
NEW YORK CITY AND OTHER TIMES

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ODE TO NEW YORK

New York is tough on its newcomers
from Lvov or Laos, or émigrés
from Ontario or Ohio.

My own Manhattan began circa 1980
with a ride on the D train from Brooklyn
to Lower East Side's Broadway.

December's gusts pushed litter
inside the day between supports
of elevated noise over my head,

subway trains rumbled somewhat
urgent - too fast to catch - all alien,
iron-wrought staircases grew out
from the narrow pavement.

Where was that famous Broadway
I saw in a glossy magazine
on the plane to New York?

Wind carried me on its back
into foolish bravery - no fear,
no disappointment - just open-eyed
curiosity beneath the overcast sky.

The past was a whole life ago
and here I was to build the present
on the mirror's side of my soul without
prophecy, regrets or premonition.

It wouldn't be a peaceful annex
to the house of David, but a part of the city,
strange, multifaced, unconquered.

Now, many years later I've fully tasted
the concoction of bustling Manhattan
with its crowd, Carnegie Hall, Central Park,
garlands of bridges on its shoulders.

All was savory for my eyes, tongue, mind
for an hour, for a day, for life.

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Bench in Central Park
[CLICK](#) to enlarge

PHOTO OF CENTRAL PARK IN SNOW

The skyline of Manhattan blurs above the Park.
Empty benches freed from the summer crowd,

lean their backs on a wooden fence.
The prickly wind erased people from the picture,

elsewhere they bend against the gusts,
burying chins and noses in scarves

and woolen hats, pulled down on foreheads.
The only living trace is birds' footprints

on the foreground. The photo emanates
the quietness that hangs on trees

sinking in snow up to their ankles, leaving
the city's anxiety some place outside the frame.

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VILLA IN THE HAMPTONS

Mendelssohn's violin concerto
is caught in the long hazel hair
of a woman at the open window.

A moonbeam stretches
its hands to the feet
of cypresses on the shore.

The black cape of sky
with bright dots of stars,
douses its hem in the ocean.

The violin's sound consumes
the sea and cypresses and the woman -
in one take of a breath.

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A MAN WAITS FOR A 'D' TRAIN, WATCHING

A girl with headphones on her blonde head
doesn't bother to pick up a dime rolling down

from her hand as she buys a ticket.

An old bearded man plays a flute with the passion

of his memory and his eyes intensely shut,
unaware of people, passing by his collecting tin can.

A man in construction overalls and scruffy hair
bends on a bench sinking his head in cupped hands.

A young mother with short dyed-red hair and
pride and worry in her eyes squeezes the hands

of her twin daughters on both sides, jumping, like
attached to a pole ribbons, fluttering on the wind.

Everything on this hot and smutty platform

is condensed to an interval between trains...

The rest is his loneliness outside others' loneliness.

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EURYDICE

Her breasts are like two birds breathing.
He sneaks inside her dreams,

touches curls of hair on her neck,
whispers Shir-Shirim into her ear.

She opens her eyes - like Orpheus
is his voice - her brows rise in wonder,

the hand covers her surprising mouth.
She loses herself and she follows him.

Her breasts like two birds breathing
and she turns into his shadow.

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ONE BIG SIGH

*I'd make myself into an orchestrator of kisses.
Instead of millions of kisses snapped off at random,
let them happen all at once - a powerful smack...
- Stephen Dobyns; Forestall Park*

Imagine a diligent dreamer
with rigorous training in fantasy
would haunt the whole town
(a county, even a country)
into a deliberate audible breath.

Everyone would sigh in one common language:
satisfying, loud, languid, ... or
quiet, cautious - as if afraid

of blowing down a house of cards ... or
short like a blink of eyelashes against a speck of dust.

A visionary conductor of sighs
I would raise the energy of snow blowers
blow-driers and whistle blowers, depending
on how participants puckered their lips.

A heavy concordant sigh could
happen in the morning,
when everyone still in a house-robe
opens the papers with one wide-flung gesture
to free headlines into a kitchen.

In a high pitch of imagination I would make
all lovers close their eyes,
hold their breath for a deep kiss
and then loudly release a velvety timbre moan.

...one, two, three - one big sigh together.

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ELEGY TO NIGHT

After Joseph Brodsky

The night is everywhere.
All are fallen asleep -
a house, stairs, night table,
the beginning of a poem
between the flaps of a pad,
chairs, leaning their backs
against a dining wall.

A man stretches out on a bed
for a night
his soul leaves his body
withdrawing into itself,
as Jewish *tzadiks* taught.
But maybe it just perches
on a tabouret beside the bed
and patiently awaits the morning

to return into his body.

Windows' sleepy eyes
peek through the curtains
a torchere flanks a fireplace
gaping in the dark.
The house sleeps on trusting hands
of night without prejudice
or premonition - like drunken Lot
not-knowing his daughters' plan.

Morning seeps through the skin of walls -
a percolating murmur of a kitchen
prods silence out of the house
onto stairs and on a lawn, where
a loyal dog of a newspaper waits
for the sleep to dissolve into the light. Not yet.

Note: *tzadiks* - wise, learned men (Hebrew)

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ON THE WAY TO FAME

The drive on the noon highway
to the right place of success
shouldn't be a problem -
30 miles passed, 30 - to go.

Except...
a sudden screech of a flat tire,
rubber smell and a skid
off the central lane

beyond the yellow line
separated the traffic from
the indifference of a rough shoulder.

The second key ingredient
of potential success - the right time
also has leaked out of my tire.

I don't need a man -
I handle my life pretty well -
but who's gonna change my tire.
O, that Triple A with its triple delay.

But nevertheless,
the car starts limping on a donut
slow-slowly transporting me from
one spot of frustration to another.

What if I make a U-turn and
drive back, peeking over the divider,
searching for the lost time?

What if there I discover a poem?

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