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The Beetle's Litany

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THE BEETLE'S LITANY

Hernan Castellano-Giron

translated from Spanish by William Little

Above fields of stars, above the asparagus
Above oceans of marshmallows, above sausages
Above silk shawls, above kids and billy goats
Above deserts, above warts
As tradition so requires
And as we've transcribed it here
From now on we shall all sing
The following chorus:

See the crestfallen crusty beetle cruise!

See the crestfallen crusty beetle cruise!

With banners and signs as wide as a town plaza
Tails of kites and comets and monkeys' sexy long tails
Broken and toothless shoes
But with a very clean conscience
Cripples, consumptives, dandies
Those who moved around at half speed and who half-chose
The spendthrift fools, the perfidious
Those who inflated their liver to three times its size
Those peaceful sorts, those with dark birth marks
Biologists, paranoiacs
Students of computer science whose science doesn't compute
Those who have a monkey's butt and let it be seen
The tragico-romantic types
Those who're hotheaded and cold of heart
Who make the V hand sign
They revel in the supreme pleasure of exclaiming

See the crestfallen crusty beetle cruise!

See the crestfallen crusty beetle cruise!

Beneath red clouds on a January afternoon
A heartless mob marches on carrying a pale blue flag
Like chickens trotting off to sleep through a total eclipse of the sun
Like the tragic sweat that fertilizes the earth every equinox
Tripping over itself often but keeping its knees apart
Just enough so that short guys can pass under each other
The cortege proclaiming the good news

See the crestfallen crusty beetle cruise!
See the crestfallen crusty beetle cruise!

When at last I'm tired of calling you in gardens and plazas
—Above all the ones lost on the edges of dreams
In those bubbles wherein reality is transfigured and harasses you—
When at last the musical hell in which you live is again our lost paradise
And those of us who're seeking that trickle of water for our proverbial thirst
Can at last distinguish Adam's springwater ale from its own clay
Only then could I happily join the chorus of your former lovers, those who've
 memorized the verse

See the crestfallen crusty beetle cruise!
See the crestfallen crusty beetle cruise!

Those who believe in crime but more in punishment
The dumbfounded
Those who finally consulted the oracle three thousand years late
The Knights of Malta
The thousands of children of free enterprise who populate the world's sidewalks by
 night and then sleep on them
Those who swallow poison and like it
They're the ones who'll make the best choir singing in pitch

See the crestfallen crusty beetle cruise!
See the crestfallen crusty beetle cruise!

When they deign to let me speak
After another lengthy catastrophe
In which black sheep will bleat more than normal

And many pilgrims wearing sandals will seek refuge in the shade
Of the castles of mad kings who've surged up from darkness itself
And magical unguents will take away the prestige from the Neosporin ointment
Then we'll fold up our newspapers, the Mercurio¹ and The Times
And from our mouths an electric can opener will extract these tragic lines:

See the crestfallen crusty beetle cruise!

See the crestfallen crusty beetle cruise!

Feeling the bare beginning of a certain glandular pain
And also a low-grade fever
While gargling with briny water, with seven blood suckers on my back
Intending no belligerence, but without being in a joking mood either
Crossing ourselves backwards, slightly jerked around
Hirsute under the full moon, but shaved by the light of the sun
With voices counterfeiting the Vienna Boys Choir we utter

See the crestfallen crusty beetle cruise!

See the crestfallen crusty beetle cruise!

At the moment when the prelude's playing for every catastrophe and when fleas spawn
—A peripatetic moment that receives communion with the most painful part of our
renal and hypophyseal cycles—
With rancid butter and a rosebud
With that emaciated appearance, bluish
You see in bodies and souls at the end of the Deluge
Clutching in your hand the city's keys wrapped in cellophane
With three hummingbird feathers, with turnover dough
Sculpting every profane feeling out of anaphoras
From far away smelling like something singed
We breathe the air of death like those who peer into a serene and secluded garden
After rehearsing by singing "The Ship"² and clearing our voices
We'll shout to the four winds

See the crestfallen crusty beetle cruise!

See the crestfallen crusty beetle cruise!

Notes

1. *El Mercurio* is a prestigious right-wing newspaper in Santiago, Chile.
2. “The Ship” is a song from *The Threepenny Opera* (*Die Dreigroschenoper*, 1928, by Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht). The song is sung by a character named Jenny.