

with a torch

— Christine Ernst 2018

so I am rehearsing for my turn as the statue of liberty in my car
I get to read the emma lazarus poem as part of a collaboration with the local symphony
later this month I think I got picked because I am tall I don't have a pantsuit to wear
but I will be wearing white even if it's after labor day
so I am rehearsing on my way home from work sitting in traffic on route 28 stuck in front
of the infamous red house also known as hater's corner in cotuit looks like it oughtta be
condemned the busted windows the junk strewn yard the collapsing porch the only
thing spiff are the lawn signs he meticulously maintains he still has his *I hate*
Obama sign out because racism
his huge *real men vote for trump* sign made him a hero to some in 2016
lately his yard is filled with primary signs for lively and diehl but the biggest one today is an
eight by six foot billboard for a local notable dope and it should be noted convicted felon the
despicable and very stupid Ron Beaty
I drive by this house twice a day every day and today as I am waiting for the light to turn
up ahead I rehearse the poem in front of this hater's house *not like the brazen giant of*
greek fame with conquering limbs astride from land to land
it feels good to speak these historic words to this tumbledown old ugly home of a tumbledown
old ugly man *here at our sea-washed sunset gate shall stand a mighty woman with a*
torch whose flame is the imprisoned lightning
I roll down the passenger side window so I can shout WITH A TORCH at the big Ron
Beaty sign *and her name Mother of Exiles from her beacon hand glows world*
wide welcome WELCOME I repeat *her mild eyes command the air bridged harbor that*
twin cities frame keep ancient lands your storied pomp cries she from silent lips I am
in this moment the statue herself here in my car the robe the torch my skin sheathed
in copper my green crown sticks out of the sunroof
give me your tired your poor I shout at the home of this mock patriot the light changes and
we crawl forward and I am crying the poem his awful signs my anger my
hopelessness
your huddled masses yearning to breathe free
traffic moves slowly and I am in front of another red house at the route 130 light now
the funny old greek revival with the great black walnut tree in front there's an antique shop out
back and always homemade signs at the curb for pick-your-own tomatoes or strawberries or
raspberries in summer and even asparagus every june
the wretched refuse of your teeming shore
there is a very old man with a cane at the end of the driveway and he is closing up shop for the
day the across-the-street neighbor to the hater up on the corner he has just taken down
the flag and furled it carefully a faded american flag as old as he is I bet I watch him pivot
carefully on the gravel and walk slowly with cane and flag toward his house someone in a car
up ahead yells *have a good night, Joe!* the old man doesn't turn but nods his head and
raises his arm in a wave
send these the homeless tempest-tossed to me
the light changes and I head home
I lift my lamp beside the golden door