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Introduction

Chris Sparks

This Holy Beat Place

This city scene is jazz
Here comes the leader
The buildings tune up
Takes out his newspaper

He lines up the folds
The caged bird sings in the sun
And everybody knows
The beat's night is begun

The train overhead
Beats bass rhythm low
While the leader rolls up
His old coat for a pillow

A lady's trolley wheels rattle
She nods, lips pursed tight
And the band leader readies
For his bed in daylight

On a cot of old news
Under a railroad sky
While the plants on the porticos
Silently sigh

On terraces clothes hang
Chinese laundry blues
Blowing bras, rusty bars
Faded, sun-bleached hues

Whump whumpa whump whump
Corrugated walls
He lights a cigarette
A scooter engine oboes

High over the railroad bass
Every night is like the last
But the days come rain or shine
Are the purest street beat jazz
The purest beat jazz
The the the the
The purest beat jazz, yeah!

Rusty balconies, swinging clothes
Caged song birds and plastic bags
As he drags his grey back curves
His hair is good, as a band leader's should

Behind the ironworks dig cutlery and china
Start to feel a second floor groove come on, muffled by laundry
Hanging on poles that reach and balance
On ends of the beat music balconies

The band leader's ritual is almost done now
His face is covered, his sleeves are rolled up
The birds are gone and the dripping sound slows
Like the pulse of a dying beast- hot snorting breath

Plastic bags in plastic bags on shelves
Wooden floors and cardboard floors and wire
Chicken wire walls with very good doors
Surprisingly good doors but very sad floors

Patched up leaning plaster smattered lean-to
Open roofed escape with birdsong coming on through
And the mad old trains they keep rolling along
And the band leader sleeps- his big old band lulling his mothlike dreams

Now bebop taps spray into empty steel pans
Tap, tap, sizzle steam smell, noodles gone in the wok
Net curtains gather dirt, behind sliding glass doors
Plastic bags lie around, like cigarette butts left in ashtrays

There is some pattern beneath the randomness
If you look honestly it's there
If you let yourself go it will enter your soul
The randomness built on the symmetry and recognisable geometry

It will satisfy your soul
That's why birds sit happily here on ledges
And butterflies visit the grassy edges
And kitchens sing like Billie Holiday

The sun shines and takes you to a place far away
And the band leader lies on his back and breaths slowly
Because he truly believes, he blissfully knows,
That this beat place is holy

Joseph M. Farley

After the Long March

Lines branch out from the corners of your eyes,
but they serve only to draw me towards pupils
black as wet earth, seeing and having seen
all or most of what I am and was and much more
of the world than myopic blue could ever spy.

Child barefoot in rice paddies planting sprouts,
witness to Red Guard madness and family arrests,
scholar, teacher, multilingual beauty sought
as wife or mistress by professors, soldiers,
party functionaries, surviving, thriving

despite the gossip and the distance between
Yellow River mud and dirty American cities,
carried on aluminum wings to new hopes,
new challenges, new loves, new sorrows,
Reborn on stage through song and costume.

Partners change as hearts; bodies rise and fall.
The past and the present are woven together
by the sound of a single string violin,
the latest lover helps you to forget the shame
of others come and gone or elsewhere waiting.

A picture taken by a stranger of a woman
with waist length braids standing by a river,
melts between fingers and disappears,
lost along with those eyes that look no more
in this direction, but only towards another future.

Words without meaning,
sounds without noise,
life never lasting,
hope a twisted vine
clinging to a tree
well rooted in the garden
bearing fruit bitter
and sweet of a kind.

After the fall

The river welcomes
all who fall.

Float or sink,
it's all the same,

but better to backstroke
on a sunny day

among the ducks
and watchful carp.

Seeking Answers

The men in the hoods and masks
keep pushing my face under water,
telling me to confess crimes
I may or may not have committed.

Bubbles explode from my nose,
and fire burns in my lungs,
but the air always returns
if I wait long enough
for them to hear my answer
and ask the next question.

Inside that head of yours

Your eyes shine backwards
into your brain
lighting up dark places
only you can see.

You never share what you find there,
never a whisper of the facts,
only a laugh and a look
and enough lies to fill a balloon.

Goldfish

The goldfish swirls down the toilet,
graceful in death
and the elimination of the body.
All refuse goes to the sewer
which doubles as heaven or nirvana.

We should all go that way someday
when we are ready or when we are not,
after the plumbers have installed
a commode large enough
to dispose with more intricate funerals.

We should all go that way someday
when we are ready or when we are not,
after the plumbers have installed
a commode large enough
to dispose of more intricate funerals.

no turning back

a river is crossed.
rubicon, styx or another.

what is to come is what must come.
what is left behind can no longer be seen,

lost as the ruins of sodom,
so much salt and sand .

onwards now. onwards
to fire and sword and patient death,

and all the fires waiting
in hearths yet to be found,

or in the hell sure to come.

Gary Beck

Shades of Prosperity

Spring in the city,
flowers blooming,
trees already fully green,
some benevolent days
despite climate change,
and while many New Yorkers
struggle to survive
tourists flaunt their wealth
lugging expensive shopping bags,
poking expensive cameras
into anything that moves,
not yet vulture-like
feeding on dead carrion,
more undertaker-like
appraising future customers.

Duality

Foreign threats
multiply
as fast as
domestic threats,
combining
to disrupt
peaceful existence.

Purchase Power II

Patrons of the art world
bid at auction
competing for masterworks
against rival appetites,
efforts rewarded
by acquisition,
applause of the crowd
for record prices,
feelings of possession
of a treasured item
won in economic battle,
soon to molder unnoticed
on crowded walls,
denuded of satisfaction.

Commodity Market

Pretentious art galleries
intimidate people
cowed by expensive surroundings,
expensive paintings,
condescending salesmen
except to buyers
who if wealthy enough
look down at everyone
spuriously confident
in the power of the purse.

Lest We Forget

Terrorist threats
become a constant
in religious war
against the haves,
since poverty pockets
are rarely attacked
by considerate suiciders,
trying to detonate
at public events,
significant landmarks,
targets of opportunity
with enough value,
shattering our illusion
of secure existence
in a violent blast
ending tranquility.

Don Mager

July Journal: Saturday, July 13, 2013

Steam's heavy breath exhales from the concrete driveway and stone path across the yard. Honeysuckle air hangs in dense warm residue from early morning showers. It's a bad aerosol spray freshener—that fails to freshen.

It's a cheap cologne dashed across an adolescent boy's chest with too much élan. Like limp car wash rags, drying, the vine drapes across the kennel fence slats where a pair of doggie-smelling wet dogs lies with noses at the gate—panting. Broadcast to the yard, splatters of furry and orange musk hurl insults.

August Journal: Sunday, August 11, 2013

Noon sun toasts the driveway to a fine sizzle. A Skink's feet luxuriate on the heat of porch bricks. Its no-neck slice of blue light darts down the crawl space wall. In the cement cracks along the side of the parked car, it laps up ants. It lifts its no-neck head and, with regal wave, waves its nose up at a sun that broils the white cloudless sky. Like small electric currents, its ritual of homage twitches through every nerve. It skitters back to the wall. A small dry dollop of black excrement marks the spot of its now—that now—is was.

August: Thursday, August 29, 2013

A pair of khaki zigzagging darts
stabs at the creamy filaments of
tall Hibiscus blooms. Like children glad
their mother's come home, their scarlet stars
open wide arms to the sun. Humming
Birds take turns in erratic high-speed
aerobic routines. One flies off. The
other hovers. Both fly off. Both dart
back. The frenzy drives forward. Now, one
is gone. Abruptly, the other like
a child's finger—as still as a thought—
rests on an open-palmed leaf. Watching,
the window breathes tight. Snap. Gone. Scarlet
blossoms shine toward the sun. Sun moves on.

September Journal: Thursday, September 19, 2013

Without permission the wide window
welcomes in with gaping arms the harvest's
intruder who trails with it a
toweringly clear black sky and the
chill lies across the bed and settles in.
The city's night spills cornucopias
of ice fruit stars. It has forgotten
its dull expressway hums and loon-call
sirens. The window holds the whole cold
moon. The stars flicker inscrutable
codes of ripeness to one another
across the recesses of receding
time just as the Chorus Frogs sing their
unseen faces across the wet woods.

September Journal: Saturday, September 21, 2013

Like the equinoxes as they beam their
democratic votes of balanced light
across the year, the Viburnum makes
its return visit. The top branches
spill milk jugs of white blossoms up toward
the floating cascades of sun that stream
down through tree branches. Light splashes the
snow-soft blossoms and trickles down through
crevices of dense low foliage
into small puddles of yellow bright
warm grass. The late afternoon's clear fresh
air hangs its now on a balance. Like
this day. Like this season. Like this year.
Like this tall bush's unkempt second wind.

John Grey

SIFTED THROUGH GAUZE

One car follows another
down unpaved Main Street
but then there's a break in the traffic,

a silence set aside by creole music,
and he spies out of his lone red eye
a long wagon pulled by two indifferent mules,

with a jazz band atop
and rolling in his direction;
what a combo -

a banjo player wreaking
clipped melody out of strings
with the backs of his fingers,

a fiddler and a drummer
and a guy towered over
by a standup bass

that doubles as his hat rack;
but it's the trombone player
who sparks his ear,

ripping notes out of the warm October air
like a hawk snatching starlings,
while his cheeks inflate double

and lips ripple like a swan's wake;
that wagon never does quite
shuffle its way all the way up

to the park bench where he's sitting -
maybe fifty feet away
it's swallowed by the dust

kicked up by the tires of the next car along -
and then another car follows
that one and then one more after that;

truth is it's been a good fifty years
since he last saw that band play -
and he can't say he didn't see this coming.

DAUGHTER BLUES

Roseanne left the church Johnston
I used to drag her to on Sundays

and now what:
the road to hell and damnation

lost her soul
to the purple-haired nose-ringed girlfriends
she hangs out with at the mall

not forgetting
mister tattoo
the feckless aimless so called fiancé

and those clothes she wears -
the short shorts,
grubby t-shirts

I plead with her
to come with me
to the big tent,
listen to pastor Jimmy

last week,
he laid hands
on Betty Sue,
cured her warts

damn but warts
sure would suit Roseanne
right about now

DEATH

Death has many opportunities.
Planes fly.
Trains move on rails underground.
Automobiles speed along the highway.
And a man or woman can step out
into the dark downtown night alone
and not notice what's lurking in the shadows.

Death once convinced an eagle
to drop a turtle
onto the head of Greek tragedian Aeschylus.
The bird did and it killed him.
So Death, deadly as it may be,
also has a sense of humor.

Death can doll itself out
in red-rouged cheeks, crimson lips,
dark-eye shadow
or wear a top hat and a cape.
It can take down from the outside
or implode the body from within.

Death is irrevocable, irreversible.
And it can drop by uninvited, unannounced.
Yes, there are some who are so in pain
that they long for it.
Death puts them out of their misery eventually.
Not through kindness.
Ironic is as good as Death ever gets.

KJ Hannah Greenberg

Heavenly Pixels

Huzzah! No eidetic memory improves upon celestial parterres or betters holy gobbets.
Religion's panade remains the scarp of enlightenment, while grouped ratels participate,
In spiritual enthymemes culling detailed prayers concurrent with bathroom cleaners.
Underdogs' defeat brings distribute texts, toilet paper, louche participants.

When such mystic elements find themselves adrift amidst mundanities, also afterbirths,
Galil's cyclamens, the weathered, blue doors of Tsfat, sparkle in contrast. Pastiche rarely
Surpass dedicated alpine flowers, South American sunsets, or subway tokens.
Gado-gado sans legumes, no matter the complimenting kedgerees, is always lacking.

Beyond riveting, life's meant to test our responses, to try out clarions of deeper practices.
Accounts of patience notwithstanding, it seems we're meant to stack towels neatly,
Give charity, spoon-feed the elderly, master kindness, or, at least, to pretend to ignore wens,
Oppose cynicism (and other forms of negativity), then celebrate the engagement of grandchildren.

Roué's continued progression toward death remains a confused series of growth opportunities.
When pulling our hearts out of our bodies, then holding them suspended, we ought to embrace
Knives ornamented with silver grips, flakes of ethnic blood, widowhood, batrachian sorts,
Heart attacks, high pressure, low sugar, cancer, more fiends, more anurans, maybe spittle.

For folks to sing, exalt, extol or otherwise celebrate, except, of course for sneaks, requires
Infusing their days and nights with inchoate happiness, sluggles, likewise complete satisfaction.
Our world, though, hangs happy pennons out windows only when flesh-sloughing disease is rampant,
Addicts and persons infected ebola rule nations, grabbing greedily, at goodness,

Computer screens, even small talk, connect the dots when endings aren't spelled out.
Thereafter, human facility skips over hubris, jumps relationship hurdles, comes out dancing.
The flawed management of social problems, elixir to unctuous persons, volunteers no relief,
No invigoration of pellucid mores. Rather, we force ourselves up, all rectilinear progression.

But Not Europe, America

But not Europe, America, neither Asia,
Petrograd, Vilnius, Brasilia, not Errbat,
No place where people thrill at madrigals,
Rove slowly up limited, Jingoistic heights.

Not by the wreckages of Hutz l' Aretz
Minus the given surcease of scoffing,
Deriding diamonds, titles, gold dust,
Ways in which technicians succeed.

Rather, we're even now birthing children,
In spite of everything, returning home,
Again, embracing Shabbot's sacredness,
Ignoring all inconveniences of "cousins."

From Shalom Zucher to Brit Milah, Elijah's
Mitzvot don't pamper, don't blind; truths
Remain sanctified, hallowed, extol realism,
Cultural bearing, all manner of devotion.

In Israel, gallants suffer so people might
Convey spiritual bounty for generations.
No furtive rites or buckram gift media.
Flimflam's suspended, tossed, obsolete.

Outlanders' unsolicited gifts palpably force
Us to embrace light and air, defeat noncadences
Of hurt, of murder, of twisted global perceptions.
From the heart, we nullify evil meta-modalities.

This Holy Land, under The One True Judge,
Fails abbreviated civilities, kills phenomena
Stirs spiritual phenotexts, allows individuals
To overcome our enemies' mordant means.

Serving Him Smartly

Serving Him smartly, offering up delights of repentance,
Of caring for one's fellows, of charity, of benevolence,
Also, modesty, true nonapologetic humility, sincerity,
When the majority of folks only imagine limned works
Or a theodicy in which belief, one tesserae at a time,
Makes for kings, not kindheartedness, among brothers.

We need not elevate any physical demesne nor
Worry over popular systems of values. Realize
That spiritual life's pulchritude, that easy grace
Assigns, again, to deep books, tableaus of truth,
Maybe even little acts of loving goodness. We
Can cull cosmic bricolage, leave back pettiness.

There's no real transmogrification, save the Boss'.
Merely, we itinerant souls, jostled during connections,
Bring perspectives on topics otherwise lacking nuclei.
At least, humanity bridges some incommensurabilities,
Journeys through adjustment as eldritch types sprinkle
Wisdom. We revise personal bests for the sake of G-d.

Donal Mahoney

Miss Carol's Dumplings

Every month or so
on a Sunday afternoon
I skip the football game
and get in my truck
and drive out from the city
into farm country
to visit Miss Carol
and get my hands
on her plump dumplings.
Biggest I've ever seen.
Best I've ever had,
terrific with her
legs and thighs.
When she lays out
her chicken dinner
on that white tablecloth
I start drooling before
I even get a hand on it.
A farm girl, she says
she's never met
a man like me
so nuts am I
about her dumplings.
Usually, she says,
men like breast meat,
when it's moist,
and I allow how I
like that as well
but not as much
as her plump dumplings
on a Sunday afternoon
and her pluperfect
legs and thighs

Father Spoke in Code

Father spoke in code
Mother understood.
She would cry
once he went to bed.
I never understood the code.
My sister didn't either.
As we got older, we quit
asking Mother what he said.

A feral cat claimed our yard.
It would leap the fence
when anyone appeared.
Except, of course, Father.
When he came out to walk
around the garden after supper,
the cat would sit straight up,
then rub against his leg
and look at him as if it understood
what others never could.

My sister used to say
the two of us were proof
Father and Mother
got together twice.
I told her I wasn't so certain.
I looked a lot like Mr. Brompton,
the next-door neighbor.
He used to buy us sugar cones
from the ice cream truck.

My sister, by the way, didn't look
like anyone in the family either,
but that was 40 years ago
when I last saw her.
I went away to college
and she got married.
We were never close after that.
Not even Christmas cards.

Forty years is a long time.
Now, we plan to get together
for a weekend this summer
before one of us dies.
I suggested we wait
till one of us is terminal.
What's the rush, I said.
But my wife told her
I was only kidding,
that we'll be coming
and not to make a fuss.
Burgers and hot dogs
will do just fine.

I know what Sis and I
will talk about that weekend,
the two people we'll always
have in common, no matter
how many years and miles
may lie between us.
Father and Mother have been
dead for decades now
but they're still alive in us.
I talk in code, my wife says,
and my sister cries a lot,
now that her husband's dead.
The one thing I want to know
is if my sister knows
what happened to the cat.
It knew the code,
may have had some answers.

Undocumented Zombies

The nice thing about being dead
is you no longer care if the doctor
mucked up your diagnosis and the

pharmacist gave you the wrong pills.
You're cozy now in a comfy casket
six feet below all the carnage

in the world, without a worry, when
a mastodon tsunami rolls over your
peaceful cemetery and uproots

thousands of caskets, tossing them
high in the sky and forcing you
and all the other zombies to float.

You discover no port will take
undocumented zombies.
You have no papers, after all;

you can't prove who you were or are
so you and the other zombies float
for God knows how long since

God may not believe in zombies.
This is a rupture not a rapture.
And while you float, your lawyer

meets with your relatives who
no longer weep about your passing.
They smile as he reads your will.

They plan on taking a family cruise
with the proceeds from your estate.
They'll dine on lobster and steak,

lay waste continuous buffets while
you and the other zombies float
further out, unable to find a port

where citizens will bury the likes of you.
Property values will drop, they shout.
They can't drop their signs and let you in.

Julian O'Dea

Photo Album

In that old photo
your face is lowered
to the book
as you read;
candid and smooth
as the page.

And in this one
you had the sun
in your eyes;
but to me, the sun
was always in
your eyes.

A Pair of Hands

Wear those stockings
to the film, and while
I do not have fingertips
on your thighs to fondle
you, let the lacy tops
hold you, delicate, firm,
and that brassiere can
cup your breasts when
my palms cannot.

Wear that set because
they match perfectly,
and work together,
like a pair of hands.

Fallen

Fallen from the tree of life,
like autumn leaves we die alone;
together, green, we fill the sky;
on our own we'll lie like stone.

Post Scriptum

Azadeh Asadi

A poem

By my sweetheart's body,
on the lands beyond the borders,
a flower has grown.

Every morning,
my eyes
water the enemy's garden.

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