

Nick Muska

All Cool

Carefully Selected Poems



Urban Affairs Center Press

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2008

All Cool: Selected Poems

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The University of Toledo Urban Affairs Center Press
Thomas Barden and Joel Lipman, editors

This book is for Sleen

Café chez Nick

*Ouvert toute les heures
pour une femme
des heures irregulier*

[Open irregular hours
for a woman
of irregular habits]

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Albums

after Jules LaForgue

They told me about the Far West, the open prairies
and my blood wailed like a coyote: "If only I came from out there!"
Kicked out by the Old World, I'd kick off faith and law
A desperado! That's what I'd be out there – a desperado king!
Out there I'd scalp out my European brain
and paw the ground like a virgin antelope
No more literature! I'd live by luck, be a citizen
of chance, and drawl Californy slang
I'll be the pure squatter, a rancher, an architect
of trapping shacks
Hunter, fisher, gambler on the far side of the Pandects
Between the ocean and the Mormons. Ah, deer-meat
and whiskey, wrapped in rawhide
Prairie-grass my bed under the Indian sky
as rich as the flower-baskets at weddings!
And what else? Camp to camp, the Lynch-law
In the morning rough diamonds on my fingers
tonight lose them at blackjack
tomorrow forget it
sourdough up in them thar hills
and go nugget nuts.
And when I'm old, a farm in the morning sun,
a bossy cow, some kids
Because I like to sketch, I'll hang my shingle over the gate:
"County Tattooer." There you go!
And then, if Paris wakens in my heart
and starts singing "not cured yet, eh?"
Bet you don't even know where your kids are!"
And if the soaring Rocky Mountain condor
flares in me a vision of the infinite
I'd chuck all comfort and start a religious sect
a cult of the Goldrush, empirical and mystic
for the sodbusters, a mix of the Christian and the Vedic

Ah, pretty brushfires, gone like straw, my crazy joys
these album picturebooks, fragile dreams, my toys!