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Poems

William Logan

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Poems

Abstract

UNDER THE PALMS, THE BORN LAWYER, THE TIDE, 1955

William Logan

UNDER THE PALMS

Behind the broken-knuckled
 palmetto, face half-hidden,
 half-lit by razory fronds,
 lost canvas of a Renaissance master

lost in the subtropics
 (lacking only the emerald glaze
 of the parrot's outspread wing
 or the dart and stitch of the hummingbird's

needlepoint), there you were, smiling and sexual,
 skin aglow with new-world salt.
 Before you stood the cities of the plain.
 The sky hung like a backdrop,

a foamy SOS-pad blue, darkening to storm.
 Warsaw. Krakow. Cities of your ancestors.
 You looked as if you could hear
 the scuttle and whimper of undergrowth.

the downward exultation of roots,
 the coral snake whose Magdalene beauty
 (crimson sliced with black,
 like a Chanel suit) could ravage

these whispers in the old tongue.
 When I found you, face-down in a drawer,
 fifteen years erased as if by the retoucher's art,
 how young you were,

your beauty all in the varnish.

THE BORN LAWYER

It was a tale told by an idiot.
 The slanting lawns where we played croquet
 slanted down to the wind-chewed bay
 speckled with dark islands,
 like my mother's beauty spots.

Our town was asleep.
 Dying maples crossed the fieldstone walls;
 a few clapboards warped on the old town hall,
 rugged with age and indisposition.
 Late in the day my mother would weep

 at nothing, at nothing she could see.
 I stared at the mouth of my pet horned toad.
 My father's anger grew as it snowed –
 he swore we could fish like bears.
 Our "river" was six inches deep.

 Down in the sun-marked woods, a shout.
 We bent to the icy stream,
 and there inside it, raw glimmer of dream,
 there, in my father's bruised raw hands,
 the glowing mottled broken trout.

THE TIDE, 1955

"Romanticism ... is dangerously lighted
 by those bayonets that Blake and Goethe
 observed passing their garden hedges."
 – George Steiner

The passion has drained slowly, like the tide.
 In the watery haze, a bored girl contemplates
 the languor of the anemone's arms,
 the clever crab with its torn claw –

beneath the cliff stands our pink motel,
 its sand-starred stairs, the television
 frothy and blood-purple like outward sea,
 the noon-light blinded through the gauze curtain,

and on everything the taste of salt.
 A freighter perches on the horizon like a finial.
 The dead are old news, and each hour
 passes the eye in downward flight

The ghosts within us confuse us with our sorrows,
 as we confuse them with their memories.
 Now the shipping lanes devour the fishermen,
 and the last war seethes on the sailor's forearms.