

THE NEXT SETTLEMENT

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Selected by Andrew Hudgins

re-entry by Michael White
Selected by Paul Mariani

The Next Settlement

poems by
Michael Robins

2006 Winner, Vassar Miller Prize in Poetry

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for DJM

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Cimarron Review: “Maps of New Jersey Inside the Palm”

Court Green: “Last Days on Spaulding Street”

DIAGRAM: “Our Homes on the Same Street”

Gulf Coast: “Requiem for an Omitted Love Song (#70)”

Hubbub: “The Next Settlement”

LIT: “Still Life with Elephant,” “Still Life with Gravestone,” “Still Life with Steeple”

Make: “Notes Toward an Untitled Movie,” “Welcome, Please Come In”

Meridian: “Kodachrome”

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Octopus: “Ending with an Outward Glance,” “Merely a Hearth in the Largest Room”

Pebble Lake Review: “The Cows Go Mulling Home,” “Predilection”

Redactions: “Appraising Their Fine Threads,” “Recurrent Dream” (I travel by horse . . .)

Rhino: “First Doubts in the Third Person”

Spinning Jenny: “Still Life with Steam Engine”

Third Coast: “The Merrymakers”

Unpleasant Event Schedule: “Recurrent Dream” (Of late, a riderless . . .), “Recurrent Dream” (Thumbs bounce before . . .), “Recurrent Dream” (Now that I stop . . .)

Verse: “Appearances,” “We Are Small Under a Rumor of the Tongue”

Sincere thanks to my family, teachers, and friends.

I

Last Days on Spaulding Street

Reelection a rumor that we could believe,
I drank, I slept late despite a fear of looters.

When I was building a frame for our bed,
another arrived in the night & stole the stock

of a perfect lumber, prying away the nails.
Between praise & ruin, we began to tremble.

Candidacy, a promise that wouldn't keep,
my brother was due to return from the war.

Some had flags & some their yellow ribbons,
I divided so often among the open wine

that the memory closed, our blackened home.
I drank, I slept late, I dreamt a terrible lie.

Recurrent Dream

In a fanciful recess, paraded & pressed by hands,
they came to find a memento I thought slipped

behind the stand of cottonwoods, a dirge resung.
In a mirage whose architect is one, decoys glide

in a vestige stirred by light. My name is ruthless,
I claim I'm without pigment, fingerprints or marks.

The places to hide were few, fewer still the lives
unsnared in the brake of reeds, betrayal's lure.

Pastless, I feign my dance under deflected skies,
I reside in the company of considerable shovels.

Flanked by Postcards, Pieces of the Wall

Scholars dispute inscriptions on a limestone box,
the morning erupts again beside the river.
There's a history too in every backroom & cellar:
here is where they fast the pleasing flowers,
love me not. Here, where the crater is buried.
The whims of grown men leave boots everywhere,
the largest moon rock in Europe, splashed down
& paraded, could be mistaken for a small fist.
When the whitewash breaks, semaphores rise
from a faint glue beyond the horizon's grin.
They are flags, raised over parliament's shell,
they are arms, bound & dragged through a city.

Gray Gone Missing

& though a needle drops among the stacks
few are never found. Their absence stirs

a long speculation, their speculation breeds
the undying string of theories: someone

drinks from his umbrella along the beach,
the face beyond a crowded street, another

lives simply among the doorless pueblos.
These stories populate a mountain village

just beyond a cemetery rumored on the map.
How difficult to vanish in a daily event:

the cancer, accident, feet swept overboard.
A radio cracks somewhere in the morning,

the heavy rains yet another form of snow.
It takes a simple math when the depressed

go absent, though none wish the body found
where other cars are empty: casings, a floor

or vacant in a tree, snagged along the shore.
Their jackets are a sodden black that's hung

across the shoulders, the night as a thread
toward longevity, those things unspoken,

a secret knock, light behind a narrow slot
to bring the living closer to taking pleasure.