

Will Wells

Carved Corbel of a Monk Reading

Mounted upside down against a hammer beam,
an oak exemplar of your age's faith,
serene in a perilous perch, you pondered
the book propped on your knees, stuck on one page
for 500 years. That contemplation
stayed unwavering when iconoclasts
beheaded holy statues in the chapels
below, and later, when misdirected bombs
stove in the nave. Stars became your votives
till a dealer in antiques, back from the war,
raised a scaffold to pluck you like scorched fruit
before the walls gave way. Still keeping vows
to lodge apart, you gathered dust, displayed
out of reach for decades on a ceiling joist,
the yellowed price tag discreetly tucked
beneath your robed backside. At the auction
of his shop, I made high bid and brought you home.
Now, right-side up and pillowed on a chair,
although suspended in detachment still,
you browse among the books I cherish most,
gazing through grainy oak to what's sacred.

The Chosen One

Our football team was called the mighty Redskins –
brawny rednecks earmarked for assembly lines.
The name conjured Tecumseh, Shawnee chief
turned hometown hero long after defeat.
Troops torched his village, clearing space for ours,
war crimes that our history book ignored.
The teacher, when I mentioned it, just frowned.
Past sundown on fall Fridays, I put on
a shameless outfit to cover up my guilt.

A doctor's son, too bookish for the mauling,
I roamed the sidelines in war-paint, leggings
and full headdress, exhorting the heavens
for victory, as team mascot, Sammy Spirit.
Coach Marshall quipped, *That boy's one of the Tribe,
part Jew I mean, no doubt the Sammy part.*
I channeled offense with war dance and a whoop,
urged staunch defense with a tomahawk chop
and twirled the sidelocks of my long black wig
like a bored yeshiva boy. No one got that joke.

Hold that line, the crowd would chant, *Hold that line*
as if earth could belong to anyone.
A great spirit whispered whose side they were on.
Go Cossacks, go, I mouthed without my megaphone,
Drive out those Jews and burn their shtetls too.
Though the crowd couldn't hear me, it roared support!
If our team trailed late, I'd rake my fingers
through cleat-gouged turf, exposing bits of ash.
Tecumseh knew the Shawnee sacred flame,
if snuffed, would chimney up in smoke. His next
of kin, I sat shiva as time ran out.

The Latest News from Nowhere

“This is the picture of the old house by the Thames to which the people of this story went. Hereafter follows the book itself which is called ***The Latest News from Nowhere or An Epoch of Rest.***”

(William Morris)

At Kelmscott Manor, kitchen gardens bloom.
Along its leafy lane, centuries seem
to lapse, as cows line up at milking time
to follow stacked stone walls into a barn
in use before Shakespeare. Any concern
should be dispelled by this embroidered dream.
Yet small ducks bicker where the Thames cuts close.
And rumbling bomber flights from Fairford Base

mark final descents by the gabled rise
where Morris plotted earthly paradise.
There, by the towpath on the Thames' near bank —
its antonym — crumbling concrete, squat and dense,
a World War Two pillbox, aimed like a tank,
waiting to mount a desperate defense.