

BURNING STONES

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JAMES WALLER

A sample of five poems from the collection

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Child Of The Hunt

Tall as a young gum and quick
A shadow of brief words
Hard silences follow in his steps
Until he comes to his own kind
And a smile cracks like lightning
Laughter bursts in a volley
Of country oaths
The truck is his castle of keeping
Faithful dogs duck from his hand
A hand which knows the spear and the bow
The knife and the hook
His eyes gleam in the bushland
With a heart of deep silence
Which flows into evening
A scent sends the dogs up the hill
And golden light creeps away
What is hidden in the darkness?
Emotions held into the distance
Where an accusation
Of lost time howls

Hooks are for fish and knives for boars

A child of the hunt wanders the bush.

Etching In Granite

Silence flows over the old ground

Shrubs nestle between the plates

A cloud of birds arcs above the sea below Memory is
the wind which invites no one

Never, for we are gone

In the line of the spirit

In the pressure of hands hidden

In the blood of the dead

Upon the sun flamed rock

Our eyes have grown

Enlarged are our hands with the flame of those hidden

Awakened the limbs in the rock are our own

Our limbs which are gone

In the wind which invites no one

Never

But our bodies surge with life

This is our hour of dance

Our time to etch into the plates

The lines of prehistory extend through our fingers
brightening the air

Darkening the sky
Hands surge with the ocean
And reach for a tremendous line
Silence ascends
And the ocean breaks
An anonymous crescendo of song.

Prayer

We drove forever
Through endless scrub
Upon sun warmed trails
Which fought the pounding sky
With surging crust
The hand on the wheel
Was blessed with a love of earth
With the joy of song which opened the banjo
Into the dry western air
We drove on passed sleep
Into mud swirled memory
Awake with the interminable hum of vast distances
And incalculable stretches of blue
Trees swayed in the dark
Upon a mountain mysterious
Figures silhouetted in the eye of a truck window
In the early hours of morning
My father I remember everything
The donkey
The coals of dying fires

Silences unceasing
And jokes which frolicked with abandon
All the more painful to feel the whip
Which cracked inside of you
O I would love to strangle that demon
And release your soul of compassion
For the trembling earth
To reunite our kin
In the blood which whispers from birth
But you are far away
And the chasm is deep
Take flight letters of gold
Find the desperate song
Which is doubled over in pain
And lift it above the earth
Where in freedom it can sing
With banjo strings made taut by your son.

The Tower of Language

It is late and the floors are marching
With staccatto steps above
I am in love with an island
Found in the limitless sea of words
A broom punctuates the floorboard ballet
As the stereo relays
Music from other times
Words climb like towers
Of boyhood coins
Which were saved in the event
Of our family becoming poor
What a curious child!
Invisible, the towers are growing
And gathering into rings of glinting silver
Upon the shores of language
Mother, they will not fund the holiday
About which we always talk
But they have formed and are forming a passage
Of laws to graze with tender knowing
Our paths sombre, bitter, lost, found

Our paths of struggle, loneliness, despair,
Our paths of tears and laughter,
Of departure between our lives
This, our island, is no holiday destination
But a bridge in the deep
A gift which may hold you aloft
Like the wings of your prayers
Which have consoled you In your grief.

The Magic Cat Is Singing

Tireless, unforgetting

The hand burns

Secretly

In a long sunlit night

Music, must I hold your cup forever?

Do you not sleep

Winged element?

Pastures are burning

In the crushing month of January

This is the country of salt pans

Where anonymous fires wander insatiably

Without surrender

A country without a name

And without a face

With shadows Of haze

Colluding with silent geology

In a natural conspiracy.

Water drops

With slow dramatic intensity

The pasture's mouth is open

And steams in one momentous dense hour of rain

Hidden in the castle

Cats are playing

With Balthus' ball of colour

Ania, the magic cat is singing

Would you like to hear ?

Yes? Then close your eyes.