

Trying to Talk with a Man

Out in this desert we are testing bombs,
that's why we came here.

Sometimes I feel an underground river
forcing its way between deformed cliffs
an acute angle of understanding
moving itself like a locus of the sun
into this condemned scenery.

What we've had to give up to get here –
whole LP collections, films we starred in
playing in the neighborhoods, bakery
windows
full of dry, chocolate-filled Jewish cookies,
the language of love-letters, of suicide notes,
afternoons on the riverbank
pretending to be children

Coming out to this desert
we meant to change the face of
driving among dull green succulents
walking at noon in the ghost town
surrounded by a silence

that sounds like the silence of the place
except that it came with us
and is familiar
and everything we were saying until now
was an effort to blot it out –
coming out here we are up against it

Out here I feel more helpless
with you than without you
You mention the danger
and list the equipment
we talk of people caring for each other
in emergencies - laceration, thirst -
but you look at me like an emergency

Your dry heat feels like power
your eyes are stars of a different magnitude
they reflect lights that spell out: EXIT
when you get up and pace the floor

talking of the danger
as if it were not ourselves
as if we were testing anything else.

-- Adrienne Rich

At The Chernobyl Power Plant Eco-reserve

If ravens perch on the ferris wheel
outside of town, if owls
nest in the silos and swallows circle
the tipped watchtower, if catfish
bloat in the cooling pool and elk
graze on perennial beard grass,
if boars rake their tusks
among the roots, if black
storks claim the cloud-blighted
pines of Red Forest, if wire
succumbs to rust, if lichen,
if shingles unhinge in the snow,
if untrafficked lots cede land
to yarrow, if mirrors, if spoons
reflect the sky, if watches tick
in unopened drawers, if swollen,
if stiff-maned Przewalski's horses
foal, if wolves, if then, if then, if

--Jennifer Atkinson

“Who Would Be Free, Must Themselves Strike the Blow”

--Frederick Douglass

The cow could not stand up. The deadly river
washed the feet of children. Where the cows
grazed the ground concealed invisible
charged particles that did not glow or make
a tiny sound.

It was pretty quiet.

The cow could not stand up. The deadly clouds
bemused the lovers lying on the deadly ground
to watch the widening nuclear light
commingle with the wind their bodies set
in motion.

It was pretty quiet.

The cow could not stand up.
The milk should not be sold.
The baby would not be born right.
The mother could not do anything about the baby
or the cow.

It was pretty quiet.

--June Jordan

Eclogue on Decommissioning

--For DEMCO, contracted by Yankee Atomic Electric Company
to provide complete decommissioning & demolition services

Fog scrimps the Deerfield River Valley. Leaves bleed
through, bent south. Gourds bloat, rupture on vines.
Our plant is no exception. It, too, has begun to dismantle

in much the same way a glass dish, hot from the oven
would crack if doused in cold water. Where to begin?
No blueprint, no wrecking ball, no countdown to blast.

But each pipe, seal and bearing must be mourned
and laid to rest. Make no mistake—
for each method, a cost. Whether to store it dry or wet

addles your brain. Odds for cross-contamination
curdle your spleen. Perhaps we ought not place blame.
Go on. Bury it. As quickly and quietly as you can.

Dump it in dark trenches in towns with jowled porches,
and slow-swaying stoplights. Mottling a river—
with no will left to say *no*.

--Lissa Kiernan