

5 Poems for Sixfold

THE CLANDESTINE SUICIDES

THEY STILL FLY KITES IN BROOKLYN

HOW TO MAKE A LIVING IN AMERICA

ROUTE 88: WHEN I WAS A PAPERBOY

BROOKLYN GIRL

The Clandestine Suicides

Last night, a woman jumped in front of the R train
at 59th Street station,
while a man jumped off of the Verrazano Bridge,
while someone else swan dove off the Golden Gate,
while others jumped off other bridges in other cities,
though we'll never know,
since many don't receive coverage,
so they'll simply be known as the clandestine suicides,
suppressed so that
this sort of thing isn't somehow declared en vogue,
like bungee jumping once was
until they started dispensing with the chord
and changed the name to suicide –
then they stopped reporting *those* deaths,
though they still happen,
for reasons we may never know.

They Still Fly Kites in Brooklyn

I saw a father and son flying a kite
atop a hill
and almost wept
and even almost weep
as I write how I almost wept,
and then wonder why I feel this way
and felt that way,
perhaps because I don't have such a memory,
perhaps it's just the discovery that such a simple moment
can still occur in the world,
a father and son so enthralled by colored paper
connected to a white string
coasting on an April breeze against a blue sky.
They did this over a century ago
and, apparently, it still works,
...because they still make kites,
and fathers will still buy them
and, from time to time,
will tell their sons
 "Let's fly this today."

How to Make a Living in America

I'd like to take my wife out for a nice meal
without needing to don an accountant's visor;
"Well, if we have the appetizer *and* the wine,
that's an extra blah blah blah..."

When I see interviews with people on television,
the first thing that enters my mind is
if they have financial concerns
or how the hell they're making money
for producing some sort of music that no one actually purchases,
for investing in some sort of vaporous cyber currency,
or duplicitous real estate deals
or even this thing called "brain tingling",
while I count out change from the cup on my dresser
in order to treat myself to an oatmeal cookie from the corner bodega.
"I'm doing something wrong by just working", I surmise,
then consider the brain tingling thing,
but it makes about as much sense to me as asking my cat for a loan.

Then I ask my cat for a loan.

Route 88: When I Was a Paperboy

The thump of a paper-stacked brick
landing on my driveway,
waking me before the dawn's crack;
I bundle up,
brace myself for another cold winter morning
to strike me in the face upon my entrance outside,
my undersized Huffy
teetering towards imbalance
with my mountainous stack of newspapers,
as I pedal
through the dimly lit back streets
underscored by crickets and dog howls
and the roaring silence of atoms.
Rolled up papers
fall short of their targets
due to my lack of traction,
but I can't stop;
I forge on,
thinking it's enough I'm here,
11 years old,
5:30am,
snot oozing from my nose
and glazing my lips,
the sun still in China,
while the news of recently kidnapped paperboys
pops into my brain,
only to be replaced
by the bitter Arctic wind
slapping my face,
as if insulted,

but I forge on,
ignoring the assault,
disregarding the news
of missing 11-year old boys,
who looked exactly like me,
who also rode Huffys,
who also worked morning paper routes;

"How stupid am I to deliver the Times Observer?!"

cont'd

A car pulls up in front of me,
stops;
a man peaks his head out
like an unsavory turtle from his shell,
a kitten in his hands,
which he pets gently;

“Y’need a ride?”

“Nu...nu...no, thank you”, I stammer,
with as much conviction
as could be mustered
from a skinny 11-year old kid
at 5:45am
on a barren Route 88
in Bricktown, NJ.

His car pulls away...slowly,
in the hopes of my reconsideration
...and, for a moment,
I swear I even spot a wolf’s wiry mane
poking through his sheepskin coat...
...before he fades into the darkness of the early dawn.

“Screw this!”, I mutter;
in that moment,
resigning from newspaper delivery in perpetuity,
then back home
to wash my hands,
the scalding hot water cutting through the frozen snotted ink on my fingers,
with just enough time to head to the bus stop
with the rise of the morning sun
telling me that this is as early
as I should be out at this age.

From my bus seat window,
I look out,
searching for his car;
 wondering if he’s following me,
 wondering where he went,

...wondering where the wolf would’ve taken me.

Brooklyn Girl

Walks from town to town,
which you used to endeavor with the grace
of Francis of Assisi
years ago,
you believed was still your daily routine,
and that was fine,
for memories were of greater value.
In truth, I knew this was not you anyway.
Still lovely, yes.
Still with that same Brooklyn rasp,
your body still here like your mind used to be,
like a shark,
fastidious and constant,
unstoppable even to God.
You knew my voice still,
but no longer my face.
I became a friendly nurse
whom you talked about me to;
"My grandson this, my grandson that..."
At a certain point, I stopped correcting you
and let you walk from town to town,
regardless of the wheels that'd become part of you.
I let you think I was someone else
when we sat across from each other,
and on occasion I'd try to go back further,
beyond that morning's toast and coffee,
and remind you who your husband was,
who your daughter was,
who your dog was,
who your brothers were,
how you raised them all,
when you vanished for a time
to the Rocky Mountains,
donned leis in Honolulu,
rafting amidst white rapids,
fearless and undaunted,
while I was a child
wondering where you were
and why,
too young to understand
that you knew you weren't getting younger
and needed to see America while you could.
I reminded how I stayed with you on Saturday nights,
and played penny poker,

cont'd

ate eggplant parmigiana,
as we watched *Love Boat* and *Fantasy Island*,
my elbows embedded in the beige carpeting
as you knitted a rainbow-colored afghan from the sofa.
I reminded you how you scaled the Montauk Lighthouse at 81
and peered out at the sea from the top,
bathing in your victory while others half your age felt death's grip approaching.
I reminded you how you were there for me,
how you were proud of me,
how you were loved by those who knew you
and those who didn't,
and you smiled.
This was all you,
I reminded you.
The you I remembered - the you *who* remembered
like the elephants you so adored -
the Brooklyn girl who still lit up at the mere mention of Brooklyn.

What you always were.