

**On Our Last Vacation in Provence**

At that tender age, he got his hands on a book  
by De Sade. His life from then on  
was inhabited by that stirring mise-en-scene:  
castle walls studded with restraining rings,

French silk draping sweat lathered leather straps,  
chamber pots spilling lipped rims  
against the bone white Limoges china, full  
with overripe rose petals and the luscious sex fruit—  
oranges and lemons and pomegranates,  
all above a silver platter of rotted meat  
in a shadow of flies.

His place was not to hold the lead,  
as he only wanted to be Justine.  
A role cast by a dice roll of hazard's hand,  
this book lit by flashlight, a map of a sort of life.

He did all he could to bring about his own  
slow and painful crawl across the castle stones.  
Knees bruised and gorgeous  
burning his very light onto the purple  
rust of life, this pride of open flesh,  
as deadly as sloth, lust, or greed.

poetry by *Rod Peckman*

Everything good that came to him,  
every sin he did not commit  
the joy of feeling this guilt,  
like a ragged split along the sternum,  
was beautiful in its way,  
a wind flutter of a dying thing  
as it falls to ground,  
so much like a leaf,  
but so much more and less.

Everything else was routine as his very bones  
yearned for extremes.

He dreams of Lacoste and the edge of the cliffs.  
Those who dared to fall, those compelled  
onto the tan pebbled earth, so fragrant with herbs,  
shaded by gray green leaves of ancient olive trees,  
contorted trunks bearing the wrinkled fruit  
locals have feared to taste  
for a millennium.

This was somehow wrong  
in a way that made it right and him at ease.  
Those shallow last breaths and the soft touch  
of fellow daemons at the base  
of this profane sacred fortress to sacrifice.

**Tabula Rasa**

Limbs scatter. Some impale the wet grass like spears.

November sometimes seethes, as bruises start their fade.

Never a blank white page. Sin lustrous, skin unblemished.

Magic ink, so spit on it. Draw a wet finger across  
the fading grooves. Our life histories emerge  
as pathetic and quotidian as the sadness in the faces  
of the other personality disorders and Janus-faced demons,  
torn asunder lovers with nothing in mind but the protection of hearts  
cast upon cavern walls. I watched you and you watched me sleep,  
and in this dark we could make no shadows.

My twists and turns, I try to understand these things allegedly done.

How what was so right in this arcing mind doubled you, answered  
with anger, a precise lash of need studded with rusty fearful nails.

No matter the suffering, I took it on as my very own  
precious reason to be. I deserved, I so needed to deserve this  
for the sin of months of insanity, choosing to leave it all and love you,  
my dear unwitting lodestone. As I did love you. I only ask  
that you have faith in this absurd assertion,  
faith in these naked white pages. We can never begin again

despite the blank expanse. The myth of this particular love  
we were left with. Cursed with this overdone conscience  
surfacing in rare moments of your most fragile surety,  
understanding the enormity, twenty-four months of irresistible

ordinary suffering, exchanging our atavistic maladies as we shared  
a tainted blood through gasping breath, fingers laced, skin pressed  
bone white.

History. Chemistry. Failure in just making it through this test  
of November and wind and falling limbs. Your mistake  
is only for you to divine, as this coldest wind hurls wooden spears  
against that part of me that still throws my javelin  
towards the impossible place I imagine your heart might be.

### **Mad Season**

It is the light.

It is the slight slant of sun  
that spreads across the browning earth.

Eyes crease in shafts slicing dark spaces  
of rarely seen things,  
as silence moves with these new shadows.

Black outlines of Douglas fir against gauze cool sky,  
an edged animation against death for a season.

The cooling blue uncertainty. Light blue bottle glass sky.  
A shift of axis, perhaps a shift of unreasonable splendor  
against the frankness of death. Wet fields of portent  
linger in tan and brown, as cold damp fingers clutch

poetry by *Rod Peckman*

thinning ledges. Exclamations of stubble, deafening against  
the wildest summer wildflower.

With my breath charging air into a billow of smoke,  
it was time, though I could not have known.

Disrobed in tepid surrender,  
a courtesan lets silk settle  
onto a bamboo mat  
modestly behind opaque screens.

(as leaves fade then fire orange,  
then red to brown, the sun  
moves into angles that display  
things as they really are,  
in this soft glow slant silver).

As my breath made cold air real, I went mad.  
I wish I could say I only shed my clothes  
and howled through moonlit night. Words fall  
from place marks, a gauzed silent shift lightwards  
to soothe and penetrate, a rusty barb, a smooth sliver  
slipped from god.

Summer took leave and with it the leaves,  
an easy blending of paint to pallet.

poetry by *Rod Peckman*

We watched it dying right. Before your eyes  
I whirled around our room with misplaced joy  
and slanting smile. I broke every precious thing,  
framed pictures fell from walls,  
glass glittered the hallway  
of the house we sold three years ago now,  
before going our separate ways.

I left with a surety I may never feel again  
now a sallow stasis has been reached.

I was there, light shined somewhere without compass,  
as the sun rose in the west. Trust this crude rendering  
under the ash blanket January sky.

(Earth, now faded after the fire,  
red, orange, then brown. I was  
never so mad and never so alive,  
primed in a certain slant of night,  
to fall into a darkness underneath.

She gathered fallen leaves.

She would not let go. Fingers not failing  
the ledge, she would not let go,  
scraping cold earth with that hoe,  
exposing my bedrock.

Then she let go.)

poetry by *Rod Peckman*

7

As I shook in my frenetic shell  
under the lessened sky.