

As the sun goes down,  
a vast palette of edifices  
is changing travertine into Vatican gold.  
Listen to the swallows capsizing in a pink sky  
folding over the gated prison.

14

Henri Cole  
The Visible Man 1998  
Knopf

(13)

*Etna* ✓

Who are you, whose pornographic voice  
and little surreptitious breaths  
are meant to taunt me,  
again and again, at home on tape?  
Who are you, whose straining tumescence  
and plundering come-cries  
make a man a mule?  
Are your white teeth showing?  
Are your pectorals waxed like a prostitute's?  
Are your taut thighs spread like a dead man's?

Hearing your exhortations,  
I feel invisible and gritty and cold  
as when I hiked a long volcano slope,  
feet snow-soaked, eyes prismatic.  
It was Easter Monday,  
something gathered and broke.  
A hand stroked the back of my neck:  
it was mine, smeared with sweat.  
White smoke radiated everywhere.  
White ice chopped underfoot.  
I glimpsed myself, reddish like an ant,  
crisscrossing the lapilli,  
twisted like rope.  
Goodbye, I said to God's looming hand.  
*Air*: Easter lily bright.  
Goodbye, to false art, evading life.  
*Fire*: I coughed asthmatically.  
Goodbye, to the Sodomite's self-loathing.  
At last, *Earth* was pollinating me,  
with my curly white hairs and aging belly.  
More: I rubbed mineral *Water* on my face.

15

1 of 2

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Stranger, with genitalia greased,  
 whose "brotherly love" can be bought or sold,  
 whose avaricious body disdains the effeminate,  
 I have been waiting for you.  
 Come, unlace my boots; I chose you.

2 of 2

*To a Prince*

At the sound of your name, I turned my head.  
 How does it feel  
 to meet a man and know he'll acquiesce?

You make no avowals  
 because you cannot keep them;  
 your only worship is that monolith,  
 the patrician past—  
 you, whose nocturnal addiction is flesh,  
 you, with whom I streaked through Rome  
 on a motorino.

I want the external world  
 to continue the interior monologue of who I am:  
 hence, the narrow mattress under me,  
 with sinking springs,  
 symbolizes solitude,  
 instead of my inferior class.  
 Ensconced in your period rooms of white and gold,  
 you couldn't care less. What a pity  
 you cannot kiss yourself.

In the steamroom,  
 where there is no moral order  
 and secret emotions channel themselves  
 toward the idolized body,  
 I could see the back of you,  
 lowering your head to a cock,  
 brown as a speckled egg.

If it's true you're marrying,  
 be kind to her. Public lies sow the seeds  
 of private shame. Yours and hers.