

Alpha by Filename

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40 days

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He stepped into the desert,
shadow red upon the sand
like blood from blue wrists
draining down a dirty sink,
numb fingers resting on a faucet
that would somehow cleanse those hands
in sputtering streams of brown.

He carefully skirted a shadow
that might have been a snake.
The sun beat hard upon
bleached bones, tattooing names
in reflections glimmering
to the splattered rhythm
of metal meeting flesh and
blood biting bone.

Yet still people watched him
as if they saw something
they could believe.

Would he be buried alone,
old and failed, bitter wrinkles
twisted in a jaundiced testament
to the disillusionment of time?

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Or would he be buried alone
under millions of waving flags
and misty eyes, shrouded
in hours long, pensive eulogies
and impressive reflective essays
by noted luminaries
on the meaning of his life;

all the respects paid from fear
of daring to believe
those so revered
might also be human?

He watched a mute sun
drift across the wavering, translucent sky
until it disappeared behind the sand.

Be Not Proud

It ends with disco.
Death—perennial left feet—
showboats drunkenly across
orange spotlights and neon afterglow.
Meanwhile, huddled dreamers bleat
their meaningless psalms of loss
like piss on snow.

Even so,
sleepy dancers still rehearse
prancing pirouettes in whirls
of colors filched from Michelangelo.
Warding off darkness and worse,
no longer boys and girls,
they know:

“Be not proud.”

The Big Wheel of Time

The Big Wheel of Time
is driven by a wide-eyed five-year-old
with tussled, side-seat braking hair
thrilled at being a speed demon
for the very first time.

The relentless plastic grinding,
over asphalt, through sandbox
sandcastle kingdoms, around
(sort of) innocent bystanders
and into carefully raked leaves
never stops;

It took him fifteen full minutes
to get going this fast
and who are you to spoil his fun?

Bury Me

Bury me in Ireland, where
(I have heard)
Gaelic murmurs whirl from leaf to leaf,
fairy circles dot the country,
and the ghosts of the Tuatha De
sleep like hungry phantoms in the ground.

Bury me in Ireland.
I have never been there,
but it is as good a place as any
to be forgotten.

In Loving Memory of Norton I
*Emperor of the United States and
Lord Protector of Mexico*

The King of Gutterdom, he,
barefoot Lord of Make-Believe,
exiled to the streets.

Hair as brightly wild
as angry drunks at closing time,
he sweeps right by.

The alley's smoky and dark
but the sewer grate is steaming warm
around his shopping cart.

A lonely fire escape
listens to the lilting tales
revealed about the day.

He raves a rousing show,
raising demons, summoning snow,
but always fails to note

his audience is mute
(dazzled by his derring-do
and sizzling drool).

When he makes demands,
lost as he is in foreign lands,
he rarely understands

and why should he when
the worst that could happen would happen again
to this giant of men?

Grimed with earthly grout
he recreates home by swearing loud
to the missing crowds:

another royal decree
by the barefoot Lord of Make-Believe,
the King of Gutterdom, he.

In Retrospect

“Paying for things” is getting old,
but must have seemed a good idea, once,
since Agnük decided for everyone
having the right shaped skull was worth
at least two pheasants.

After that, art had to be magic,
an ocean pebble or seashell enchanted
to throw the voice of a goddess
like firelight shadows in sooty caves,
illuminating power shapes, mystically indistinct;

A mosaic in light blue tile acquired
at the peril of a life, prayed and blessed
by robed holies and hermits herded in
before being set exactly in the perfect pattern
to trace footsteps of divinity;

Or a cathedral with no seats and glass stained
by the sweat and dedication of craftsmen
gone to Heaven early to double-check
and ensure the finished steeple’s measurements
would indeed reach all the way.

Instead, Puritans roused the lazy layabouts
into witchworked forests to carve farms
of industry and integrity. Dancing and play
weren’t seen in the black and white tapestries
of Goody and Goodman Sunday best.

Forests disappeared, replaced by waterwheels
and concrete. Young ladies learned etiquette
in textile mills and young men chased fortune
west into gold rush sunsets while, back home,
business ticked itself, quote by quote, into an art.

Dustbowl to merger-acquisition,
a person’s worth lies in exchange
from when obesity waddled revered,
but now we have robots and unions
and television.

Not that the ducks

cared, though they paddled alongside
and seemed to listen. Over submerged
traffic cones and McDonald’s detritus
their shiny black and green and mottled brown
glistened in the drizzle, but they were just waiting
for me to fall in so they could eat me.

That missed, significant kiss

lies edgewise, internalized
in the gist and thrust
of faith and mistrust
that bind us here.

February friends, we wished
and whined our way through meanwhile.
Meanwhile, meteors light the sky of slow
self-destruction,
water into icy storms expands,
and help takes form of human hands.
Even gray skies grow old.

(Now I wish to show you strength,
even if it means being alone

Real Men

Real men don't use umbrellas when it rains
but stroll,
stately and serene, never rushed
as slick, clammy sheets pound drop after drop
into carefully tailored dress casual
while breath steams in sharp winter air

Real men don't use umbrellas when it's sunny either.
The shade from their baller caps snug on their heads
is by far cool enough in the boiling asphalt summers.
The clockwork sweatstains spreading from their
manly cores—
simply part of the game.

And

Real men absolutely do not use umbrellas
while sitting on moldy concrete benches
waiting for their wives.
Even though birds gather close on overhanging branches
Real men are monoliths of stoicism,
not even flinching when droppings ooze down
suitably blank faces.

Because real men never learn.

And There Will Be Time

Her body presses against mine
in friendly invitation
half-drunk, half-asleep, mostly unaware

Four hands, two sighs, one gaze
tipped and poured together
in a tipsy situation

A shining knight triumphant
rides home along the taste
of her breath

A mystery unfurls, charges
my reflection in her eyes.
Then blinks:

Two immiscible dreams mingle
between half-separated lips

. banners roll the drawbridge down
. fanfare fades behind

one fairy tale dies