
Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Jason Irwin: Three Poems

Jason Irwin · Wednesday, February 10th, 2021

POEM ABOUT MY FATHER DISGUISED AS THE END OF THE WORLD

Everyone knows this landscape is a façade:
propped up horizon of corkboard and tin.
Curve of flesh. Lick of salt.
It's all we can do to endure
the next few hours: gridlock on the drive home,
the unavoidable reckoning
of empty rooms. Who can say for certain
we are not descended from the stars?
When I was a boy I lay in bed
while my veins burned. My father was an asteroid.
Some nights I caught sight of him crashing
through space. Other times he was the whiskey
in my glass, the voice crying "No."
The almanac predicts a treacherous end.
There'll be no more pleasantries, no more
high-speed streaming of your favorite natural disaster.
No V.I.P. value meals, or cream in your coffee.
So call down the gods if you want, the traffic police,
insurance men. They're only smoke signals in the fog.
Hawkers on the midway. Nails bitten down.

*

PHANTOM PAIN

It happens when I'm on the bus, or late at night
when everything is still. Hammer hits to the synapse.
Blood thumping like a subwoofer in 4/4 time.
As if a worm were licking my 5th metatarsal.
After a while it no longer startles you,
like cruelty, seeing your own reflection in the mirror,
or finding your dead uncle in the kitchen at 3am,
gazing into a glass of milk.
William James wrote that the severed limb feels sympathy

for the one which remains.
Maybe the dead feel sorry for leaving us
with so much paperwork.
They scratch at the door, move the furniture
when we're not looking.
Once I dreamt of a child who stumbled like an injured pony
through the streets of an unknown town,
certain he'd done something wrong,
something beyond remedy.
On the bus I feel something cold and slimy
slither across the place my left foot once occupied.
I shift in my seat, and scratch at the empty air.

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LAZARUS

You wake to splintered light
through the blinds, a car alarm,
an argument in the next apartment,
the hiss of the radiator,
and for a moment you're unsure
of who or where you are—
that dizzying transience only refugees
and the newly dead can fathom.
You reach as a child reaches
for the warm familiarity of a pillow,
a pattern on the wall, or your own
reflection in the mirror. Until suddenly
it all comes rushing back like breath,
like scenes from a movie, that feeling
of being in the world again.
The pain that reminds you
of all you've lost, like a severed
limb gives way to the shock of carpet
against bare feet, blood pulsing
through your fingers, and the sweet
aroma of black tea as it's poured
into your favorite mug.

Photo credit: Jen Ashburn.

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