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fingers were stained red from the picking of them. She sat down beside him mashing the berries into a paste. With her finger she painted his face as though for battle and then softly chanting, she spread the remainder gently on his knee.

That evening at eight when the door knocked Shauna stood alone on the doorstep. Charley was ready and waiting, wearing his new clothes and leaning on his crutches. He smiled at her for long seconds before pulling the front door firmly behind him.

J M Beach

BURNING THE FUTURE TO KEEP WARM

Staring down the trees that took centuries
To build a forest floor of root berry and brush,
Home to deer trout and thrush, and human
Footprints only visit these active halls, so foreign
In tranquility and good-natured community.

Seems such a shame this woodland retreat is temporary,
And home is nowhere close to feel at place, farther
A life time journey to dwell as part, turning back
Civilization where habitation is less
Than certain, needs sometimes met, sometimes

The food is rationed, care is scarce, plowshares are rifles
And blood is spilled for foolishness, in these times
The cold is kept at bay by chopping down the patient
Forests we cannot really grasp come crashing,
Spilling oil into rivers, stomping berries, clearing brush

Uprooting foreign calm for violence we breed.
Oak by oak and pine a pile accumulates
And those who go without must steal
A piece of the carnage, exploiting each other
Burning the future to keep warm.

J M Beach
VATES

The pretensions of a prophet like an inconvenience
Prick at the pride of the righteous, the comfortable
Jeers of the satisfied do more than mock the dreamer;

Vanity kills, the very fiber of reform endangered with a glare.
Would rather a hail of bullets or the strong hands secretly
To silence than the scoffing vainglory of the moral majority;

Would rather the conflict of opposition than nothing,
Being ignored, a peculiar tragedy beyond all violence,
The terrible incomprehension of the idiot staring blankly.

Oh the misdeeds of the foolish fumbling through life a danger,
The fool who imagines himself wise and punishes
When in power all dignity, the cost of ignorance too much to bear.

To say a prophet cannot breathe without choking on injustice
Is not a lie nor spoken lightly, the vatic voice a necessary burden
Determined as a curse to punish the wicked.

But why not remain comfortably anonymous, disgusted, dreaming
Of peace and promised lands? Compelled the misery to preach
Because of the misery to live where people compelled by tyranny,

When the only impossible outcome
To be seriously disposed of
Is justice for all.

Neil Halliday
BLUE RING ANGELFISH

He looked through the hieroglyphics of notes he'd taken as soon as he'd
woken from last night's sleep. Apart from a word or two which stood out
older than the rest...Blue...Angelfish...he couldn't decipher what he had
written. But it hardly mattered, because it was still so very clear. Too clear
perhaps to have been unreal...

It was a street in an American city, normal and unassuming yet old-
fashioned; something which wouldn't have looked out of place in a 1990's
movie set. A team consisting of sound operator, cameraman and director
were filming two actors dressed as British policeman. He watched as the pair
pretended to patrol the shopping precinct, walking in slow, measured
movements which were none-the-less impressive for being so obviously
artificial. He wanted to go up to them and introduce himself as a bona fide
Englishman; wanted to be close to something so familiar and reassuring as a
couple of bobbies on the beat. For one insane moment he had the idea of
committing an offence on the off-chance that the constables might be in
Stanislavskian mode and decide to arrest him.

He surprised himself by knowing anything about acting then recalled
how, quite by chance, he'd once caught a documentary on History Channel
92...

Suddenly his attention was distracted away from these policemen to an
even odder sight. Immediately, almost instinctively, he registered that this
second phenomenon was more bizarre than the first. His impressions were of
strange men wandering around as if they didn't notice each other, never
touching or making contact; always managing to somehow avoid one other.
Often resembling blind, exotic fish in an aquarium accustomed to living
thousands of feet below the surface in caves with no knowledge of sunlight.

Some wore blue suits, others purple or black. All had their faces painted
white but haphazardly, amateurishly, daubed like an Indian Holy man setting
out to visit the Ganges for the first time. Their wisps of hair floated around
their heads in disorganized orbit, fine black strands of a shade too artificial to