

AMERICAN MASTODON

poems

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Customs of Golems

Fearing discovery,
Sasquatch runs into Sears
before the holiday rush
and crouches inside a silver circle
of warm, cuddled coats: red, blue, and
popular grey.
As he sits, his teeth on his knees
like a bike chain,
he hears crazy things:
You stop that Sean Michael or
I'll tell Santa and you won't get that
mmmmm again and again. He shivers.
He shivers at the voice.
Tall as maples and wrens.

At night, he searches
for the high, white stars.

After three days, he waits until
the voice is gone and
tears out like gas on fire.
Sure the glass hurts and the alarm is maybe
a bit too loud for his
nocturnal, pursed ears,
but it is winter, after all.
So he takes a coat,
just in case,
leaving twigs, berries, and
twine behind.

Kids are blamed, of course,
but they still end up getting
incredible toys.

Next We Should Try A Monkey (But That Would Be The Nuts)

The Soviets dispatched the canine Laika (which means “Barker”) in Sputnik 2 in November 1957, one month after performing another technological feat that stunned the world, launching the first artificial satellite into orbit, Sputnik. Laika overheated, panicked and died within hours of launch in the second spacecraft to circle the planet, contrary to Soviet reports that the dog had lived for up to a week, said Dimitri Malashenkov of the Institute for Biomedical Problems in Moscow. The 1,120-pound (508-kilogram) space crypt remained in orbit a total of 162 days, then burned up in the atmosphere on April 14, 1958.

—CNN News

The steel cylinder is pretty
perfect: no holes, no corners
and not the best for paws
that go sliding up and down over
Greece, Turkey, Pan-Asia.

And no hard snacks but a
thin liquid gel
squeezed
through a tube.
This takes all the fun out of it.
There is no need for a tail.

In a craft that turns slowly
like hissing meat
you chase it anyway
a hundred million times
till the wires are a mess
like the organs of baseballs.

So the sharp array taped to the State
gets a confused signal.

Because it's all black and white:
on the TV,
the newsreels,
the faded photos of *Life*,
and

lest we forget,

in the canine optic nerve

that winds towards the brain
like a long, slow walk
through the afternoon leaves.

The World Minus Five Feet Four

for Emily (1980-2000)

In Ray, Ohio
dogs sniff for you.

Let's say their names are Bruno or
The Captain. And they move in
slow curls
towards the low woods.

Frightened, the slugs hide
shaking
in their clear, soft skin.
The silver trailer shines.

The dogs now
have smelled this all before:
damp skin and leaves
fill the rooms of their brains
like the punch of the old poinsettias.

But grey bone has no smell
so this is how they know it: as emptiness.
A soft circle to press up to
in the black-and-white fuzz.
As a child, place your hand
an inch away
from the old, wood-paneled television.

When it is done,
there is the communal wagging of tails
(always this)
before the tall men in the dark windbreakers.
Why? Because the rolled carpet

at their feet
is heavier than it should be.
Those who know why
will haunt their houses forever,
till the mail drifts like snow
and the milk has gone sour.

All the hard pats and good-boys
cannot help this.
Especially among
the thin, bare blankets.

I'm Not Going Down

Even though the coffee smells fine
and is surely accompanied
by sweet crumbled cake.

Even though my mother is yelling
Hell-o, Hell-o
to my tired father about
fixing the extra chair.
He makes the sad mistake
of using the word “epoxy”
and she responds,
with greater volume.

No, I will stay here in the large thin bed
that used to swish and flush
and smell like black rubber.
I will lay on my flabby back
and hear the rain
down the jugged roof
through the sharp gutters
over the brown aluminum siding
into the dark soil
washing the spare skeleton
of the family dog.

No, I will stay even though Dad,
good, old, ready to go,
comes in and starts ironing
a stiff tan shirt with breast pockets
and a series of wrinkle-free slacks.
I will wish to get a backrub,
the kind I, as a child,
feared was breaking

my baby spine
or grey spleen.

No, I will stay here,
since I am alone
at least
until the relatives come.
I will stay here
in the shadows of the dark
monumental furniture set
and the starry wallpaper
and furtive stares

of the Silver Age Flash
and Golden Age
Green Lantern.

Until I go down and make peace
by silently grabbing the *kuchen*
and lifting up the mug,
forgiving all their
limp noodle handshakes
and horribly-wrought casseroles
as we laugh in the day
amid the thick pies.

Bartleby and Emily Dickinson's First Date

He answers the ad:
SWF seeks Master –
after studying it
for weeks.

After a nervous call, they meet for dinner.
He is impressed by her indifference to the salad,
her unabashed intentions
towards the Porterhouse.

Afterwards, they see a poorly-chosen
Hollywood blockbuster
or an art film.
Emily revels in the full-
frontal nudity. Bartleby
shifts visibly. She finds
this sort of cute
so she coaxes him out of his overcoat
and he feels a thin hand
there
in the dark.

When the date is over,
Bartleby mutters something about doing her taxes
and she laughs
a high harmonious sound
like the movement of gulls in winter.
This startles Bartleby and indeed the whole waking world.
She pulls him close and whispers:
Call me if you wish
my lord.

But her breath smells like steak sauce.
So he makes a feeble, poorly-chosen excuse.
It will haunt his days
like dismemberment.