

Alfred Nicol

Cellar Snake

Since spring, I guess, we've shared the same address.
The snake's been living with us, more or less.
But we don't share a group mentality.
And we don't want him living here for free.

My slinking cat is equal to the task.
His eyes glow green behind a cobweb mask.
He can't be recognized when he appears
to occupants whose rent is in arrears.

The snake has got his tail between his legs.
In fact, he's got his legs between his tail—
He's got no knees to kneel on when he begs.
If the serpent's got a prayer, it's doomed to fail.

Already he's been turned back empty-handed.
Bent at an angle, cornered where he landed,
his shapely S is wrenched into an L.
But is the letter dead? It's hard to tell.

He seems to have a fatal bloody nose.
Beside him—clearer than you would suppose—
a little pool of liquid on the floor.
Too late, I think, to show him to the door.

I stand there doing nothing, like a god.
The cat can't wake his plaything with a prod
so he gets up and walks away. He's bored.
It's overrated, being overlord.

The Passional

The saints have got a sickly look.
As pale as death. Or paler.
He saw their pictures in a book
his aunt kept in her trailer.

He looked at St. Sebastian, caught
and tied up to a tree
with arrows in his neck. He thought,
There's the life for me.

He wanted to have wounds like that
and suffer for the Lord.
He tried to irritate the cat.
It hurt to be ignored.

Sometimes he stood outdoors at night
without mosquito spray.
It made him think he'd rather fight
a lion any day—

Some martyrs get their bellies torn
to pieces in arenas.
He broke a brambleberry thorn.
He held it near his penis.

It's not as easy as it seems
to get a chance to die
and prove you're not the kind that screams
and almost starts to cry.

He wouldn't make a lot of fuss.
He'd face the evil forces
unruffled as Hippolytus
yanked apart by horses.

Believe You Me

*"I cannot wrap my brain around
how different you are from me."*

"What difference? You make it sound
like crossing the Sargasso Sea
would take less effort than to find
where both of us are of one mind."

*"If there were only two of us
the crosswind wouldn't be as strong.
There's you and me to ferry, plus
the third you always bring along.
That's our Bermuda triangle.
We sink because the boat's too full.*

*My own decisions are my own.
I don't let others think for me.
I don't rely on the Unknown.
I take responsibility.
Before you act, you run it by
the great Commander in the sky."*

"For my part, I don't understand
why you should care what I believe.
One can't 'think freely' on demand.
Not every kind of faith's naive.
Whoever wants to see what is
has got to look past surfaces."

*"And let me guess how that is done.
Shutting your eyes to what is there,*

*you see—though you're the only one—
a world you conjure from thin air.
You don't perceive Reality.
You just see what you want to see."*

“Photographers will sometimes squint
to better read a value range.
I focus too, to catch a glint
of diamond-light that doesn't change
when most of what we're taking in
winds up in the recycling bin.”

*Oh, please! The things you're telling me
are even worse than I supposed.
I think this 'diamond-light' you see
when you have got your eyes half-closed
gets in through where your brain is cracked,
and that explains the way you act.*

You're making fun of what I said.
How do I act? Inform me, please.
*Like you've got tinfoil on your head
Tuned in to alien frequencies.*
All right, it sounds absurd to say...
But you believe it anyway.