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Pleiades: Literature in Context, Volume 38, Issue 2, Summer 2018, pp.
69-71 (Article)

Published by University of Central Missouri, Department of English
and Philosophy

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/plc.2018.0121>



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Meditation at 6 PM

Of interesting things in the kitchen,
let me remember these are not the least,

this water and this potato. Even leaving
aside the familiar miracles of pipe

and pump and chlorine, the complex filtering
system that lets me piss in the river

I drink from, let me note how water fills
the Pyrex the way it does, quick blisters

into the cup, the very rush of it clouding
itself up, then settles, pours into a superlative

clarity through which I see grains of salt fall
to the bottom of the pot. And let me consider,

as I scrub this potato with a potato-shaped
brush, how, though no potato is truly ovoid,

this one is like a pebble or old boiled egg
in that none of the three should be eaten:

for this potato is green. But let me praise,
while cream thickens over a low burner

and butter softens in its wax paper wrapper,
how this potato grew in horseshit and kept on

growing all month in its bowl on the counter.
Let me not throw it out; let me not think,

as I fold dishtowels into small soft squares,
of vomiting or the gastrointestinal tract

but that in twenty minutes we'll all be only
twenty minutes older. Let me watch the pot.



St. Dismas

He's patron of the honor block, good thief,
the famous late penitent—and might you not,
dwelling in the desert, also murder to rob?

Amen, I said, and signed up to teach
at the supermax, Amen, but did not mean
today they should be with me in paradise

which is my backyard by the river not far
enough from Dannemora's wall, thirty
concrete feet through the village the prison

built in mountains convicts mined. Here
is its post-office, here is its gas station,
between them the wall. This road is closed

but here are the troopers, here are the dogs.
The manhunt lasts three weeks and I am not
Jesus, I lock my doors until I hear one's dead,

the other caught. Like anyone else
in the northern counties, I've seen the hole
in the steam-pipe and the smiley face

on the post-it note that read have a nice day,
I've tried to imagine how naïve
one might have to be to smuggle tools

or drive a getaway car or think it could not
be dangerous to be living in a place like this,
bolt after gate after wall not unlike hell

in late medieval images of its harrowing—
here is St. Dismas, holding his cross,
while, like a common criminal, Jesus

tramples demons who might only be doing
their jobs, the only steady middle class
ones they could get in that region of bare

storefronts and rocky farms. I don't know
what makes a man kill a man—but even
the river hates its dams. It floods that June:

fish flashed through my backyard's grass
and, as if this paradise were not provisional,
the geese grew bolder every day.

