



Image from The Crimson Ciaran

R. T. Castleberry

What the Smuggler Knows

Every old story repeated,
I trust in nearly nothing.
Backed and cornered, trying for blind balance,
I pitch pennies against an emerald reward,
sell loose cigarettes to Marlowe's killers.
Drawing my name from the black silver street,
haggard layers of formatted isolation,
I make an East End guess at
the weekly candidate for contrition.
A .380 Beretta at the back of my belt,
drugs in hand, hauling bartered meds,

I roll the alley back, night traveler's lanes.

As destroyers bless the national Games,
privateers and buyers' agents bargain
in brandy and cocaine huddles.
Remembering shanghai recruitment,
Marines and merchant seamen mix
uneasy in roving crowds.
A vodka baroness smokes and texts,
brackets rough-cut tobacco with Algerian hash,
conveys a Milanese heiress, a starlet friend
to DJ cabarets, dockside dive bars.
Cigarette butts, *Zona* cans,
cracked heels of Louboutins are
trash piles in the valet lot.

Winter-barren, ocean wind cracks
windows at harbor sailor hospitals.
Leaving a useful idiot with
a knife through his neck,
I take my earnings, lean in
to find twelve-dollar haircuts,
finest fast-food chicken.
Crossing into city lights, graffiti walls,
I scrape my boots clean with a broken stake.
Deep into February's fear, dreading the rain,
I hang a dreamcatcher beside the bed,
sleep deeply as I can.

Turning Back

Descending autumn hills,
reprisals over, there is
nothing for me now.
Wiping bloody hands clean on prairie grass,
my enemies, many friends have died.
Looking to growth away from the frontier,
I'm leaving the West.
Settling my horse and tack,
I'll drop my war bag in
a Southern Pacific passenger car.
I may study law, take a desk

in the family's bank.
I'll account for absence and passages:
where Jake landed, why Amy and Paul
ended as river crossing casualties,
laughing as the bullets struck.
Bracing my legs on the opposite seat,
I'll sleep to thoughts of miles rolling,
fishing beaches, Atlantic winter storms.

R. T. Castleberry has published work in *San Pedro River Review*, *Glassworks Magazine*, *Silk Road*, *StepAway*, *Gyroscope*, and many other publications in the U.S. and abroad. His poems have appeared in the anthologies *You Can Hear the Ocean: An Anthology of Classic and Current Poetry*, *TimeSlice*, *The Weight of Addition*, and *Level Land: Poetry For and About the 135 Corridor*.