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Standard Midland

Written by Roy Fisher

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ROY FISHER

STANDARD MIDLAND



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The Afterlife

I've lived within half a mile of it
for twenty years. West
by the black iron weather-hen
half-strangled with clematis
on the garage roof
I can locate it. Past a low ridge
in the cliff face of a limestone dale
there's a cave in the bushes.

When the old tigers
were long since gone, leaving their
teeth, the valley people
would climb there with the dead
they thought most useful;

push them well in,

take them out again,
walk them around:
'They're coming! They're coming!'

We Malagasies love
our second burials.
We hire a band that comes
in a van. Again
with liquefaction almost done
we hold our cherished ones

in our arms. From the grave-clothes
they fall in gobbets as dog-food
falls from the can. We wrap them
in fresh dry linen. They
bless our lives with their happiness.

Walk them around the valley. Drop
here a finger
for the god that is a rat or a raven,
here a metatarsal
to set under the hearth for luck.

And what was luck?

The afterlife back then
was fairly long:
nothing demented like for ever,

nothing military. The afterlife
would come to the party.

Inner Voice

Getting old,
living alone, I still
talk too much but to myself.
I talk my way through
procedures like
carrying books downstairs.

The monologue's so stupid
I do it in farting Mockney
or worse, mincing
Estuarian: none of it worth
the touch of my own Standard Midland.

Syntax

March. The cat
with eyes askew
rubs her great head hard
against the last stalk of kale
left standing in the mud
till it breaks
and the green juice gleams.