

WATER HILLS

BY MICHAEL FINLEY

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A Penny for the Poet?

Poets are born to suffer, of course, but here's a rare opportunity to pat one on the head. Your donation to Kraken Press will help keep this site up and running.

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WATER HILLS

The water hills are
High today. Water
Hills meaning us, how
We break up the
Surface of things,
And make the lake we
Rise from more
Interesting.
Something burning and
Electric with
Insistence is in us,
Scratching, tapping
In our skulls. Some
Unnegotiable body of
Water rocks us in its
Arms, and in the
Distance collected
Like blue waves
Between us the man
Kisses deeply and
Longingly wife, and
The lightning
Sticking in our heads
Makes fire, each
Inhalation fills the
Sail, borne aloft by
A hand so strong the
Boat and sea obey.

A DRIVE in the COUNTRY

Summer was dry but the
Farmers forget and plow
The dead stalks under.
Today the wind is lifting
The first loose dirt away.
The elms in the Mahnomen
Park are striped for
Felling, and sugar beets
Litter the roads at sharp
Curves. Tree trunks lay
Scattered where they
Landed after the tornado
Of 1958. Outside
Crookston a yellow dog
Just made it to the ditch
To die, and farther
Ahead, a mile from the
Border, old shoes line the
Shoulders. Canadians are
Home now, wearing new
Ones.

TAKING a JOB in
Another TOWN

Life by the freeway's
Like life by a great
Two-way river north-
Flowing and south.
Always vapor bluing the
Air and sand-fine chunks
Of street. The wise
Dell to the leeward
Side, the less wise peer
At the neon tree of
Midwest Federal, the
Sunset swims red against
IDS mirror, and every
Night very late the
Traffic and the
Breathing sound of tire
On asphalt stops and
Many times when that
Happened I would open my
Eyes in the quiet and
Listen.

"THE MINSTREL & THE LADIE"

The singer's message: I am only a boy
And my songs and my fiddle
My only true friends.

But the woman banging her glass
On the formica bartop is receiving
Transmissions of life in the wild,

She envisions geese lifting
From a fern-bog in the peninsula
Of a state she has never visited.

Between numbers she buys him a beer
And for a moment there is no Ramada Inn:
Young man, I want to kiss you everywhere.

But he clings to character, stammers
His Thank you Ma'am but home's a distance,
And the roads up Moorhead way are slick.

To no avail. She's deaf. Changing.
Already she's a brute brown bear
In the northerly wood,

Already enjoying the scratch
She knows comes next on her rump
On the broken spruce branches.

ONE WEEK before HIGH SCHOOL
GRADUATION, I MAKE a VISIT
to MARBLEHEAD PENINSULA

Limestone quarry, blue pool
With white sides -- men have
Made something beautiful here
By hauling away the world.

A young man learns to suck
Time from a cigarette, feel
The life of stone expend itself
Underfoot at the center

Of an argument deep and hot
Within the earth, whose
Debates and rebuttals
Are never resolved.

Solidity implies something
Happening to all of us,
Suggests most things are
Simpler than they seem.

Water, rock, light are what
You get for answers;
Water, rock, light and envy
Perhaps for things that last,

Advance regret for things
That go wrong, and the hard
And useless knowledge that
Something deep inside agrees.

LAST YEAR'S XMAS DANCE

Norwegian farmers in hospitals, islands
Of plastic tubes and fluttering eyelids
Struggle to do what they will not do,
Arise and return to their fields.

Ivor Thorsen of Glendive, Montana,
Disintegrating nerves flown in, is awed
By his speechlessness, motionlessness,
Dreams he is laughing in Glendive, Montana.

But the strings inside are all undone,
Incomprehensible to a scarecrow who
Has walked ten thousand furrowed
Crumbled lopsided miles.

Mary, Anna, is it really Christmas Day?
And is it really clumsy me slipping here
With farmer feet on the Legion floor?
Oh look at me Mother I'm dancing.

The HEIGHTH of the DROUTH

The ice in the
Pitcher spins round

And around.
No rain, no food,

An equation fixed
When the colors of mid-

Winter occur in mid-
Summer. Farmers cite

Crop damage figures
Begetting Armageddon.

Even the fish at
The bottom of what's

Left of the spring-
Fed pond are ap-

Prehensive.

CENTIPEDE on CHOP SUEY

Fork and knife to left and right
But before digging in I see
Dancing like Krishna on unpolished rice
Two dozen legs rising up at me.

In Libya kids pluck them larger
Than this one by far from holes
In the sand and swallow them armored
And wriggling, whole,

But that is not our way in Brewster,
Here we give our plates a push
And pray our appetites return
In time for eggs and toast.

Little guest, just as I am
So are you, hard put
To keep to the minimum
This jitterbug on my dinner.

BIKER BOB MANISKALKO'S
LIVING ROOM DECOR

Ignore the Iron Crosses
And posters of Nuremburg
And leather-breasted
Blondes on naked Harleys,

But drink in the tapestry
Tacked up behind empties
That might be a tribute to
Baked potatoes, clad in

Aluminum foil but isn't --
It's night-time on an arid
Beach, and the two
Astronaut buddies walk

Hand in hand in the
White light from earth --
Brushed on black velvet
And hung by the platters

Of Bobby and JFK.

THE BUSINESS OF BEES

When prices are normal
And weather cold, bees clump
In a knot, suck sugar
And hum to stay warm.

But when sugar is high
It's cheaper to dump them
Out of their drawers and buy
A new queen come the spring.

This year the bees are
Tumbling, hear: sugar
Is dear, the snow lies
Buzzing on the ground.

TIERCE

Everything points upwards
Here, the prayer of the
Rails leading out from the
Concrete block yard, the
Breath of the street
Escaping the hole the man
With the jack hammer
Punctuates, the furling of
Triplicates like carbon
Doxologies past desk tops
And tucked into clip
Boards and carried under
Arm on up in the shaft of
This city's newest B
Building's birthing, the
Whistle weighting the
Foreman's shirt or the
Handful of pencils waiting
To be sharpened or the
Childlike character of
The salesman arriving for
The day's first prospect.
There is ambition in
Announcing Yes, let's to
The suffering attending
Each new mornings' waking,
To men and women wide eyed
Thinking This is our
Chance, let us try and
Complete these walls
Before dark.

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