

POETRY

Asbestos Book

He had climbed it so often, and now the top was red,
That palm tree heavy with nuts, so languorously, luxuriously coifed—
Was the sun at last, in fact, the sunset in his head?

Had the blue sky gone home for good, not wanting to be scorched?—
He sat upon the summit of something, no doubt about it,
His bronze skin, moist and oiled from his ascension, waiting
to be torched.

This can happen in the greenest and most blessed isles—
You have explored the crystalline streams, your teeth rotten
from sweet fruit,
Experimented ad infinitum with all the nude and native styles.

That is when, toward evening, you will go in search
Of that last emerald tree you had sequestered there:
Nothing in the lucid day suggested any overflorid perch.

It looks now simply overlooked, that startling image—
The delicious wind turned the pages of your island log,
And here and there you must have skipped a high, unblemished page.

So naked, brown, and burnable—do not, do not, burn the book—
It is the perfect place way up in the flaming air
To roast a little, read a little, from the rubric of those pages stuck.

— *Charles Edward Eaton*