

poetry by *Yonatan Maisel*

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"Arbitrary in the Abstract"

Arbitrary in the abstract,
cunningly circumspect,
audaciously flaunts protocol.

Frivolous, in the hypothetical,
Wanderlust;

Platinum-Brunette.

Metaphysical; dodger, wily slayer of pragmatism?

Random, though rigidly fixed.

Adroit ineptitude. Unfettered stagnation.

Arbitrary, distorted, surreal outside world,
viewed through rain-soaked,

translucent, window-pane.

Jaggedly blurred, yet softly unequivocal.

Ambiguous, but alas, explicit.

Abstract. Though defiantly imbued with salient strokes of realism.

Burying my Brother

Last night we sponged John's body
as if he were a small boy,
creamed his face, moistened
his fleshy jowls.

He lies in T-shirt and jeans,
clothes that he once smeared
from belly flops into second base
with red dust, his friends cheering.

Cold as clay, he doesn't hear
his neighbors' peacocks,
their cries like mourners who can never
resign themselves to grief.

Photos of his kids lie scattered
across his chest like cards
in a poker game, a winning hand
now played out.

A Final Walk With You

It's not all life
in this canyon
Even life
passes here

I sometimes feel
as if I float
down
this canyon

Yet I never reach
the walls
their height
or the feet of their forest
breathing life into itself
holding me in
down
as if they've more to tell me

As I float
a young aspen grasps
intertwines
a fading pine

Even life passes here

The dizzied bee
stumbles about
my way
left homeless

My friends in the pond
Not now !
After the winter freeze
warmth and the bloom

There seems no life left
waiting
in these canyon walls
holding me
womb like

The evening's soft current
sways
the pines

beneath I lay
into sleep

In this canyon life passes.

"Ruined Songs"

shovels are sliding into fresh dirt
with sickening ease, a crunchy sound
like a watermelon splitting open or a
cranium hitting a dashboard

and ruined songs play like
migration and imitation
traumatic remembrance
of places you used to stay
quiet and still like
an animal not quite sure
whether to make the mad dash
or not

bury me three feet deep
because the water table
is too high and I can't
be buried at sea, less
than wanted, like ruined songs

please don't remind me
of places I used to stay
just continue to sink
that spade
to churn the flowers
over and over until
I can be buried
three feet deep

shovels drill,
and ruined songs
play like
three feet deep
burials

"1976"

as we sat around the television in 1976,
how could we have realized how downhill

we were sliding?
as we watched the first german cosmonaut
in space and the cosmic marriage of two toys
on live DDR television,
how could we have foreseen
where we were heading?

i met you on a rainy day though i forgot
where it was, why we met, or what you wore
just that it rained and the grass then
looked like a fake plastic carpet.

the wall had fallen and afterwards
we watched the high-rises grow sky high
and witnessed the westernization of
grocery stores and our children
but we couldn't find a map to paradise
in the rubble of 28 years of separation.

from our television set, sigmund jähn looked directly at me
and described the glowing orb we were growing on
but i couldn't have imagined the slope i was on
as we sat around the television in 1976.

Before the Mill Whistle Rush

Early one morning
my mother taught me
how to drink coffee,
her palm on top of my head.
This is how we do it, she said.
It takes too long to cool
so pour a little in your saucer, add some milk,
tilt your head down just a tip,
(don't forget to say your prayer)
blow gently, see the ripples,
count to twenty, and sip.

Ceali

Ceali picks up things and holds them out
before her and says in clear English,
"This is an orange" and "This is a pear"
and "That is the basket that holds them."
Her new language comes easy to her. Still life
objects become little girl things in her hand.

Ceali stays at our house most days
while her mother works cleaning hospital sheets,
doctor scrubs, and nurses' whites in a building
that lets the heat out through a smokestack.
She cleans our house on the weekend.
The wrinkles on her knuckles seep
around her hand when she squeezes a mop,
turn to deep creases in her palm.
Her fingernails are the color of corn meal.
I imagine her lips were once welcoming red.

Ceali likes to sit in my wife's lap
but sometimes she wiggles too much
and the wife tries not to grimace.

Our Jack Russell, Fritz, has a brother named Ted
who lives with us, too.
They share a privacy pen
built by the man who lived here before.
It's made of dark-stained boards and a door that locks.
His dog slipped away one night,

and the man left soon after.
Our dogs are healthy and bark and jump and snarl
whenever a stranger approaches.

Only one of my children lives at home
and the wife now uses the free room
to begin, but never end,
projects that should not mean so much.
She thinks and plans and worries, lies
on the bed, stares at the ceiling.

At night we keep our doors closed.
The dogs slip into their pen.
When she leaves Ceali gives the wife one kiss.
She's saving the rest for her mother.

this world

I am watching a girl dressed in blue catholic
school uniform pushing wheelchair with
old man in it, yellow and dry like old water melon-
Chicago, 5542 North Artesian Ave, Ap. G, it's afternoon

and she just pushes the wheelchair in circles
and whistling happy tune,
above them one pigeon is circling in the sky, looking for
his lost love or something more
pleasurable, I keep watching throughout the window
sinking in my 4-day beard, drinking wine and listen
to some lyrical symphony while the view outside
is trivial and tasteless like everything else

and the girl continues with the slow circles
and the old man is sleeping now or maybe dead:
but somewhere there is China and the ships are
crossing the big blue ocean:

there are the armies and the dictators and
the little girls,
but this is no good for me and even for my state
at the world affairs
because soon enough there will be enough bombs
to blow up all of us to Mars

the pigeon keeps circling
in the sky.
showing to me that there is still chance for me,
for you
for me
for us
and even for the bombs.

night

sad songs are pouring out
from the broken windows
and here is the smell of
stale wine and cigarettes;

outside
the dogs howl in the dark
the sirens are not so real
like they should be,

the stillness
hangs down and the night
locks me within.

Elegy for a Day

Long shadows mark the unalterable march
of light to dark, the unstoppable end
of one moment after another.

The clang of today's morning alarm
is a memory, as is the trudge into work
and the sludge of coffee in the middle of the day.

The hours grind, fade into the past—
even this evening with the inescapable chores
I must complete alone.

What remains is the same tomorrow
Yet, in the lengthening light,
a snatch of music slips into my ear.

I step outside and the late roses, falling
off the bloom, assail my nostrils, and the sunset –
oh, the deep sunset – blazes in my eyes.

The little red muffin and others

The little red muffin sat in a corner of the basket.
The rosemary seeds on its head whispered shyly.
One of them stole its presence out of the scrumptious vicarage,
rolled down the muffin's side and
onto the base of the hemp basket.
It wished it were a hemp seed.

The banana peel slid off.
The banana lay naked.

The loud penguin with a mouthful of carp,
dove into the glacial ocean.
It choked on the carp.

The hand that hit the harp,
forgot it had five fingers
and played like it had six.
The five were over-stretched
but they recovered.

The little red muffin sat in a corner of the basket.
The blueberry muffin was embarrassed to sit beside it.
The rosemary seed that wanted to be a hemp seed,
stole its way onto the top of the blueberry muffin.

The banana peel felt useless.
The banana felt free.

The loud penguin struggled with the carp
stuck in its throat.
It spat it out and went after it again.

The hand that hit the harp,
apologized to the five fingers,
and promised them to never do it again.
They said it was ok.
They had enjoyed it.

Native (?) Emotions – In distress

A mind overtaken by
mindless thoughts
meandering groan-fully,
(through sometimes delightful tunnels,

brightly lit by imagination)
though inevitable in their demise,
prohibiting any control,
seemingly harmless,
without prize or trophy -
Still -
The pattern that follows -
Still -
Coming to a stand - Still.

Kick-start in reverse
the evolutionary cycle,
but not circular
in fashion,
though rambling through
haywire mixtures of immense
Stand Stills.

Keeping the safety harness
delicately hung on the
over-extending arms of
emotions in distress.

Beginning - unsure - reload
shooting blanks - blank shooting

How the rosy, perplexed sighs, which mount and un-mount
with youthful vigor; selfishly determined to return -
Do.

On Visiting the Seattle Art Museum

People peer and appear to understand:
educating through evocation, elaborating
and elucidating, pointing at portions of pictures with
their partners while my mind wanders to the
true works of art: the women who weave
in and out of baroque banisters and post-
modern Plexiglas while they preen or pretend
or pontificate or pose or peruse, depending on their
persuasion that particular day. And as I exit I am
unable to revive any awe for these artists whose
creativity has been crafted into kitsch by
marketers whose motivation is a miniature
rectangle canvas covered with green, like a Rothko,

only without the rebellion
required for true art.

Fortune Telling

Completely unlike the
lilies of the field,
betraying the birds
of the air, we seek
to find our future
in the same way
that we have

predicted our past.
We seek signs anywhere--
astrology or 8-balls,
therapists or thespians,
stock markets or our
mothers, tea leaves
or low-interest loans--in

an attempt to tell
tomorrow what it
may or may not hold
in store for us. And
while we arm wrestle
with our destiny, today
has us pinned to the mat.

Requiem

I mourn for my youth
and my yesterdays,
and I say a mass for the

woman who walked away.
I meditate on the mistakes
of my mind and my body

and my soul, and I mull
over every unwise word
and asinine action.

Fate has felled me

more times than all
the world's lumberjacks

have lain into tree
trunks, and life has
pummeled me with

more punches than my
boyhood bully was
ever able to land,

or so I think.

And in so doing, I
deceive myself into
believing that I am dead.

The Two Together

Magdalene, with all her magenta sins,
The seven demons piled high inside.
Force her head down, oh yeah, down, mmm hmm, that's right baby.
Suck it like the temptress you are, drown as I release.

Mary, the eternal sexless mother.
Set apart from all the women of the world.
Forgive me my sins, I hail you, seven times,
One for each of the demons that bitch seduced me with.

Mary, Mary,
The Whore and the Mother.
Tangled together in my fantasies.
Each feeding off the other,
Inseparable as sin and salvation.

I Do Not Mean Suicide

I imagine murdering myself.
I do not mean suicide.

I dream of chasing myself down with an ax,
Heaving and cleaving myself to bits.

My own screams of terror
Mingling with my own cackling glee.

IRONY OF PEACE

Much talk of international peace,
but minds are full of war designs,
so wars are there everywhere,
and nations fight tooth and nail,
stiff air, land battles with gurgling sounds,
despite hue and cry by men of peace,
supply of warships screaming headlines,
no talk of peace,
till full destruction on both sides