

Four Prose Poems

Ken Taylor

wyoming

who you cowboying for? pertness and pout tossed at the shitkicker striking the lonesome pose of voluntary exile. rounded on himself among vinyl pops from the last song that dropped. doesn't care to be worthy of her regard. her poke is a sorting hat within the scope of giving vent. to prompt soliloquy or quiet. if he talks his voice will not be the thing said, but the way of not saying it. what it aims to spurn. short on collar points. disciple of celestial steering. he keeps his mouth shut. the image will have to carry. not to be seen as holdup to action. he's lost in thought in the throwback era. hides the cut of his build in gloom. implies reckoning in his rebuff. she finds him the crux of standalone art. a site-specific sight within the range that fits a postcard you mail back east. feels the flirt of his resistance. his indefinity. her ask is equal footing on snow melt and blistering dirt. to be coincident in ecliptics. both skirt direct approaching. truck with slippage. melismatic suspense. if there's traction it'll be testament to a swell of wind in prairie grass. to the means of last resort. before she can cross the bar, he buys three beers to go. one for his pocket. one for the rain. one for the untied cinch strap of an absent friend.

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riding the tremble of aspens through a rocky mountain orbit is probing blocks of sky with echoes. she says that doesn't rhyme and doesn't count. i tell her nothing's doing near the poet's ladder to be other than what's happening. if there's a future beyond this theatre piece. one stint after another. toward an ornamental dusk. her fear is reaching the busk of white space on the page. revising down to losing threads of story in the crosshatch motif of her beautiful twirl. she's been probing the bottoms of cups and found ethereal stacked in the pantry. we both seem close to knowing there's a gap when choreography grows between brackets. arranged in diagonals. in double double syncopation. *pill box hiding. help stole her rings again.* her inside work strives for the same ease outside. sliding in scale from lanterns to sails in amorphous enactment. how do we grasp the fiat of material? the most real thing? when the tap of feet isn't news declaring beet pickling season. predicting mergence with other holes. says she dreamed of a rosemary bush down by the water table set for two. when only one remains to sing to a brook. holds three fingers up like a second child. *this many drinks.* her mind looms like uncorrected proofs soon out of print. clings to riddling speech. wants a clean slate to return to factory settings. to seed stars that brought us to start again. seeks 21 in the deck. *recompense. voyage. change of place. this cycle ending.* sometimes sneaked from the bottom to stave off the next beginning. *the fool.* and like a fox when hungry she plays possum. in a kind of dissolve. recalls the earth voicing profusion with a simulacra of doves. plays at freeing nesting dolls. hums tunes to an improvised dance with a dog. to crickets. to the chance of each leaf.

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the want ad reads seeking a heart that beats somewhere near the écossaise of a show horse or the tempi of smashing ice to make a julip on race day. either way shows you're glad to see me. i'll be your loyal doggie on the trail drive. even by the trick of mirrors breaking up the pass. you'll play chuckwagon cook serving sourdough biscuits and beans to the cowboys. over the shoulder shots reveal the weight you carry as second in command—which beasts to slaughter for the arrival party. corners to shave for the trip home. we can snuggle in the soundtrack among sewn flour bags at night to name comfort in the forces that turn the sky. and in the second reel, when we set up house, i'll sing stylish ditties of the outskirts assuming the hue of spent coral reefs. feisty in that schoolmarm way of vying for your care. you'll be the town smithy shaping horseshoes and downing suds after a long day by the forge. there's no call for us to mend some tattered allotment. to fritter away these moments performing need behind curtains. beyond now is ample land to be gold rushed. unplucked tender plots waiting for firstcomers. grammar shall eventually clothe the earth in a kind of glory, but we'll soon be asked to turn in our wardrobe. we can still probe each other's pockets for bills, loose smokes, maybe a breach in linings. reaching past imposed limits for the true story.

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got word in cody she passed. three-day drive through more than as many states. through an imperfect understanding of things as they occur. slept in my truck under one of her quilts. elders from her woods i never met greet me with something near stink eye. *you done lost the brogue*, one said. nods from others. i promise to find it after a couple of drinks. the good shepherd on the funeral fan is bounded by a fold that minds his staff. he strides through 2-ply cardstock that comes in packs of ten fixed to scalloped wood. obliging the damp hands of summer in alabama. *bring a friend to church* stamped on the back. during open casket views the undertaker tells me how he was called. *i always liked the cars*, he said. set his sights early on the '60 cadillac eureka. V8. 4-speed automatic. chrome trim. whitewalls. houndstooth headliner. shiny casket loading table that slid over storage. his first job was a car wreck. decapitated driver. the second, charred kids from a school fire. *when i didn't spen*, he said, *they knew i could take it*. later bought the business. a nearby fish camp. former titty bar. now has four parlors and a fleet. in the presence of her disappearing act. what she's taken leave of. i try to hold her shape within being clearly absent. she has ceded self for an unknown predicate. left us entangled with antique recollections. the color-shift to pearlescence. a preface of what's not among the bond of kin trying to reconnect. *who do you belong to?* we're soon smoothed by ritual practice. sweet tea. catfish. field peas. waving flies from plates.

