

The Human Story

Scars that have faded
to a ghostly white
delegated to the back
of one's mind,
scars that are still pink --
fresh with recent memories;
each of our arms
are marked in some way,
whether visible
or not.

Don't we all have stories?
Those dark places
we keep beneath
the shiny exterior
of our white-toothed smiles,
and when asked,
"How are you"
in passing,
we all say, "Just fine."

And who's to say my story
is more traumatic than yours
or that yours
is more traumatic than mine?
Do we need to x-ray
each other's chests
to find out whose heart
has more bullet holes?

Pasts riddled with
fathers who scream,
mothers who drink,
a boyfriend
who likes smashing faces
into concrete,
a child who died,
a body consumed by disease,
a leg blown off
in the land of sand and hate,
a mind that stopped remembering,
a mind that remembers too much.

So, put away the measuring sticks.

There are no blue ribbons;

we're all just participants

in the span of time

allotted to us all.

Live with all of the grace

and dignity

one can muster

for you're no more (or less)

human than I am;

I am no more (or less)

human than you.

Between the Fly and Me

The energy shifts
when you enter a room
and my own energy
 d i s p e r s e s
to make room
for your charged atoms.

I do not turn
from the kitchen sink;
the silence of the cardinal,
the defeated droop
of the dog's tail,
the frozen position
of the fly on the windowsill
have told me
 all I need to know.

Each of us wait –
the bird,
 the dog,
 the fly,
 and I
to see what happens next.

“Where the hell's my supper?”
you bellow.

I construct a smile
from muscle memory,
slowly turn,
wipe my hands on the dish towel
and place your warmed plate
on the table.

The brave bird
shrills out a note;
the dog looks at me
and wags his tail –
 tentatively;
the fly buzzes
at the screen door.

In one smooth motion,
careful to not use
any more oxygen
 than I must,
I open the door
and let him go free.
Perhaps someday
he will do the same
for me.

The South Side of Monday

the faint beep beep beep
squinty eyes, blurred blue numbers

it can't be time to get up
my hand slaps at the clock

like a fish on a dry dock
until it collides with

that evil destroyer of sleep,
the nemesis of misty dreams

I stub my toe on the corner
of a dresser that hasn't moved
in ages

and adjust the nozzles of a shower
that will not get warm
until it gets too hot.

Hair piled into a towel,
I absently nibble toast – after realizing
I'm out of butter.

I'm also out of eggs, milk and coffee,
all on a shopping list
buried under Friday's mail.

I leave the house wearing
two different colored shoes
and do an about face

running smack into Graham,
the neighbor down the hall
who doles out advice

like buy-one-get-one-free
coupons from the grocery store
"You should get up earlier,"

he says, and twirls his fingers
in the general direction

of my hair and face.

“I don’t have time for this!”
Oh, hell. Did I say that out loud?
He raises his eyebrows

then sniffs, “Suit yourself.”
I fling open my door,

do a one-legged-flamingo
dance to change shoes

run to catch the #145 bus
barely get my bag

in the closing door,
which forces the door open,

awarding me an icy stare
from the silver-haired driver

who takes off again
before I am completely seated

causing me to spill sideways
into the blue rubber seat

and flop over onto Gladys,
the lady who works at a bakery

and smells like gingersnaps
cinnamon and strawberry jam.

There could be worse breasts
to be buried in, I think,

as I mumble an apology
and settle into my seat

silently cursing
the newborn Monday
before 7 a.m.

The Unspooling of Threads

Someone slides the veil over my face
skinned knees and fireflies
 in jars
an ancient organist plays the bridal march
giggles and secrets told under eyelet covers
the aisle looms large with rose petals
 mud pies fed to younger brothers

Do fathers really give their daughters away?
“Higher, Daddy! Swing me higher!”
Do you take him to be your lawfully
 wedded?
playing ghost in the graveyard after dark
hands clasped with rings that bind forever
 spinning, spinning, spinning like a top

dizzy
dizzy
dizzy

“I now pronounce you...”
No – wait. I must collect my crayons
 for my fits of inspiration
 that produce
pink unicorns and purple wood sprites.

You may kiss your bride.

Mutability

Aching knees when it rains; Back
bent – a little more forward;
Creative positions to tie my shoes.
Dare I even discuss the comical
Expression that comes over my
Face when I fart too loudly but
Gift the blame to my dog, Jack?
Hearing ain't what it used to be;
Instead, I pretend to understand:
Jolly good, I'm glad you got a new
Kerchief! *No, gramps I'm now a
Locksmith!* EH? I guess it doesn't
Matter. Back in the day I was a
National hero. Uncle Sam sent me
Overseas to fight; they pinned a
Purple heart on me, and I never
Questioned my faith in God, lost
Respect for my troops, or quit
Serving my country. But now
Teeth fall out sometimes, and
Underwear is called Depends
(Visionary product by the way).
When will I pass from this life?
X-actly when God says to me:
You're done with the tour, Oscar;
Zip up here; I've got peach pie.