

I COULD ALMOST SEE CARS ON POSTAGE STAMPS MOVING

James Cushing

I rushed over greener hills and browner, warmer rocks.
Only the young Marlon Brando made me happy.
I could see two ropes of muscle connecting his head to his neck.
I give a philosopher twenty minutes to prepare
an explanation, but he calls me back with some story
about sports cars and ex-girlfriends.

A couple of years pass and I see him in the agora
selling stew and black bread from a gaily painted cart.
He snakes a little slice of paper into my hand.
I think everything I write is a letter to you,
smiling over bourbon, mouth full of smoke,
about to start telling your bread-crumbs fairy tale.

We went out French doors to a curving lawn
where we made love in the shadow of a giant sedan.
To the west, breakers played "The End" again.
The rest of our afternoon was a pond of fragrances,
one of whom gave me my name. For ten years
you were the clothes I wore, the bed that held my sleep.

I remember hushing little summer flames,
the sun waist-deep in the melting horizon.
I remember rhythm patterns from mockingbirds
who picked at unpromising ground for seeds.
Now I glance back at a shirt I tossed on that bed.
You knew this would come, you heard the whispers

behind the headboard, you accepted their steaks
and their love letters. I saw you startle their birds.
I walked behind you like a man with a plow
using its blade to jimmy open the earth.
I heard the great thunder-god roar for honor,
his voice turgid with pain and bitterness;

we knew he was about to strike our city,
yet the winter air had never smelled sweeter,
the jasmine scent had never thrilled our crosswalks more.
Night-birds gathered in persimmon trees.
Crows pecked the crumb-trail left by two
children, shivering tonight in the Schwarzwald.

The forest means the same thing it always means:
right before me, my books start turning to dust,
their page-edges brown and delicately dry.
Are they still as important as I thought they were
when I bought them more than twenty years ago?
Did they mean, or was meaning a gift I made them,

a figure pressed out of the compost-mulch of years?
If tonight were a song, this part would be the chord change,
and we would know where the song was going.
But I find my mouth full of pomegranate pulp,
red juice staining the clerical collar I'm suddenly
wearing. I just peered into the face of a book

as I imagined sibyls must have gazed into
the hypnotizing pool at Delphi, and the sensation was so new
I had no language for it, only a mouth full of pulp.