

Intonations Heard in the Desert

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CS Reid

Dedicated to my mother, Jerene L. Reid,

for your invaluable guidance and love

throughout the years:

You are what I eternally strive to be

Discipline

(E. Dickinson)

Ink effaces her hands—
blemished and white—
smearing the precise manuscript.
The words come
like the happenings
in a dream recalled:
concrete, yet veiled
from their distinct meanings.
A semblance of form appears,
shaping narratives from
experiences imagined
perhaps, lived more
vividly through vicarious
maneuvers. The maneuvers
that give way within
a moderately furnished room—
vistas of swirling ideas—
counter against walls,
blank and unresponsive.
The silence is only
an afterthought.

Waiting

(Anne Boleyn)

That winning smile,
cajoles her forlorn demeanor
to that of a whimsical girl-
shape-shifting when favors are granted.
Raven curls,
spread in torrents like
the arc of night,
folding over patches of ice & green.
A coquettish smile,
belies her rumored trysts;
veiled poems immortalize the moment,
rendering clues of the muse's identity.
Dark blemish smears
her indelible past,
growing as assuredly
as Wolsey's descent from grace.
Near the coast,
a Spanish lament
heightens into a prayer,
filling the chapel
on the grounds
of Kimbolton—
sanctuary of decay & isolation—
entirely unsuitable for a queen.

Interpretations

Velvet contralto severs the stillness
emanating across the studio.

A phrase hovers above
the piano, lilting gently off pitch,
like rich cream that has turned;
an angel cake with a raw center.

First beat of the measure
sets the pace, ensnaring
the ear to give
over to the suspended tapestry—
web-like cacophony permutating
in differing voicings.

It swivels around
the inestimable space
between the first motive
and the final cadence,
spinning perfunctorily like
a top set to motion

Enraged

(Boudica)

Smoke spirals
above the thatched roofs;
shrieks subside as the
Romans march off in formations.
Her daughters-
fair and slender-
crested womanhood,
sprawl on their sides
weakened by the loss of their virtue.
Gleam of bronze
and crimson flash habitually
before their eyes.
An affront that has ruined
the prospects of suitable
contracts; stain encroaches
the royal line spreading like
tremors—destructive,
yet infinitely elusive.
Riding haphazardly through the forest,
the messenger steels
against the lash of branches.

Mother

Resilience emanating
across generations
forged by successive
hardships assigned
from fear and suspicion
countless events have
fortified your unbowed
character incessantly
trudging forward