

Poems from the River

A Collection of Reflections

Kurt Brindley

POEMS FROM THE RIVER
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For more from the author, visit kurtbrindley.com.

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Acknowledgements

I acknowledge that I am wholly fallible and incomplete and that any success, however slight, I have had or will have in life was and is dependent upon the example, the goodwill, and the grace of my betters; for it is they who, despite my intentions and abilities, have inspired me and cajoled me and sometimes even tricked me into being, if not a better person like them, then at least a less bad one like me.

But even they can only do so much.

Amen.

Forword

POEMS FROM THE RIVER is several collections of personal reflections, with each collection representing a specific time and space and mentality in my life. Many of these poems, especially those from the *Ashtabula Collection*, have been with me for so long that they are to me like old photos.

Like old photos, I occasionally will dig them out from wherever it was that I last buried and forgotten them so that I can fondly reminisce over them. Some remind me of happier times, some remind me of sadder times, but all remind me of something.

These old poems have, over the years, changed as I have changed. They have followed me around as my family and I moved back and forth across the ocean during our navy years and they were at my bedside each time chemo burned through my veins. They have been ink on paper. They have been hidden away in old floppy disks, occasionally being converted from this latest format to that latest format. They have been sometimes lost and sometimes forgotten for long, long periods of time.

But in the end, these poems are still with me, right where they belong.

Kurt Brindley
July 2011

For Megumi

*ever since
even though
and until*

my love

Poems from the Ashtabula Collection

Ashtabula

1

Ashtabula!
Are you dying?
Are you dead?
What is it about you that charms me now?

Look at yourself.
What have you become?

Once your immigrants, your harbor, your rail
helped to build the promise of the nation.

Yet witness your reward:

Crumbling crumbling crumbling.
Everything crumbling.
Nothing new.
Nothing sustained
but old dreams and older identities
that are taxing, indeed,
but untaxed, nonetheless.
FieldsBrook.
Superfunded sewer river
brewing in uncontrolled
orgasmic uranium releases.

Bula Bula Bulians,
happy sad miserable glad Ashtabulans,
defining existence with their egos and balls
on dusty sad softball fields
and pissed drunk bowling alleyways.

Your reward, indeed.

Where are your shiny new asphalt trails
leading to hollow prosperity?

Where are your cash-flooded business zones
to wash away the sorrow of empty pockets of desire?
You are left only with wandering undisturbed vacant landfill ways
and boarded up and abandoned main streets--
memorials to the hopes of shallow, forgotten dreams.

Seems that after 200 years of dispiteous toil
you'd now be wallowing in the excess of your excess.

2

Ashtabula!
Are you dying?
Are you dead?
What is it about you that charms me now?

Progress, you insolent fool!
What have you accomplished?

Trembling field, weary barn, towering tree temple,
havens for youthful escape and wonder--
razed for profit and the promise of cul de sac prosperity.

Hidden streams, sudden creeks,
paradise Petri dishes--
paved over.

Enchanted wood,
dreamspot of witches and lust--
ripped out by its tenacious roots.

And yet, Progress,
you refuse to direct your powers
in the direction where progression is needed most:

So sad to see the foundation
of second-rate education crumble crumble crumble to dust;

So sad to see humble cottage villages
slide into the oblivion of Lake Erie's erosive shore.

So sad.
So sad.

Ashtabula!
Are you dying?
Are you dead?
What is it about you that charms me now?

Can you still remember the day
when your river, your namesake, ran pure?

O Algonquian speaker,

settler,
name-giver,

with what people did you belong?

How beautiful and plentiful the river must have been
when you first settled its shores.

Did you prosper?

How did you feel when you first heard
Progress's mighty war cry?

"Western Reserve, ho!"

How long after those words were translated into your tongue
did it take before you fled your sacred river's shore?

Algonquian speaker,
thank you for giving us your beautiful sounds of *ashtabula*.

River of many fish.

Though, your river, our river,
sucked, siphoned, sickened,
its natural treasure tithed to death
while worshipping the Almighty God of Greed,
is now bountiful only in name.

Please forgive us, Algonquian speaker,
for shitting into your sacred waters
the most toxic poisons of our industrial bowels,
the waste of our excess.

4

Ashtabula!
Are you dying?
Are you dead?
What is about you that charms me now?

Once you were a haven for shackled freedom seekers--
a salvation for the darkened damned.

Your harbor harbored love and hope and the promise
of new beginnings for all.

But now, like your nationmaster,
you are segregated and scared.
Your tracks of rail serve to better support
demarcation lines of hate and mistrust
than they do your crumbling crumbling crumbling trade and commerce.

Tear down the bastions of hate
built so meticulously and steadfast within your borders.

Replace your pallid two-toned heart
with a pulsing, vibrant rainbow one.

And pray that quickly comes the day
when your eyes no longer shine with aching disgust
on mismatched couples interwoven with forbidden love.

5

Ashtabula!
Are you dying?
Are you dead?
What is it about you that charms me now?

Has my sentimentality grown with my years,
or, is it simply a desire to be from a hometown of significance?

Don't you know you were nothing more to me then
but a cage, a place I yearned to escape from?

And when I became of age
I willingly signed my life away in increments

without any second thoughts
To make that escape.

So much nothing to do back then.
So much nothing...but freedom.

Stupid Youth!

Field out my door,
old barn to explore,
wood with its paths,
childhood dreams that still last.

All memories now.

Sweet memories--
sweeter, perhaps, than what was.

Can what was ever really be as sweet as the memory?

For the what was--the life, the experience, the reality of the moment--
begins and then ends.

But the memories of the life, of the experience, of the reality of the moment,
especially the sweet ones,
can be eternal.

6

Ashtabula!
Are you dying?
Are you dead?
What is it about you that charms me now?
Calico aster,
you too were nothing to me then.
How many times did I kneel by your side
without acknowledging your existence?

My ignorance forbade me to know
that we were family back then, family still--
Ashtabula's native children.

I remember, Ashtabula,
strolling down your cattail'd,
milkweed'd , pussy willow'd paths,

while muttdog romped ecstatic before me,
rejoicing in the *ashtabula* wild-scent
that filled his nose.

My faithful, burr-faced companion
understood your beauty well before I.

How long ago was it, Ashtabula,
that I lived only to recluse in your fields and vales
and at the temple tops of your wooded diocese?

How long ago was it that I left behind
within your grasses, within your mud, within your snow
quiet impressions of myself, if only for a moment?

Your impression, Ashtabula, is within me still.

The Barn

Sagging and unsure, an abandoned barn stood in the field
next to my house like an old man with a story to tell--
like an old man worn down by Time's unrelenting pursuit,
but unwilling to give up the chase until his story was told.

The old, once red, once rugged barn reeked of life and death:
bat dung, molding straws of hay, rotting wood, rusting metal,
all within various stages of decay, concocted their smells to create
a sweet mustiness that lingers in my nostrils, still.

The barn was an arena for my innocent, childhood adventures:
fallen rafters were pirate ship masts;
the broken loft ladder was the sheer side of a mountain;
the storeroom, dark and wet, was an unexplored cave.

Later, it was an arena for other things:
trembling kisses that revealed the tongue's true purpose;
fumbling first feels ignorantly missing their mark;
one-beer drunks and other dramatic peer pressure impulses.

It was my war room when I planned for battle
and my safe haven when I was in retreat.
It was my sanctuary when I searched for God
and my asylum when He couldn't be found.

The old barn accepted my faults and shared my secrets.
It never laughed at my awkwardness but sheltered me when others did.
And it seemed as if it held on to its weary, ancient existence
only to help me discover the meaning of mine.

The Field

When Progress found the field
where I picked blackberries
that stained my fingers purple,

it promised to remove the barn
which no longer stood for any other reason
but to store mysteries and memories
and a hoot owl who sang me to sleep,

and replace it with cut-out homes,
filled with cut-out people
who never sang at all.

Progress, while at it, removed a majestic oak tree,
a tree older than the nation, perhaps as old as creation,
to make way for simmering, virgin asphalt.

Nothing since has looked so tall.

The Pond

A trestle rises over a pond that, as a child, was forbidden to me.
It was hidden deep within a haunted forest, I was told,
and filled with poisonous water and hungry snapping turtles
that especially loved the flavor of disobeying children.

But when I finally found the courage to make the illicit quest
for the illicit pond, I discovered instead a dreamscape oasis--
a wayward child's gift from God,
where trains slowly floated by singing sad singular songs.

Legend has it that the pond is an abandoned quarry--
a quarry once bursting with the fuel for a power-hungry nation;
a quarry once bustling with all of the everlasting hopes and hazards
of purpose and profit that Progress had to offer.

But Progress, in its uncontained fervor to progress,
struck a magnificent underground spring;
in its retreat it abandoned to the rising depths
an unfortunate train engine and several hapless coal cars.

Even swinging off the rope with all my might and diving true,
always on the lookout for hungry snapping turtles,
I could never swim deep enough to bear witness
to the forsaken casualties that lay below.

A Taste for the Climb

A pear tree grew in my
grandpa's back yard.

I climbed it once.

I climbed it not to reach
the ripest fruit tucked away inside;
I climbed it simply to prove to myself
that I could.

Scared.

I was a little too little to reach the low, thick branches
that would be the foundation of the beginning of my ascent,
so I took--I don't remember what I too--
but I remember I took something from the shed
to step up on.

It wasn't easy.
Even with the extra step,
it wasn't easy.
But I made it.
I was tenacious.
I persevered.

And then I really began to climb.

I climbed.

I climbed right past the pears
pears pears pears pears pears
dangled everywhere green and plumb before my eyes.
They could have been so
easy for me to pick,
no effort required,
and so safe and low to the ground,
risk-free,
if I would just pause to pick.
But I had no taste for fruit;
I tasted for climb instead.

Never looking down.
Never even considering looking down
because my sights were set on up.

It was an old pear tree--
mature--nice climbing branches--
like a stairway for the gods.
I too was old--
mature--a climbing god--
ascending to his heavenly throne.

When I reached the top
I couldn't stop
because by then I wanted more than climb.
I wanted sky.
I wanted to fly.
I wanted to keep on toward up.
I wanted to keep my legs pumping toward up
because I knew that once they stopped
I stopped.

As I sat on the highest branch,
a branch so thin it bowed even to my insignificance,
I looked up and just kept looking up.
I looked up and just kept looking up
and I didn't notice the sun
as it too bowed low before me
until my mother's distant evening call
reminded me of my mortality.

And then it was gone
--the sun
--the sky
--my desire to fly.

I was me again.
I was scared again.
But I had climbed
and I had climbed high.

Faces in the Bathroom Floor

I was quiet as a child.
I was one who preferred to spend time alone.
I was shy.

Maybe I still am.

I used to, to the somber audience of myself,
continuously question, and ponder,
and wonder about the reason for my existence:

How could someone so skinny possibly have a purpose?
I always concluded that I was merely someone else's dream:

I was really someone who was not needle thin, but strong;
someone who was not drawn within,
but outspoken and able to stare dream-me-likes down,
and then laugh as they shied away, quiver-lipped.

When I wake up I'll thank God
that he was only a dream.

Please.

I used to climb secluded trees
and perch myself on the most stable limbs--
not too high.

And, with all of my might,
I would try to project the energy of myself outward,
toward people who normally would never
consider me,
in the hope that they would.

Perhaps this would make me a little less insignificant.

And as a child, I spent an inordinate amount of time on the toilet.
The bathroom was a good place to feel sorry for myself.

People tend to leave you alone there.

Walking Down the Road Worse for Wear

Sliver moon stuck in my eye,
permitting no distractions--
Even the moon is a chore for me.

I chose the road once forsaken
and soon worried over ruts.
No poetic outcome for me at travel's end.

The farmer knew what he was doing--
perhaps he had Emerson insight,
transcendental cognition. I did not.

I do not still.

I have read many of the same words as the farmer,
but in my fervor to learn at any cost,
I believe I may have missed their meaning.

Toe stubbed along the way.
I am thankful to the pain
for reminding me to breathe.

Waiting for the Bell to Ring

Who's the asshole who said:
Time heals all wounds?

My wounds will never heal.

Who's the asshole who said:
All good things come to those who wait?

I'm still waiting.

Who's the asshole who said:
Patience is a virtue?

My patience has run out.

Without a Word

Your message has been delivered
Its meaning is crystal clear
You'll no longer be my companion
No longer will you be near.

My heart, my soul, my everything
Aches without your touch.
With you your love has vanished;
I've never lost so much.

Since we first met, first held first kissed,
Your love has always been near,
But your message has been delivered
And its meaning is crystal clear.

Chants and Hums

Discordant melodies ring in my ears,
each note severely distinct.

And beneath the music, lyrics begin as a whisper.

Melismatical chants and hums slowly rise into
sadistic shrieks and screams so loud
I fear I'll be overheard.

And I can never quite place the tune.
And I can never quite place the beat.

Picking Through the Pile

Walking down the street one bleak, autumnal day,
I came across a vendor hawking a cart full of used souls.

Picking through the pile, I came upon a soul
that once belonged to me.

In a noncommittal way I asked through the din,

What's the going rate for this pleasant looking soul here?

The vendor, busy as he was, for souls were scarce those days,
wiped his bloody hands across his bloody apron,
gave me a wink and said,

A fine soul indeed! For you I'll make a deal.

He made his way to me through the desperate crowd of customers,
leaned into my ear, and in a conspiratorial whisper explained,

*Unlike most customers these days,
you seem to be one who understands the value of a good soul.
I only sell to those who appreciate the goods that they want to buy.
What's your offer, my friend?*

I wiped at the desperation on my forehead;
in a nonchalant, divergent tone asked the busy merchant
how he came to own such a stock
of obviously first rate,
like new,
barely used,
souls.

His smiled faded.

*Young man, why do you ask such a question?
What are your intentions?
If you were to ask the banshee how she knows
for whom she should express her next mournful keening,
or ask the shaman to lay out before you the path he takes
to the netherworld in his quest for straying souls,*

would they not be jeopardizing their own industrial ways?

He snatched my soul from my grasp
and tossed it atop the mussy pile.

Away with you! You shall purchase nothing here!

And nothing could convince the busy vendor
my intentions were pure.

Followed by his flock, he wheeled his business away.

My soul could not be bought.

Empty handed I walked away, returning from whence I came.

Step Into the Grass

Tonight
I'll bare my feet
and step into the grass;
and, for the first time
since the sun
last set on my naked
shoulders,
I'll prostrate myself
before the rising moon.

So much time has
passed since then,
since I last felt raw
moonglow on
my rusty skin,
that I have forgotten
how the breath of night
can upturn a sallow face.

Long ago,
when I could still remember
how to pause,
and how to listen,
and how to breathe,
for more reasons
than just to breathe,
I knew fields
and wood,
and calico aster;
I knew how to kneel,
and how to observe,
and how to bring myself to quiet.

And I knew,
without knowing,
that if I lay
on my back
beneath the reeds
and remained hushed,
as night clouds

floated by,
shadowed and silent,
that my Self
would simply fall
away.

~~~~~

Youth!  
Numinous  
youth!

Youth,  
as ignorant,  
as simple,  
as pure,  
and as free  
as the flowing  
freedom of sudden  
Dogen insight--

a sudden insight of...

\*

~~~~~

Tonight
I'll bare my feet
and step old and aching
into the caliginous balm
of the cool redemptive night.

First Dance

Back towards him, covers pulled tight to the ears, she slept.
At last her breathing took on the slow, regular beat of detachment.
He was now the only conscious soul; he would be his only audience.
He lightly touched the body next to him.

Satisfied, he uncurled himself from the bed and stood tall within the night.
The floor greeted his feet with warm electric pulses.
Arms before him, he inched his way through the nightness like a man newly blinded.
In the bottom drawer, in the back behind the many, many socks, he reached and he found.

Tonight, he, the nine-to-fiver, he, the power-suit-wearer,
he, the wannabe-world-dominator would dance like the dickens
while the rest of his family slept.

He checked the bed once more with a cautious turn of the head: still.
Headphones, alien and awkward, found his ears.
Silence was muffled out.
A faint glow seemed to radiate from the mirror--its outline resembled a smile.

An excited, hesitant finger found the button--and then pushed it.
Sounds poured forth and entered him with a rush.
Instinctively, toes picked up rhythm and fingers picked up beat.
Hips began to gyrate and knees began to sway.

He danced!

He took in a deep breath, completely filling his lungs, and then released it.
Accumulated poisons shot from his mouth in a stream of fire.
So much fuel to burn, he thought.
Even as the flame poured from his mouth, he continued to dance.

And he danced with fervor, without reserve, as cool, liquid melody
poured all over him and re-hydrated his soul.
His pores glistened with song.
Everything of him reverberated with sound.

He became a blur of movement, fluid movement,
and gradually took on a phosphorescent glow
that beautifully subdued the darkness.

No longer was he as he was before.
Music washed him away
and left a resonating
puddle of harmony
and light.

A light that danced and danced into the night.

Kamakura

or

The Spiritual Kami Bazaar

Torii gate, tall and proud, pirches pigeons
as lotus sutra-hummin' crowds
toss ten-yenners at defunct gods,

as chestnuts roast over an open roaster
b'neath the hawking merchants's please for
monetary salvation

Shuckin' shells and swappin' war stories
of prayer deprivations,
hunger artists of the eye,

fasters till the cows come home,
(cows comin' home knowin' no fear of the cleaver)
clad only in mystic *hilfigerdocker* wear, banter:

*...and can't you just feel the daibutsu spirit all around you?
Once I fasted for 12 days! More chestnuts?*

*Thanks. Once I fasted for 30 days standing on my head:
butterflies rested on my nose and told of truths untold.
You just wouldn't believe--isn't attaining samadhi just heavenly?*

*I would--it is! A squirrel once sat in my palm
and spiritualized to me all the reasons for his fears...*

Buddha Buddha
Bronzed and bowing
I now know why you keep your eyes lowered.

Densha Vibes

train shimmyin' and shakin' stop after stop after stop
shimmyin' and shakin' me into trance-like coma-state of reflection
rockin' me down deep deep deep and deeper into the valley of the deep
far far and farther away from the contagion of the disenchanted

Staring Out My Window Pondering Your Absence

Fuji meditation drifts in through my window...
How unfortunate your ignorant soul
so far away, so devoid of this simple pleasure.

Sitting With You

Sitting with you
at the noisy café,
listening to your story about
the price of your new,
second-hand china and
how you've been wondering about
each cup's past:
the hand that held them;
the lips that drank from them,
started me to wondering, too, about
the stories that had been listened to
by others who sat in this chair
in which I now sit.

Yokohama Peacefully Sways

Yokohama peacefully sways
from the cool, seaborne breeze.

Fuji's there too, to remind us of serenity.

There's so much to talk about; but instead,
let's just listen to the city.

I Stand in the Pouring Rain and Cry

I stand in the pouring rain and cry.
The rain, hitting me cold and hard, and
my tears, falling hot and velvet soft,
mix and run down my face
to the saturated ground.

Nothing gets washed away.

The world is still cold and hard.

Poems from the Warped Little Triangle Collection

The Greatest Day of My Life

Today is coming to an end
As a day just like every other day
That has come to represent the accumulation of my past

Though each new day has the potential
To be the greatest day of my life
The older I get
And the slower I get
I fear that my greatest day has already passed

And I don't remember which day it was

Warped Little Triangle

Me and my frivolous little endeavor
Writing words to you as if they mattered

As if it mattered that after all these years
I now can afford to waste my time
Click click click clicking keyboards
Beneath my stained and callous fingertips

As if my finally reaching the hierarchical top
Of that warped little triangle
Mattered one little bit to you

Maybe you'd rather I retreat
Climb my way back down to the base
Back to the beginning
Back to when each decision was simple

This or that
Eat or heat
Fight or fuck

When life was real
And when senses
Sensed

But now at this point in my life
It would be a long slow climb down
From the top

Unless I jump

AMPLIFY -- attenuate

I do those things I need to do
To find the energy required
To meet the needs
Of the day

Often though
Those things I do
Are not nearly enough
For the needs are much greater

Drain

Round and round and down I go.
When will it stop?
It won't...

I know.

Devolution

With every step I take
A little something of me is left behind
Even while I move forward, progress
Eyes fixed on the future heading toward me
Arms swaying at my side
Tiny radiant sheer moments
Of who I am to be
Churn and pulse into who I am
And quickly fade and dull
Into past me's
As they shed from my skin
Trail in my wake
And finally scatter with the wind

If I Did It Once

If I did it once
I did it a thousand times

God damn it
God damn me

It's hard not to do it
So hard

But in the end
And after all

I am only me

Mad Crazy We

Yes yes no
I love you so
Little
And so
Much
Especially when you touch
My pith my soul my seam
And everywhere in between
It seems a dream
Without sleep
Without rest
Frantic pacing
Through a never ending
Awaking of you
And of me
Too weary we
We two
Together
Forever
And never
Shall we part
Lest we start
The end of our
Mad crazy we

Life By Day, Diversions By Night

Underarm antiperspirant
(a little aluminum never hurt)
Windsor sometimes Half
(depending on the thickness of the silk)
Black leather shoes
(need another shine boy)
Drive too fast
(the only remaining adventure)
Report on the report
(the % of profit minus the % of my life it took to earn it)
Evening ritualized formalized dining
(prayers then self-induced gluttony)
Designated dirty clothes bin
(no place to toss the dirty soul)
Graying hairs advance
(and trimmed from unspoken places)
Gentle snore from the other side of the back
(nightly diversions begin)

All It Does Is Hurt

Pain
When it hurts
Reminds us that we are alive
And for that we should give thanks to God

Bullshit

Pain
When it hurts
That's all it does

When rusty nails
Sink deep into the flesh
And pierce the selfish soul
All it does is hurt

When the dull knife is drawn
Across the naked neck
And drains the dark red hot blood
All it does is hurt

When I look into your eyes
And see the sad haunting silhouettes
Of my many past transgressions
It hurts

That's all it does

An Understood You, A Rhetorical Me

We both are
Without being said

Poetic License

Thank God for the passionate poet
Who trumpets the sun's morning rise

And who writes lovely, pretty sad songs
Of young lovers's heartbreaking goodbyes

Thank God for the passionate poet
Who reaches right into the heart

To stroke it, to tease it, to please it
And sometimes to tear it apart

Amy Love Where Are You?

Has anyone seen that
Beat-ass hippy chick
Who opened up my rusty skull
Scooped out the honey and spice
And left behind a heaping pile
Of raw stinking poetic
Truth

The Meant of the Move

Thy thee how so
dive jive writhe
the beat the beat
tap tap tap tap and
move is meant so
like immodest mystical monks
Listen no
Ears pulled stretched wide
so pour sound down like a
rushing fall of symphonic
cherries blossoming in a
harmonic madness of
death chants and
undulatingling rhythm yes
Plea please pleasant pleasure
sense lust last satiated
to little to much to full
rhapsodic memories
blew ocean blew sky
wards of the psychotic
mind like the mythic manic
panicked crooners spooning a
sad happy singular sound
bite through the body
piercing melodic howls
but only after time has torn
swaths of memory and
pasted quick and slow
together and forever
to the meant of the move's
tap and beat

Sunshine on a rainy day

Sunshine on a rainy day
especially those without rainbows
(because rainbows have become so, well, Hollywood)
tends to turn my soul around
not in the melodramatic (Hollywood) sense
but in the universe-has-no-end sense
the sense that
I am not just another person moving and shifting within a plastic world
but instead a force among other forces that are equally important and
like the universe
without end

Nihon

Nihon, Nippon, Japan,
That beautiful rising sunspotted land

One step onto that far out eastern soil
And your soul
Your soul and mind
Your soul and mind and every
eternal electrical pulse that will never
stop pulsing even after reaching all there is to reach

Will transform from what they never were
To what they were always meant to be

Koan Love

Monks of love come
Monks of love go
Each in their pursuit of that fluid
Eternal Love
Nirvana perhaps
That Love of the Immediate Now
Where soul meets soul meets soul meets soul meets soul
Until merged
Until One
So they think
Until asked

The lips of two kiss and there is passion...
Where is the passion when the kiss is of only one?

Behind Every Page

Seeking
Searching
Probing deeply
Without fear
Without malice
Without end

Behind every page
After every word
Under every sentence
Around every dot

Reckless perhaps
But feckless not

Aching
Burning
Pulse in a rapid mad rush
In pursuit
Of that elusive stuff of the unknown

That hardest stuff
The stuff that when finally found
Hurts

For it's the hardest stuff that refuses to be found
And refuses to surrender

Until deep red blood has been drawn

Simple As That

Turn out the light
To see the night

Fall

This time o' year always gets me to thinking
About life and death and how time flies past
Like a vulture late for the carcass

Low

The window's open now
this is the best time of year for it
crisp
but not
cold

Sleeping weather

The night sounds of summer hold on
but without their mad tenor or tone
now that it's fall

I hear other sounds tonight too
Whether they can be classified as
fall sounds
I don't know

They are sounds
that are always around
in places like this
but tend to go unheard
by me anyway
lost in the day's din

The rolling hills roll
and the lowing cows low
during the day
as they do at night
I'm sure

But at night
with the window open
and the air coming in crisp
they seem to do it
just a little better

We War

*War is an ugly thing, but not the ugliest of things.
The decayed and degraded state
of moral and patriotic feeling
which thinks that nothing is worth war
is much worse.*

*The person who has nothing for which he is willing to fight,
nothing which is more important than his own personal safety,
is a miserable creature and has no chance of being free
unless made and kept so by the exertions of better men than himself.*

~ John Stuart Mills

We war, don't we
We warriors
We worriers for the world

You, Red Death Warrior
You mobilized
You sanitized
Purified to perform ancient rights of battles
And to stake patriot claims of fragile freedom
In hearts alien, hearts eternal,
Hearts ignorant of all you know

You know
You know

You know, noble warrior,
While you wander through the heaven of Hell
Raking the shit scattered pieces
Of bitter and broken promises
Into neat, heaping piles made ready
For the devil's dusty full bin,
I, Warrior of The Forgotten Peace
Arming my chair of flaccid command
Long for the glory fight that I never had
The fight I will never know
The fight you will never forget

You know
You know

The Beautiful Rest

Been had death on my mind
For some time now
So I thought I'd bring it before me
And take a stroll through our
Somber cemetery of silent soldiers
Our national place for rest

And today was a perfect day for it
A perfect day for thinking death
For somewhere on that loop of 695
I see firefighters standing
On top of their trucks
Up above on the overpass
Them and beckoning flags in silhouette
Never seen that before
And then troopers blocking onramps
And then an amazing amazing amazing
Massive swarm of brilliant flashing lights
From every emergency vehicle imagined
Coming toward me like
A global emergency response
For the death of the end of the world
Then militaristic motorcycles zipping by
Zip
One right after another zip zip zip zip zip
I never even noticed the hearse
But surely it too passed me by

Yesterday my daughter tells me
Her friend died from an overdose
The news numbs me and I tell her
That he's always stayed tucked away
In my psyche for some reason...almost
As if I was expecting to hear that his art
Has exploded on the scene
And that he made it through
But this is a mad strange world
And he was able to give it
A mere 7947072000 seconds
Which is both nothing and everything

In the eternal expanse of time
The national cemetery never ceases
To hush and humble me
The beauty in death
Yet as I occasionally read
The eclectic names
Stamped on tombstones
Wigglesworth
Curts
Baldwin
Musmanno
Sanchez
Eichelberger
Motherswell
Dimitriou
Fabellon
I can't help thinking that
At least some of them
Too must have led
Lives addicted
Lives pained and troubled
Incomplete
Yet because of the ways of the world
And the ways of war
They were able to survive long enough
To die in a way that glorifies their death
And provides such a beautiful place to rest

Been had death on my mind
For some time now

Poems from the Marrowish Collection

Penny What?

Saw a penny rolling down the hill.

Remember those?

Pennies.

Not too much good anymore except for luck so it goes.

Still they're around here and there.

Junk drawers.

Under couch cushions.

Behind old oil cans on the floor in the garage.

Glory days are long gone.

Penny poker.

Penny gumball machines.

Penny thoughts.

Penny what?

Penny not a god damned thing.

Known

Does the tree blowing in the breeze
feel the wind upon its bark?

Still, it prostrates itself as low as it must.

Does the grass lying dormant during winter
realize its slumber?

Still, it wakes to grow in the spring.

Is the heart beating in the chest
or the brain thinking in the skull
one with the soul?

Still, the soul exists eternally.

Wood

Chopping wood
is my meditation. No
thinking. Only the
Now
of the swing
and of the cut.

With each swing
and each cut I rise
deeper.

Wood, ready for
the fire,
piles up around
the chopping block
and it becomes hard
to maneuver, though
I fail to notice.

...samadhi

Now.
I am.

...but there is always
the one log, knarred,
knowing,
that invites me back
to the present.

I return
looking forward to
the challenge.
One might even call it
a fight.

For I know
that come winter,
when the fireplace
is lit,

I will recognize
the pieces of
that knarred
and knowing log
and I will remember each
exhaustive swing
and each reluctant cut
and I will give thanks
for the good fight
and the memories
of it.

Goliath

Icicles, once mist, once snow, once water,
precariously hang.

Such a strange transformational journey to beauty
they take.

There is beauty found in their precariousness;
there is beauty found in their fragility;
there is beauty found in their serenity.

But the transformation does not stop
at beauty.

Unsatisfied, for whatever reason, they grow
and they grow.

And as they grow their beauty
melts away.

Too big now for beauty—
no one ever roots for Goliath

Atrophy

Yeah, it's cold out;
too cold for walks and such.

So I sit around too much;
stand and stretch sometimes,
but not enough.

Yeah, I sit around too much
and watch the cold outside.

Why couldn't I get sick
during the summer,
where at least my muscles
could atrophy in the sun
while lounging by the pool?

It's Hard But Not That Hard

It's hard to feel this old when I'm just this young.
It's as if I've aged 30 years in the past ten months.
Is this how it feels when one is as old as I feel?

Does it hurt to stand like it does for me?
Does it hurt to sit like it does for me?
Does it hurt to walk like it does for me?
Does it hurt to eat like it does for me?
Does it hurt to sleep like it does for me?
Does it hurt to wake up like it does for me?
Does it hurt to go to the bathroom like it does for me?
Does it hurt to shower and to shave and to brush the teeth like it does for me?
Does everything hurt this much when one is as old as I feel?

Yes it's hard to feel this old when I'm just this young.

But, I have to say,
I'd much rather feel as old as I feel
and hurt as much as I hurt
than suffering from
what could have been the alternative.

It's Not All

It's not all
the blood clots or
the headaches or
the backaches or
the tests or
the deep breaths or
the chemo or
the meds or
the nausea or
the hair loss or
the constant dependency or
the constant trips to the hospital or
the constant answering of the same questions or
the constant beeping or
the vital signs taken in the middle of the night or
the catheter plugged into my jugular vein or
the IV pump having to go with me everywhere or
the spinal taps or
the bone marrow biopsies or
the waiting to find a donor or
the waiting for the bone marrow transplant or
the wondering what the results will be or...
maybe it is.

The Brightest Light That Has Ever Shined

A bright light shining brighter
than any bright light has ever shined
shines down on me.
On us.

I find the courage to look at the light,
this brightest light that has ever shined,
and far from blinding my eyes,
they see, instead, for the first time all that is.

The brightest light that has ever shined
shines straight through deep into me,
illuminating all that there ever was
to be known about me.

Everything.
Not one detail of me past or present
is hidden from the light,
this brightest light that has ever shined.

And like the sun burns off the morning dew,
the details of me are burned away,
leaving nothing behind but
what was meant to be.

Still, details of me are certain to reform
like storm clouds, dark and threatening,
if I ever decide to stop looking
toward the brightest light that has ever shined.

Afterword

Looking back, I see. I clearly see.

Looking ahead, though, the outlook is somewhat blurred and distorted.

But I do see your hand.

And I reach for it.

And I grab it.

And I hold it tight.

And you guide me.

And I follow.

About the Author



A husband and father of three, Kurt Brindley is a retired sailor who lives in a house on top of a windy and rolling hill. He traveled much of the world while serving in the navy and, aye, he's got some stories to tell...

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