

Spring 1977

Three Poems

Stuart Friebert

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AFTER WHICH

Tell them you just work harder, take more work home,
the life of the moment, life of a thousand years, get
your hands up higher, suddenly, without the slightest
reason. You couldn't have gone slower, built a house,
bought clothes, washed them every day, after kissing
a little while you went out again, walked easily at
first, as if you had a lot of land. But you grew angry,
struck her cheek, like an old man calling to his wife,
a bird in his hand, we all know how it got there and
the cat curved on the ground, panting. Adds to desire.

You do as you like, she said, nipped you with her thumb.
Fish started to jump and all this in a strange lake with
a shore of its own making, sending a curse over the world.
You're worn to bits now, can't lift a finger, turn to water:
if you don't drink you're worth nothing, after which you make
a quick fire, let exceptions boil, as hot as a horse falling.
If you look up she's starting to cry, as if it were spring.

WE SHOULD NEVER GROW JEALOUS

There are things that have not
interested them for years, if he
drinks just one glass of brandy,
then lets up and uses the time to
extract one tooth after another,
his foot falling on his neck at
the bottom of the stairs, snapping
at her if she approaches: I'm telling
truth now, you watch me forget to fall
the next time, you with your hands so
full, don't try falling on me, don't.

Or push me off, calls for an attitude
toward me, when the water's low take
a small hook for your supper, close
your bedroom door, open it quick.
I can no more pass through than I can
prefer brick to wit, and if I take
the hook immediately I sink to bottom.

Root there like a tooth ripening
in the rippling mouth, the shore
gets lost in mist, what do you see?

THREE HUNGARIAN PIECES

There's a hurdy-gurdy man on the block.
His Csardas starts slowly, moves faster
and faster, until your partner has been
whirled into a state, birthdays, weddings,
funerals, christenings, national holidays
of one kind or another, there's always an
occasion for dancing and drinking, always
a Hungarian yelling, I drink when I'm dry,
I drink when I'm sad, glad, I always drink.

After graduating from elementary school you
enter high school on the advice of your Aunt
Mariska, you meet a boy whose father is an
authority, visit his home frequently. First
he tells you your people migrated from Spain
during the Great Inquisition, then he points
to your body, You're covered with millions of
fleabites, my boy, change to clean underwear!

A boy vanishes, gruesome stories spread throughout
the country, soldiers appear everywhere, everyone's
ordered off the street. Years later, it's discovered
the boy ran off to Amsterdam to learn the trade of
diamond polisher, his jewels known the world over.
Now it's an accepted fact in Budapest that acquiring
them is more important than quarreling, underselling
your neighbor's produce: he brings it in from his farm
on a barge, or a dirty rowboat, or a flimsy sailboat.