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Archipelago

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Archipelago

In spring at last all the windows rise open
and with them all sound of spring creeps in, gently,
like roots pushing their fingers through black earth.
The whine of the whippoorwill and the titmouse's
pecks of pitch. The clash of the neighbor's door as it opens:
the hinges' expectancy. Into the brilliant streets,
now crowded with sound. A long-legged man
walks his white sheep dog. Its tongue
hangs from its mouth like finely pounded leather.
At the grocery store the man strokes petal-soft mangos,
the thin, dry leaves of corn. He buys cucumbers and avocados
for the first time this year, carries them home
in a ripe paper sack, bulging forward like a pregnant belly.
At home he peels a cucumber slowly.
It clings to its skin and weeps captive-cries—
the dry knife noise, the shy shudders as the skin falls
into sink water, glowing like green glass bottles.
The man's mustache curdles with prickles of salt,
and his shoulders heave forward with the giant weight of cutting.
On the porch the dog hears the smeared sound of many radios
from many speeding cars. The wind is rich with new scents:
young rabbits and budding oak leaves. Sweat. The dog watches
the glittering birds as attentively as a lover.
It dreams that each ragged scratch of their boney claws
reveals new birds hidden in the dirt, and that these birds too
are scratching. It dreams that it is sleeping on the porch.
Inside the house, the man does not think of his wife, whose footsteps
are as dull as an orphan's. He does not think
of the silences between them, the quiet hum of her snores
so early that his thoughts are still fanged and wild,
still clinging to the wisps of moonlight
that trace the bathroom rug. He does not think
of her oval lips, like pears, like seeds of pomegranates.
Her soft stomach, the tender lines curving near her eyes
like garter snakes. The man
touches the moisture on his forehead, its dim coolness,
and leans against the counter. Outside he hears
a car coughing and starting. Sharp shrieks of children
racing all the way to the end of the road.
Ice becoming drips of water. Curls of leaves
left from last fall, licking new-bare legs



and periscopic maple stems. He listens
and hears Styrofoam cups scudder
across the street like legless mice.
He is not thinking of loneliness.
How he is connected
and not, drifting
through a sea of sound. The echoes.
As graceful as a hand reaching up to touch a face
and then falling.

Rebecah Pulsifer