
FROM THERE TO NOW

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FROM *THERE* TO *NOW*

One wants to travel to get away from
the tedious *here*, to the exciting *there*
building a castle of expectations -
not me.

My eyes used to focus on reality
as in an eye doctor's office -
checking far-sight, near-sight -
no blurring, no disappointments.

Now the heaviness
of my not-too-good lungs
pins me down like a butterfly,
dry spread-winged in a display-case.

Only fantasy lifts me above
my flat old age, scampering around
with its own small purpose
of breathing, groceries, doctors.

Now and again I send *there*
a reconnaissance plane
to supply my still agile mind
with pictures of winds and clouds,

of multifaced Jerusalem streets,
Italian sun-drenched grape vines,
Wrubel's Demon and Renoir's Cathedrals,
faces - cameos on a mural of Moscow.

I hold onto those scattered memories
(with no sound, smell or texture)
just flat remaining reminders
of what I can't have now.

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REMINISCENCE OF THE DARK

After Edward Hirsch

My mind shuffles across the present
holding a small lantern above the ground
just enough to see a few steps ahead
and italics of my footprints behind.

Beyond a dim bubble of light I can't see
people - no matter how I squint my eyes,
and it is not the illusion of isolation - it is
loneliness encaged by the dark indifference of others.

Then the dawn morphs into daylight,
and the radius of my vision slowly grows,
and now I can dispense with the lantern.
My eyes touch the skin of a poplar's bark,

feeling its top sway to the earth rhythm.
My arms encircle its trunk - skin to skin,
hearing roots sucking in soil's fresh water,
green capillaries feeding hand-shaped leaves,

Wind rests its wings on branches that
secure my balance within rain, people, time,
sustaining my stand against disunion
with the wheelbarrow of memory.

I am armed with a flickering lantern
and patience for my illness. At a crack of dawn
I cross the darkness, cross the present,
into the light, into the day, into the light.

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BALLAD OF GROWING UP

From the tower of my adult self
I watch a boy in the library's dense air
redolent of stale paper, etching leather,
rich leafage of other lives.

After closing hours, he likes to sneak
back into the night silence of the Book Temple,
to a narrow space behind long rows,
arranging two chairs for his ten-year-old body.

He sleeps there and dreams, sailing
around the blue globe, conjuring up
the tenants of hard-cover dwellings -
as a crew in his ship of fantasy.

A dragoon of the eighteenth-century
Polish army, decorated with epaulets,
plumage and clinking spurs
lands next to a pretty girl in a mini-skirt
and a navel-short tank-top.
They sit on a shelf, dangling feet,
brushing thin shoulders
of their two-dimensional bodies,
laughing in different languages.
After a fleeting while, a Cinderellian
strike of a clock sends them back
to their uncrossing isles and lives.

After many a dreaming night
the boy begins weaving poems,
pulling thread by thread from his life
and from others', until he has grown
into me.

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FREUD READS MY DREAMS

The morning develops dream-snapshots
in a dark room behind my eyelids

and clips them on a string to dry -
voices and faces I can't recognize,

the last train car I can't catch,
noise of a party I am not invited to.

Waking I keep my eyes closed
and skewer dreams on a pen.

Then I chafe them on a page -
inadequate and unsettling.

Why?

Because my libido is squashed
under the heavy lid of my age.

because my eyes lack laughter
and turning inside stir the past

where my mother and daughter
grapple for my non-attention.

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JUNKYARD

This place doesn't have a guard
to protect its useless tenants,

brought here by mercy or chance
and cannot leave on their own might.

Undesired by roads, drivers, lovers
they doze behind blind shields,

scavenged to the naked bones,
they miss their arms of shiny doors,

throbbing hearts of engines,
miles speeding underneath.

No sound among that stillness -
just instant metallic clinks

of hubcaps that fall and rattled away
tired of holding onto deflating life.

Residents of junkyard sink into
the muddy present of slow aging and fog.

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TOUR GUIDE'S PHILOSOPHY OF CHOICE

Welcome to the town of choice

Please. Look to your left - a deli with a sign in the window:

The Best Soup, The Best Toast, The Best Coffee.

You can climb off the bus in a drizzle to thrill your palate or just imagine - you feel their flavor on your tongue.

Please. Look to your right - we are on top of the slope, the river flows below out of view.

You can climb off the bus and trudge the rugged path or just conjure the river's dramatic image.

Is it calm and slow before meeting the ocean, or shallow - kissing stones on the bottom, or rowdy for white-water of rafting?

You can hold onto the vivid image of the current below or face the truth - which often overrides our vision.

What a strange reality! It all depends on how you see it - you scream at first breath because you're pushed out of comfy warmth and slapped at the exit, or because you're released from a sticky watery prison.

At the end of our tour you can see - facing each other - a looming gothic cathedral descended from Renoir's painting, and the oldest seventeenth century synagogue that survived by pure chance of history.

You can walk into either edifice and talk to your God (if, of course, you are on speaking terms with Him) or don't bother and stay on the bus.

It is your choice.

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RENDEZVOUS WITH THE PAST

Twenty years ago I conjured him up
(lanky, baggy pants, shapeless jacket)
sitting on a bench in front of City Hall.

Intrigued by his philanthropic smile
and sparks of hidden smartness
I asked for his help
to break the crust of my limitations -
verbs and nouns cumbering my mouth
and slurred her speech after a stroke of fate
that hurled me naked over a linguistic wall.
But, at the time, he didn't sense
augmenting pain of memories
and feelings as wet clotheslines
sagging in the air, attached
to shores of my prior life.

He crossed my path again
(a fitted suit, soft shoes, and friendly eyes)
He firmly held my shoulders, guiding
me to the place of my forgotten thoughts.
His refined smile seemed to say:
I see you're set at ease and ready
to sift through your liquid memories.

Yes, I am ready -
my hands - on a keyboard,
my mind - with a round-trip ticket to the past.
A rudder in the reminiscent surge
of my slightly warping testimony,
he pointed to exclamation marks of buoys
to avoid shallow insignificances of life
and channeled me into the deep to sort
the flotsam of my wrecked family.

As a thoughtful ephemeral lover,
he beguiles me to my computer every morning
for a rendezvous - with me, with him, the past -
my last embodiment of happiness.

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HERE I AM A POET, A NEBISH AND OTHER LIVING CREATURES

I.

I am a *sparrow* who hustles across a plain in tireless dashes, quickly correcting wrong turns, who jumps along the gravel path or puddles left by yesterday's rain. I re-write my life in the alphabet of footprints on snow, roads' dust, and wet sand.

I am a *cat* who relaxes under a soft hand that smooths its fur and unhurriedly purrs its life written by someone else who pampers its ego. But sometimes it arches its back in fury and its claws leave scratches on the furniture.

I am a *salmon* who ecstatically swims against the stream with rebellious resistance to gravity and to normal flow of things.

II.

I am a cartoonish *persimmon* wearing oversized galoshes in front of the store where I stand to attract shoppers.

My hands stick out grotesquely on both sides. They barely bend trying by nervous jerks to smooth and flatten wrinkles on my belly.

A skin-deep layer of self-reliance fashions the artificial impression of a merry fruit that now and then generates molasses of poems causing toothache and nausea.

My inner flesh, soaked with slime of inferiority, eats me alive with sucker-tentacles of anxiety spitting out pathetic confessional poems.

And my all '*uris* - unlovable, unhappy, unlucky - are jellied below the shiny surface.

Sometimes a jest knives through my persimmon skin, impelling a few grins and the permanent abscess of jealousy.

I wish I could coat my tart self in irony and sarcasm, but my vocabulary lacks their meaning to extract a couple of laughs from the audience of a few.

Yet, I can't afford to be overly sad and dwell on my mental

ills - it is boring even for people who like me.

III

I am a mother, a reader, a movie-buff who happens to trust a barrage of thoughts on paper. I've discovered a sea of language - an urgent, lucid, sultry expanse of words.

Metaphors settle on the lawn of a page like pollen from poplars or redwoods.

Images pop into a strophe from the mirror held onto seasons, rivers, people.

At last, a poem is airborne and I just happen to be there.

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