

FREDERICK SMOCK

Ovid in Extremis

Each and every morning
a bare-breasted Nubian girl brought
to his large balcony apartment on the Via Appia
upon a small silver platter a selection of
Greek pastries, phylo dough thin as gold leaf,
chopped meaty walnuts, honey from the clover fields
of Ilium. What did Rome know of such
delicacy? After she had fed him the pastries,
with her fingers or her toes, he and the girl made
love six different ways. It was always a new
girl, and six new ways of making love, every day.
And this was just for breakfast. His motto:
Indulge, but refine. He took down a sheaf
of writing paper and penned upon her naked back
verses to titillate the aristocracy and his many
patrons. The words always came easy, and
they always pleased—until that day Ovid awakened
as from a dream to find himself on board the
Black Sea Princess sailing out of the harbor,
bound for the ends of the earth, the glorious past
diminishing, his natal shore! He abandoned his
stateroom, bowls of passionfruit, oranges from
Seville dressed in diaphanous tissue, to stand
upon the decks, the night sky sliding under the waves,
the known world receding, exchanging the
women of the court for women of the fields.