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Praise For Pondo: The Series

Pondo Loves Francois Louie

In New York, ghosts do not float.
They shift by
in flickers, to the beat
of Pondo's curdled stomach,

collapsing like kisses in his iris
sprawling against
resistant color

while a tall cat glares hubris
at the foot of his stairs.
The eyes are immense

casting him in their gleam.

And Pondo drinks milk
from cartons so spoiled,
the refrigerator racks
have pressed patterns
into their waxen shells.

He is sick from the stench
of cheese, but the meds keep it down.
Francois Louie is crazy, which is beautiful,
sings Pondo,

and he started slapping me around
wanting to know if there were any
massage parlors that gave full releases.

This is not your typical French boy.

Mustachioed smiles at the milk bar
in the East Village with Francois Louie.

He has to sleep with you.

He is a muscular bird.
He goes to Gothic festivals in Germany.
Pondo sells cheese. He is from Modena.

It is where balsamic vinegar is made,
and he also sells grain. Pondo loves Francois Louie,
and the word *diaphanous* as it slips
from his tongue, ice in a desert.

Pondo cries as he crumbles gorgonzola
into acrylic cups.
Before I am cremated, I want a strand

of my DNA spliced with a white iris.

I will

live on. And Pondo smiles
for cameras that are never there.

Francois Louie collects tarantula carcasses,
mounts them on the wall, gyrating
past the sticky moments and smaller bills.

Come on baby. This isn't love.
(Francois Louie
is moving under the red lights.)

It's just a dance.
Give me a tip,
so I can move on.

Pondo Holds a Child

Pondo looks down and sees
it is not beautiful. Its skin
is pulled too taut on its face

leaving nothing to grow into.
Pondo grows into things, and it pitters
with its hands, as a roach

flipped on its back, waiting
to be stepped on, or swept into a corner.

It was dropped into his hands
so casually
by the woman who wanted to feel the grain.

It is lighter than the sacks of grain
he pours into wooden
barrels. *See*, (it runs through her hands
as he shows it to the woman)

It is fine grain, shipped from my
brother's farm in Modena.

But Pondo has no brother,
and the grain is from Poland.

Pondo has never held an infant before.
He releases it reluctantly at first, then violently
pushing it away.

The woman leaves with a quarter pound,
the child in her arms
screaming backwards at Pondo
and his cheese-shop.

That night, Pondo stands
in the hot-shower-running-cold,
sad that there is nothing left to clean,

yet he can still smell the ripe cheese.
He has cracked toe nails and coarse, black hair
on his whispery long legs.

He steps into a stiff towel, softening
as it sticks taut to his wet skin,

and Pondo wonders if he really grows into
things, or if the city is shrinking around him,
spreading puddles at his feet.

Pondo Watches Casablanca

Grainy with time. Morocco
is all smoke and fog, an illusionist's
smorgasbord, not the country Pondo saw

as a child of twelve, his mother holding
his hand, as old brown men blew him
kisses from beneath flapping

canvas. It was a blooming for Pondo,
each artifact phallic. Each wind,
a flirtation with the world to come.

And he ate chickpeas and curry, and goat cheese
filtered through cloth in a river. Now,
Richard was a man on his knees in a phone booth

on Broadway and 9th. Time goes by,
Pondo thinks, as the credits roll silver,
When songs become truths,
there is no need for faith.

But Ilsa. Ilsa shines Europe. Her voice
is a breeze fresh from the Tiber,
a goose bump on Pondo's arm.

Eyes dewy for Pondo, Ilsa is a woman
Pondo might love, had she been a man.

Ilsa is life in the throes of remission.

Her voice has no stubble, or sand, or grain,
or the texture of age that has pixeled the film.
Ilsa hides halos among hats,

and Pondo goes to bed angry, a burial of sorts.
His face crashing into white cotton,
the softness wasted upon him.

*There is a carafe of water in the kitchen.
Perhaps you should go.*

But Richard from the phone booth stays,
scratching gashes into Pondo's back,
red trails like the reflection

of airport lights on a rain-soaked run way .
Pondo closes his eyes,
biting hard on his lips.

Pondo Takes the Fifth

Dominic wants
to be forgiven.
It is the fifth step.
Pondo is no easy sale.

Keep your fifth. Pondo does not yell,
he is stringing injuries and judgment
onto a strand that Dominic must wear.

Dominic has an Eastern European neck,
a thick neck, scalloped by veins and stubble,
that would challenge any hangman's noose.

It has been three years
and Dominic wears
a Hawaiian shirt.

Keep your fifth. Pondo mutters
it again as Dominic goes on.

It was not me.
He does not look at Pondo.

*It was the drugs/alcohol/
sex/addiction.* Pondo tilts back
a shot of sambuca.
Licorice rides bareback down
the slope of his throat.

Keep your fifth. Pondo offers no penance.
He cannot absolve these sins. He has

no patience for fives. Pondo tells people
he was the fifth child,
born on the fifth day of the fifth month,
at five fifty five AM.

Pondo plays multiples of five
on the lottery game, and they never pay out.

But Pondo is a liar.
He does not know
what time he was born.

Dominic stares at the bar, frittering a napkin
in his hand. The drawer-pulls in Dominic's
apartment were porcelain doll parts.

Arms and legs growing from cabinets

and drawers. Pondo remembers that.

He tells Pondo, *I loved you.*
I did not love myself.

There is still a picture of us
with that parrot we bought
hanging in the bathroom.

Dominic pauses. He is pregnant with suspense
and the woman next to him at the bar smells of
garlic and sweat. She smiles at Pondo,

her teeth white against black-brown skin.

Dominic traces circles on the bar with his
empty glass. *I am positive.*

And Pondo knows Dominic
is not talking about certainty.

Pondo Dreams of Modena

It is all red roofs and churches.
So many: on corners,

between shops, angled onto avenues,
a big word for small streets,
all archways and pigeons.

They deal in wax and incense, salvation
stored up in the grout between stones.

Pondo cobbles together images.
The gulf of vinegar, men on bicycles,
women in skirts at the Piazza Grande.

In his dream, Pondo does not walk,
his thinness wavers
in every other frame,
pulsing through light,
feet never lifting,
pushing through smokey porticoes
and narrow streets.

He is flame among stillness.

His eyes belong on another face.
An old woman is toothless on the corner.

The sulphurous blue
of Pondo's wide-iris-eyes
wages war with
the tint of the sky. Steeples pierce it,
and Pondo's stomach hurts.

*Santi Paolo, Bartolomeo, Biagio,
Vincenzo, Giorgio, and Carlo. Eufemia.*

Vinegar squeezes through his intestines.
Pondo has learned a new word. Crohn's.
The word clenches in his gut

The flesh (is it flesh?)
turning on itself, eating itself, a cannibal
organ feeding on anxiety,
carving honeycombs
as he sleeps.

The Church of St. Augustine.
Chiasa di San Agostino.

Pondo's mother
crossing herself.

Pondo dreams in Italian.
He smashes a millipede as he kneels
on the stone,
looking up at Mary.
Gold on gray,
her halo a headpiece.

She makes eyes at Pondo.
The infant she holds
cups her bare breast,

pinching it still as if to display,

a medieval nipple gone hard
against the chill
of damp stone.

It is the only time Pondo has ever
grown hard at the sight of a woman.

He bites down on his lip, the
stiffly sensual breast, plucked
from beneath folds of fabric

presented to him
by the infant squeezing it
hard at the tip.

reaching up to cup his own mother's breast,
her eyes closed, mouth moving in prayer

and he wakes.

His nostrils fill with the foul
stench of cheese, his stomach burns.

Steeple bells chime the cries,
of five thousand milkless infants,
sounding past skyscrapers.

His eyes become olives
in the dark pit of night.