

William Palmer Patton

'Twas nice to be home . . .

'Twas nice to be home, to see the folks, the  
grandfolks, siblings, nice to see fields and skies  
from horizon to horizon. But the fields were ice and  
the skies were grey and the wind was a stinging  
tempest.

*Sing Goddam!*

alas a needling wind  
chapped bloody skin cracked  
a-coughing brittle breath  
teeth chipped-up chattering  
blood all blue bone cold

*O raineth drop! O staineth slop! O how the wind  
doth ramm!*

DAMM I had to get out, needed out; but needed  
things. I wanted things. O how I dreamed of things!  
O things!

*I wish I owned a Dior dress made to my order out  
of satin. . . .*

well, not all things, nonetheless

I scrimped and saved, passed up nothing. If it  
twinkled or glistened or glimmered, I bought it. And  
the salesman (*stinking excuses, stinking to please  
with snakeoil, education and terror*) began to sing:

O ne'er 'll ya know just what you'll need;  
so hearken m' boy, O heed!

For out there's fire and ice and rain  
and misery, O there's pain;

But quiver not, O do not quake  
for I sell all you'll need to take!

And though from trials you'll ne'er be  
spared  
at least you'll be prepared.

“Do you really need all of those things?” my father asked. “Well, yeah.” And I looked at my things and touched my things and packed my things; and stuffing, scrunching, jamming.

“It’s not going to fit, son.”  
“Then let it dangle outside!”  
“And if it gets stolen?”  
“Travelers insurance.”  
“Are you really going to do this?”

And I called up Z. “We doin’ this?” “Let’s do it.” And he called for a drive-away, then called me back. “They gotta postal van going to Florida. It’s got no heat.” “Take it.” And early the next morning we headed out. ’Twas freezing; my toes were numb, fingers numb, the tip of my nose went numb, snot dripped from my nostrils and froze.

*goddamm, goddamm, goddamm!*

“At least there’s music.”

*Ancient?*

Country!

when, alas, even twangs and cries faded into remembered vibrations

*Alas, even soft voices die!*

As a static resounds mid silence and cold  
And numbers arise, beginning again arise  
Around like wheels a-spin ’pon black ice  
Asphalt, stilled like stiffened trees, we sit  
As winds beat ’pon the frosting windows.

Bare trees rise up from distances and pass  
Blurring mile with miles. O endless miles  
Bore into the static spinning each number  
But static resounds amid silence and cold.

Cadence is stiff, melody frozen. Numbers  
Continue to search never finding the song.  
Consume us O song with a fire! Too long  
Counting numbers a-spin we are spinning.  
Cease spinning O digits on hotter degrees,  
Cease silence but spinning static and cold.

And slowly we warmed. And we found a tune. And  
we were happy nay ecstatic, yeah!

*And one loosens the hooks of the tawdry, twisted  
winter wind, her dress falls . . .*

and in the southern sun she can stand there  
bare.

We'd arrived in Orlando.

"Now what?"

"I don't know."

"Let's walk."

"Where?"

"I don't know."

"We should sail."

"From where?"

"Let's just get south."

And we helped one another lift the packs then down  
the highway walked as the weight dug into our  
shoulders and scrunched our spines. "We gotta take  
a bus." And 'bout a quarter mile down we caught a  
bus to the outskirts of town where we spent a  
sleepless night on the side of the road.

*We're on our way, man, out of town, go hitching  
down . . .*

down,  
down

And came the morn with ride after ride. And down,  
down, down, with old ladies, down with truckers  
and Cubans and couples, down with some dude into  
Key West where someone was bound to set sail for  
the south. And we were told us of Christmas Tree  
Island to which we'd have to take a boat. And he  
dropped us off at the dock and we stood arms  
waving 'til a man in a dinghy picked us up and  
carried us through the salty spray, across the rolling  
waves. And shaken, with a chill, we landed.

---

William Palmer Patton has published work in *Ascent Aspirations* and *Barbaric Yamp*. The piece published here (which includes several "damming" quotations from Ezra Pound) is excerpted from a recently completed book.