

Otzi

Aileen La Tourette

Otzi the Ice Man was found in the Alps on the border between Italy

and Austria in 1991. He had been there for approximately 5,200 years.

I look like fresh snowkill to you, an off-piste tourist. Jab and shovel.

You snap a hip-bone whittled by time and ice to a classic angle:

man caught between a rock and a hard place. Scylla and Charybdis,

if you like, scholars that you are. Something rings a bell, maybe me,

all sounding brass and tinkling cymbals on your table where I grow

a fungal vest you barely notice, wrestling over custody.

You miss the arrowhead in my left shoulder, pronounce me:

Victim of a castration in the Egyptian manner. I invite you, gentlemen,

to stick *your* dicks in a glacier for fifty-three centuries. Later,

you judge mine *shrunk* from *mummification*. *Pissing contest over,*

you number me among the Incorruptibles, more incorrupt than most,

no Clare slowly darkening behind the grille in Assisi, until they fit

a tactful silver mask. A cheap saint, me. But that won't do either,

apparently my bones fell straight from heaven, via meteor. Busy body, me,

cursing seven people, including one who found me, poor sod. They drop.

Monster, Yeti, martyr, extra-terrestrial, anything but a poor fool slotted

by chance between two rocks within a glacier, a man-sandwich

still wearing his hide satchel of food, tools, medicines,

whipworm in his gut, arthritis in his joints, pinprick trail

where acupuncture fails or - grant me the irony, succeeds,

gets me where I am today. The Copper Age, Chalcolithic,

gives me the axe that impresses you, the sheep that don't,

the shoes you admire, try to patent. What makes me waver

on the ledge for that split-second? *He who hesitates is frost,*

right? Perma. Frozen Fritz, you call me, Otzi for the Otz Valley,

where you found me. Names for a dog. Mrs. Lot – also nameless –

trod on hems of flame, heard the screams – became a sculpture

in tears pared down to salt: antiseptic, currency, seasoning, grief.

Orpheus feels a tug at the end of his arm like a fish on a line, it's dim,

dark. Drowning, he has to see - and me, turned back for one last look.

Now it's your turn. Freeze, burn, but look back,

white bears, seals, walruses swim baffled fathoms,

groping for purchase on slush caps

rendering like tallow. This is now, amigo.

Ice is preservative. *That we live. That anything lives,*

links everything that is. A whisper from iced lips,

an ice-swansong. We ice over, overnight. *Ice.*

Listen to the *I* slide in the sibilant. *I is. Ice.*

Gang

Suzy Miles

We know their names and backgrounds; umpteen files

suggest potential for trouble. There's Sun.. glaring,

obvious, don't look him in the eye. Wind.. slamming gates,

mussing hair, snatching caps; best mate Thunder..

just one big noise. Rain.. blocking exits, pouring

in doorways and streak-of-nothing Lightning..

here, there and everywhere, dressed to impress.

We know about their mood swings, the sleeping-in late,

when Sun arrives mid-morning, pale, with Wind,

who really can't be arsed to waft the apple blossom

or blow the windsails round. And Rain drizzles out,

his torrents underwraps, dripping too soft on buttercups,

ignoring the birdbaths, not much bothering

to buck up the grass.

Just for one sassy moment they can brighten our horizons

as they play with rainbows, tease with promises of gold.

But then thoughts turn dark, and with deepening depressions,

on each street corner the boys gather round, yelling

vile obscenities like Hurricane and Flood, Heatwave, Drought.

Spitting out the C words over and over. Kicking off.

Begging to be better understood.

Antediluvian

Tony Lucas

He's been around awhile, the old guy

who's collecting animals and plants

to pack them in his box and ship away.

God knows what he will do with them.

Maybe he'll eat the pigs and goats, but

I have seen him pick up cockroaches,

worms, heard his delight at finding

some odd-coloured frog. He talks

about things needing to be saved,

and seems convinced we are ordained

for sure disaster. He can only see

the future as a panoply of doom.

We know how floods will come, from time

to time, and, yes, they are a trial

but that's the price you learn to pay.

Our fields grow better crops, given

a layer of smelly mud; and who cares

if a bunch of rats and snakes get drowned?

They say the government has plans

to fortify the river banks,

whenever the economy improves.

I see he's back off to that boat of his

again. Some people, if you ask me, just

get high on that apocalyptic stuff.

And anyway, I guess we really shouldn't

stand here talking now - it looks as though

we're headed for some serious rain.