your truck
you grumble at the middle class
as they pass you by
and thank your feet
that it's been years
since you've served the machine
that bleeds creation

or you laugh
and let the fucker rust

when you're poor enough
to give up boozing
you measure taste by northern rivers
and count yourself blessed

when you're poor in spirit
sex shuns you
and your socks stink
until you wear your heartbreaks
like a necklace of skulls
you wear your necklace
and prowl

when you're poor enough in spirit
to be counted among the dead
wings of the forest are open phrases
and your meditation is the language of beasts

when you're poor
you can always use a buck
your best friends are your creditors
and your shame is a life-long
argument where nothing is settled

when you're poor
everything in your life seems real
you are at the mercy of nature

and you count yourself blessed

survivor

"we dragged her down
the side of the road
into some gully

threw that bitch down

gagged her

and punched her out

then

as i felt sweat
slide down the sides of my shirt

and the stars were bets of thrill in my brain

we passed around the turpentine
and i shot her where she whimpered"

coyote got up and laughed

she limped up the road and laughed

pink blossoms

(for Gary and Philip in appreciation, and for Loretta)

manzanita

your blood
hunches coyote backs
your bones' fire awakens

wind among thickets
wing-flutter

moonlight, branches, electric

what blue-bellied lizards
sleep in your dreams!

manzanita!

waves drag you down

(we've come, california
to whisper you back
we've come

to whistle with birds before vastness
whistle with deer
and listen tonight among treetops)

manzanita much sweetness is
gold in your bell
many clans

wear tics in their fur
and mash bitter jellies

MANZANITA

earth and stars
sing in us, roots

welded together

BLUEJAY IS A BAREFOOT
MAN SCREAMING

he hops
and plants his magic stalks

he flaps his woolen jacket

he paints mountains
and falling snow
with whistles

and with rainbows

(for John Weber)

nothing of itself

the wheel that turns dreams
drumming with rain
wheel that drums the sun

honeys laurel boughs with yellow flowers
"i've come again to run my love
through your ears"

with owl
whose hoot is morning star's

cricket-tongued

young grass, miner's lettuce, yarrow
violet shooting stars
swirl, yellow band, white

midnight blue
genitalia, "roast my
leaves, roast my roots.

how beautiful you are
baby-blue eyes
in the days' salad."

robins up mountains
into meadows, out
ends of alders bridal-veil
waterfalls of aquarian sun

the same
silver catkins
rise
and interlace
willow twigs

where penny-royal pepper
frost-pocked marsh
mud, maple and ash

frogs spin yarns
yarns of cattail down
whirl in the wind

tree-stump
testaments of legalized terror
road gash, slash, massacre tales

mothers, fathers, live out their worst
cling to life without children they recognize
and what the little ones are doing these days

they wear their hair in branches
their wrists, rainbows, rapping down nails
sprout the tender, feathered flesh of wrens

how friendly they are
with people
who know what to eat

and how to make pillows
where coarse veils of flesh
tumble down

clouds
whacked into fists
fists

whack fists into skulls
that are bells

moan
and thunder the drunk

clapping the bones

drag memories
toward a stratified
bread of music

spit blood on the love of words
spit snow

white, blue, steely grey

thread
red jasper
twisted
in folds

earth's
crust rift
rubbed

fern food, mosses
green as fascination, green
as sperm volcanic ash

a lake long ago

and if earth is shaken
from its people
as it has been

here in the past
now and everywhere
here or somewhere

some starry organic bands drift
dancing through the universe

dawn washcloth

wind-whipped snow galloped woods from the arctic
its smoke smelled of flanks and bellies

now all that remain are watery spoor
and newts drag clouds
in their knees, their rain-

made hearts taste of moss

birdsong in canyons, whispers
wear bumblebee fur, filaree
women talk
naked in the grass

happy as fingers full of bread
hands, cowbells
in old oaks, prepare soil. . .

at first light an outhouse
tumbles its funk into pieces
and i, not quite like a lizard
from a tossed log

FLY OUT

onto my elbows and bottom
my boots
the sky's bright howl

for my mother

1

it's all
blue butterfly dust
dusky winged skippers

quail top-knot
and flicker feathers

it's gooseberry flowers
garnets, quills
lobed leaves shine and
darken
by water

where soil is shallow

it's poppies
it's all chapparal
arrow-shafted
whitethorn
bushes of snow

it's manzanita berries beginning

it's the month of little lizards
many birds in the morning light
it's insects' *ko-o manoo*
insects initiation dance

it's the sun, a rabbit running through the sky

it's always buttercups and blue-eyed grass
it's all grassy slopes, grassy slopes without end
it's a flurry of popcorn
flowers, it's purpled trousers

lupine and goldfields
it's wild iris, mama
mother of rainbows

snow
and the sun sings
rain
and it's green
yellow

blue and white
bits of sky brodiaea
blue butterfly food
brodiaea bulbwheat

braided like onions
it's drunk and in jail
it's the lost senses of mothers

whose stolen children
were bound to snorts
and miles of smell
flies cling to

starved
and sold into slavery

*guns aimed at the air in thousands
in confusion — men, men, men —
who will come after them?*

it's midwives
on the run from the law

what loveless hail rides in fives
what hummingbird blood for love of earth
 what joy
 what cities
 of cruel water

2

 suns are scarlet claws
 and bunches
it's the feel of a hand-hewn axe-handle
 it's all oaks

 where squirrels gallop

 stars bound, it's buckeyes
 six stems every bud
 five leaves each stem

 it's apple-yellow doug fir flowers
 it's an ecstasy of apple green
 maples, mission-bells

 it's all moss-swaddled stream trees
 come to life
 leaves woodland words
 bright as wind in your ears
 or eagles at play

 it's wild pea
 tossed lavender
 winding across
 the forests' springtide
 it's lillies

 it's word in the turn of an hawk's red tail
 it's black-tail's belly song
 the decomposed
 hand helping

 and it all dies/ violet
 fades into white
 dies into life
 geranium gone
 to seed

 keep coming
 with what we are
 to peg praise
 stones in a sunlit pool
 water-striders
 less eloquent than food

 and it's all in the pulp of a fallen tree
 all in the ink of my mother's waking
 her 66th birthday alone

 overweight, frightened and angry enough
 to squander her life in southern california motels
 demanding your vision's moment be considered just
 "thieves are chased through the night
 by lights more terrible than God
 no turning back
 the years' screaming waste

 whatever they are they've forgotten our names
 spider, scorpion, worm"
 it's me, mama, barry
 i'm given poems to write

 and it all dies into you
 it all subsides
 dies into coal and gumweed

 it's all blue butterfly dust
 dusky winged skippers
 and rags of blood at birth

 it's all a boy, mama
 running and shouting in the grass

hopper's flat

rattlesnake

sleeps in the sun
sings to me
rather hums

"pine violets there
sure taste yellow"

stream through the grass
bites my bones
meadowfoam
say nothing
about women

but how green
near
and free
as i would be
free to eat among friends

salads

sunshine

groves of poppies

i too hum and rub my legs
in clover
where frog

taught the Pomo
it's real name

waduk waduk waduk

among watercress in flower
a big bay laurel

and robin

rules the meadow
ravens laugh from fir snags
hawk eyries in the pines

robin

shits singing "revolutions"
clang coin
the commerce of my bowels

back

into earth"

swimmer visions

solid rock

little sorrow

and my heart pounds out

cut the air with swallows

walkingstick beading

i paint my poem with turquoise
tales of skinks

toss my gold to treetops
where the feminine cones

i speak
leaves gesture—
beetles love

and salt the sacred hills with color
slumber, flower-flooded eyes, feather

and winging, hum scarlet spirit elipses - -
verdigris in a sulphur spring
i too dialect frog

talk among grasses names
butterflies and flowers

though peaks, happily, are tipped in snow

i shout

SPRING AGAIN IN A CLEAR BLUE SKY

at night stars are fragrant

working all day in the garden

sun honey breeze
from madrones
and a blank-minded

fire in my bones

toads out at twilight mosquitos

a kingsnake slides through the grass gone
to flower

i'm at home

and satisfied

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BY

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