

Smiley Comes In From The Cold

Poor George, the world's such a puzzle to you, isn't it?
 Ann said when I told her I was leaving.
 The master spy, the old China hand
 With my tradecraft and intelligence.
 She said I looked like a wounded owl,
 When my glasses fogged up and I took them off
 And wiped them with my handkerchief.

I thought of Oedipus, the first detective, who discovered
 Twice he was the answer to the question.
Get in line silly boots, I said to myself.
You're in distinguished company.

You know I was thrilled when Ann picked me
 Out of all the men who were chasing her.
 But she needed traffic signals to run,
 The split second of light in anonymous places
 Where desire, like the empty eye of a camera
 Wants to take in as much as it can remember,
 Not the truth, but the idea of truth.
 Ann was always the hungry boots.

One of the great marriages people said at first.
 But at home, someone seemed to pull her plug.
 It was just the idea of me that she fancied

You were there at the Gallery opening.
 When she danced in her stockings
 With Bert, the long haired riding instructor.
George, you're such a stick in the mud,
 She shouted for all to here.

The clues—invisibly inked all over her body,
 Warm lip prints on her neck and shoulders
 That blossomed under my stare, and the scent
 Of someone else's cigarette on her hands and in her hair.
 The faint encodings of another man's touch.
 I recognized "his handwriting," his behavior
 As we used to call it in the trade, a friend, no less.
 And then I found her diary in the living room.
If George only knew how much I betrayed him.
 And all the pictures spilled out.

The dubious patrimony and all those unanswered questions.
 The oiled whisper of bodies, coaxing and urging
 Their pleasures in the churning of the sheets.

For hours my pulse would spike past a hundred,
 Me, who could beat the lie detector test.
 I thought I would disappear out the top of my head.
 I took to reciting the twenty third psalm
 In the pews of empty churches.

Reggie Martindales's parting shot echoed in my ears.
 "My regards to Ann; everyone's regards to Ann."
Get a grip, you kept advising.

I left her after the ultimate double betrayal
 By Bill Haydon, who turns out to be
 The deep cover mole in London Station.

I think about Chaucer, "the Miller's Tale,"
 Then Arthur, Lancelot and Guinevere.
 Cokewald, cukeweld, cucueld
 From the Middle English and Norman French. you know.
 The female cuckoo lays her eggs in other birds' nests,
 Such an ugly, awkward word,
 But cuckold, doesn't say it all.
 Perhaps Ann, not me, is the foolish boots,
 Though it is hard to see her as a fool
 When she is so much coveted and admired.

Everything is a lesson Ann used to say.
 Maybe the lucky one in the lover and not the beloved.
 Or am I just fooling myself, missing the tell?
 Another watcher in the shadows that I still haven't detected.
 You always told me, *Mind how you go*,"
Watch your back, George.
 How do you see it now?
 Tell me--who's the clever boots?