

A WRESTLER NAMED PLATO

Not the bum we hollered at on the south side
of Chicago, who'd twist the other bum's head
between the ropes till he miraculously extricated
himself and stomped on the first bum's back like
a jumping jack till the ref somehow yanked them
apart. When he winked, dad yelled for our money
back till guys in back hissed, Shut the damn fuck
up!; and pushed dad down. I tried hard not to cry

I mean Socrates' buddy of sorts, whose gymnastics
coach called him Platon, "broad-shouldered," and I
bet got him more than ready for the Isthmian Games.
No one seems to know how he fared, but I've been
examining my grimy copy of his writings for hints &
hidden clues to some avail: by the laws of his body
he must have gotten in some mighty kicks, dropping
at least one opponent in the dust at his feet before he
has taught a lesson in return. Later, Socrates did his
part to remind him of man's weakness. No humbug
about him, who said, "Enough now, no need to recall
the past, the bleeding's stopped, your wounds are not
serious." Then they engaged in another loud argument.

BEAST OF KINGS

Not the lion guarding Rameses II's tent at night,
not Scimitar, Marcus Aurelius' companion at table,

while others explored the bed chambers of besodden

guests, not even the lion on Jerusalem's escutcheon,

the one I brood about while waiting to hear if a friend's
died in the recent bus attack. Certainly not the one Pope

what's-his-name sent to Charlemagne, nor the grizzled
one guarding the Tower of London, which could smell

a virgin among the throngs, and never mind the first one
to arrive in America in 1776. The one I have in mind on

this "Gloomy Sunday," playing the song over and over
that sent some leaping to their deaths in The Depression,

is a comical cartoon character, so good-natured the cooks
are butchering a herd of goats and roasting them instead.

FLYING WEDDING RINGS

"Slung beneath retired Wellington bombers," I read,
"huge coils were wound around a steel core," through
which powerful currents built up magnetic fields to

trip sensors of enemy mines in the deadly waters below,
the planes struggling to climb or, luckless, surging plumes
would bring them down. Not a happy trade-off, Churchill

growled, twisting his wedding ring, stamping out his cigar.
Once I tried to smoke as many in a day as he, till Doc Wulff
pointed to some dark spots on the X-ray, started me twisting

my wedding band instead whenever I got an urge to light up,
which sent me back to the middle of Lake Gogebic on a stormy
honeymoon outing. Giddy about our finally tying an old knot,

my wife threw up her hands: My ring just fits! The moment
after it flew off, she shouted louder, waiting for me to dive in
after it. Afraid to admit I couldn't swim, hemming and hawing,

I weighed anchor and rowed to shore in the silence of cliches.
Atop a sand bar, in just three feet of water, we learned later, has
led to other silences. I've stopped claiming the water was muddy

enough to hide anything, never mention reading anything about
what's below the surface of any body of water, just surf channels,
dying to know how long the current wars will last, still afraid to swim.

SEA SQUIRT

Can you believe we're related? Not only that,
their vital organs, I read, are "protected by

a layer of special connective tissue - mesenchyme -
which turns up in human embryos." Best of all,

for us these days, they harbor the secret of how
to re-grow tissue. You say that's of no interest?

You'd better come nearer so we can have a chat
about something. A light shines on the spot where

we're lost to the rest of the night. In the morning,
we begin to have a different life, which invests us

with a certain air among friends, who do not know
you need a transplant, and of course I never whisper

a word about it, which you consider an act of kindness.
When I suggest a trip to the aquarium, you say okay but

no fine talk. Pressing up against the glass, hoping they'll
detach from their rocks, reattach to your palm imprints,

you whisper, now I'll have my transplant and then, God
willing, back to more life, without which we are dead you

said, remember? I'll make myself eat the glass, I think,
choke back my fear. She'll die, the devil whispers in

my ear. Why are you crossing yourself, she says, You're
not a believer. Yes, yes, I know, I stammer. I'm awfully

thirsty, and asking God for a little vial of pure hope.
Your laugh's nothing but the pure, crystalline key of C.

SHADOW

-for SK

The one cast across the donkey's back
by Christ's cross. A man caught in the throng
might have lost his meal, before stumbling back

up the steps to shout the news to his wife, who'd
fumble for her thimble, the wax hardening to her
imprint when she scratched a note to her sister.

They weren't water drinkers, so she ran for the wine
but it tasted wrong, their cups tipping in their hands,
the wine staining the floorboards, on its way out to
the Via Dolorosa and now, two millenia removed,
we're hunched in their doorway, looking down at
the red blood leaking under the jamb. Motioning
us to kneel, our guide says something in Arabic.
We don't remember what, not having heard a word.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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Stuart Friebert, winner of the Four Way Book Award with the volume *Funeral Pie*, founded Oberlin's Writing Program and directed it for twenty years, and co-founded Field Magazine/Oberlin College Press. *Floating Heart*, his 13th book of poems, has just been published (Pinyon Press). The *Language of the Enemy*, a collection of stories (2014. Black Mountain Press) and three volumes of translations: *Stomach of the Soul: Selected Poems of Sylva Fischerova* (Calypso Editions); *Puppets in the Wind: Selected Poems of Karl Krolow*" (Bitter Oleander Press); *Be Quiet: Selected Poems of Kuno Raeber*" (Tiger Bark Press).

