Shalott

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Shalott

Abstract
In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"Singing a song of darlings locked upon the castle door, and fenny things and summer leaves, and the raven's quote 'Nevermore'."

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“Sing a song of darlings locked upon the castle door, and fenny things and summer leaves, and the raven’s quote ‘Nevermore’."

She tilted back her head and laughed and I marvelled at her; laughed too, I suppose. For she was laughable, in much the way prophets are laughable—always damnably, laughably right.

She leaned against a vacant cradle and regarded me for a moment. She was waiting for my opinion; that I knew. The answer that I must give however, required a second question.

—The verse fits, milady.—Her eyes voiced the reply, and told me that I needn’t answer. Snot, I thought. She could no more answer the unvoiced question than I.

—Will you please take me to dinner tonight?—she asked. Her eyes glowed with the strange light that I expected was the major part of her.

—You have a lot of nerve, Char. Where now?—

—On the fair isle, milord.—She pointed to a small island, not a great distance off shore. However, my skiff wasn’t even off the cradle yet this year.

—The paint is still tacky.—

—Why not borrow H.I.A. ‘Ariel’?—

—If you want to go on ‘Ariel’, get Fred to take you. It’s his boat.—

—You’re more fun. Alas—I have no great affinity for His Imperial Asininity.—

—Tut-tut—I said.
—Tut-tut.—she said,—Have you no love for the Muse?—
—I’ll get the boat.—I said.

We set out as the moon began to rise, like a pearl wrapped in veils of gossamer. The island was cloaked in soft darkness with the hint of emerald on its heights. “Ariel” pitched softly on murmur of its wake. And she did bring the dinner, swathed in a red-checked cloth and stuffed in a wicker basket.

—Have you a bucket? I’ll drag the wine behind us to cool.—

Nights differ, one from another, and the differences are as between a spring wine and a fall wine, a matter of taste.

This was a special night, one for lovers, for those who loved. I couldn’t have loved Charlotte, except as a mildly in-factuating something. I was too scared to; I was afraid that if I dared the result would be a kind of Doris Day—Rock Hudson plot—laughably unreal. I did not particularly want to be laughed at; nor do I believe that I could have kept myself from laughing any more than I could earlier on the beach.

So she leaned her head on my arm during the voyage and sang a song—in French.

—You have no knowledge of the tongue, milord?—
—None whatever.—
—It’s really not a love song or anything, you know.—
—I should have expected as much.—

She ignored me and continued—

—My father taught it to me. A proper girl, I suppose, would find it a bit offensive. But the music is sweet, even if the lyrics aren’t, and that’s what counts, isn’t it?—

“Ariel” neared the shore and I secured it in a quiet anchorage, below a promontory, willow-crowned; in the lee of a crescented beach.
—A quaint and wonderous isle,—she pronounced it,—well fit to the respite of our stomachs. Come Caliban, to table.—

—Caliban, my ass!—

She began to giggle and lost her balance as she waded ashore with the lunch perched upon her head.

Somehow the dinner remained dry even though she didn’t. I built a fire, so that she might dry while we ate.

—I must look terrible.—she said, not really concerned whether she did or not.

—Like the ‘Lady of the Lake’. Have you ever been told that you are a very strange girl?—

—Do you accuse me, milord, of witchcraft or other devious arts? That’s a fine kick in the head!”

—Plain Kate, Kate the Cursed—try the chicken, it’s delicious—Shall we say, less enchantress than enchanted.—

—You’re a rogue. —Entertain me.—she said.

—How?—

—As the Muse inspires, cheer me thus within these, my wooded walls.—

I began to recall a piece I had learned, it seemed, ages ago. It was dredged up from some long forgotten source, raised finally to certitude.

—‘Lying robed in snowy white
That loosely flew to left and right—
The leaves upon her falling light—
Through the noises of the night
She floated down to Camelot:
And as the boathead wound along
The willowy hills and fields among,
They heard her singing her last song,
The Lady of Shalott.’—
She was silent for a while, long enough for me to enjoy squishing the chill sand between my toes. Then she countered with a verse. It seemed almost to escape from her lips.

—Singing softly on the castle door,
singing softly on the desert moor,
singing softly, the raven, 'Never, ever more.'—

—Nevermore!—

—Good night, sweet Prince! Time this lady got some shut-eye.—

Fred came by a couple days later while I was arranging some new rig—mostly dacron stuff.

—Say,—he said,—have you seen Char around lately? She seems to have disappeared.—

—I know.—

—Well, where's she gone?—

Fred, I thought, sometimes you're a damn boor.

—to join a sit-in, down in Georgia someplace. She left Saturday morning.—

And this was in the summer of my twentieth year.

HAIKU IV

Red, orange, yellow
Warm wind and water trickling
Blue sky, people play.

W. FRANKENBERGER, C.S.B.