

New Mercies Cycle

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Mother and Son, Morning Meditation

Silence such as it is
And the occasional riff of jazz-like anger—
Caught and carried by a neighborhood breeze
From anonymous lips
In the apartment complex across the way,
Obscenity-laced—
Or at times the sweeter song of bluesy infant-cries

Silence such as it is
With the bee-hive hum of traffic,
The flotsam-and-jetsam sounds of compact cars and hemi trucks,
The ebb and flow of engines,
The stall and honk calling to a carpool's congregants,
While next door's dogs bark "Intruder" at the morning sun

Silence such as it is
Threaded under by the watersong
Of our drainage-ditch creek,
A song of utility, a quiet canticle
Gurgling to stillness in an algae-skinned, peridot-green pond

In this accompanying cacophony we find our silence
Such as it is
For five minutes
My ten-year-old son and I set a timer and forget it
While we settle into a chosen stillness,
Brief as it is,
Together in it as companions
With nothing to notice but a chattering squirrel
Or the faucet as Dad starts his coffee—
No homework or chore, no nag or complaint
Permitted trespass

We have the silence while the silence has us
And with it a camaraderie

He sits in imperfect silence,
His electric-charged body slowing to a lower voltage,
His bucktooth grin slackening to rest
For him, for me, temporarily there is
No pleasing or easing or expectations-meeting
For a blessed change

He listens I think to the symphony of accidental noises,
His mind maybe drifts, and his limbs loosen
We are there alone together
Mutually side-setting the world away awhile
Letting the silence

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Sing us awake to each other

Bifurcated Heart

There is a bifurcated heart
Beating in my chest,
A dual heart:
Loyal and wishful, grateful and grabbing,
Wanting what it doesn't have.

Still the moon is full tonight,
Hanging in the sky absolute and entire,
An orbbed womb haloed by silvered mist,
Birthing tides.

Whole she hangs,
Cratered by Space's every hurled attempt
To break her. She did not break.
Her strength—she is round with it.

Tonight she shows us how wrong is
Our assessment of her changeable nature.
Shadows merely cycle across her face;
Only our perception of her is ever slivered.
She is unchanging.

So also my heart.
It drums a rhythm as tight as a time table,
As regular as tides,
Steady while it houses
Its manifold desires and devotions.

A Poet's Triptych

- I. I cannot capture Shakespeare's lilting song,
The rocking sway of five iambs in a line.
Each slant and crooked rhyme reveals how long
The distance lies between his ear and mine.
For each syllabic strike that lands amiss
Upon my heart another strike does fall.
The urge and grip within me now does list;
Each nearly capsized thought I'll keel and haul,
Then toss it on my beach of wants repressed,
And like so many words I've lost before,
And many other hopes I've not expressed,
Another grain of sand falls on my shore.
To turn my hand to poems is a wound
I cut upon myself—relief unfound.
- II. A poet is an obnoxious thing to try to be.

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Smug.
Artful arrogance metering out my meaning
with a rhyming suggestion of universality—
oh please.
We are each of us alone,
and none of us is normative.
Perhaps our shared humanity is our most
carefully composed illusion.
Delusional is the attempt to write
a poem.

III. There is no iron in me.
I am bone and flesh and compromise.
I am capitulation.

Water seeps into crevices
And soil-softness that will receive it.
Call me Puddle.

I wish I could find my mettle,
My metal-minded, mercury-fired power
To unbend the bending compliance
In my voice.

I want to speak like a prophet tonight,
A terrible light to burn behind my eyes,
A chorus of seraphim to add its vibrations to my timbre.
I want truth to blaze, tinged with sulphur.

God the Baker

I can hold both in my head,
Can't you?
The possibility I am right and
The possibility I am wrong.
It seems the weather should've taught us by now:
We're in this together and better be.
Better be.

Life happens to us proleptically,
Falling out of the future toward us,
Like ribbons of sunrays or (God Knows)
Asteroids. Because:
Tsunamis.
Earthquakes.
Flood, fire, and pestilence.

We take refuge in cities.
Mine is a mile high and sheltered,
A bulwark of mountains to the west

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And vast prairies east
Holding the ocean at bay
With its sharks and hurricanes and
Undertow currents.

Because we have known Nature as a bitch
Not a Mother—
Tooth and claw, flesh for scavenging,
Bone and blood ready to be mashed into pies and eaten
By fate and
Unexpected calamities.

North of my city is a caldera that could
Swallow us whole,
Explode my entire world with a
Shrug of its shoulders
And a pyroclastic wave
We'd see coming.

So all the lines of punditry seem so silly,
The drawn lines of us's and them's—
A fool's effort.

We should huddle close, harness each other,
In case we only have time for one last
Spasm of love before we die.

Reading scripture with the news is harrowing.
The words work us over like dough,
Punch and roll, punch and roll.
God takes a breath and lets us rise,
Then punches down again.

At some point God the Baker will
Put us in an oven till our crust cracks.
But we will be made consumable to the world
For its nourishment.

Frost on Fields

Frost on fields, the day begins before dawn.
Stars fade, replaced overhead by starlings;
The little birds wing from their hidden nesting places
To speed to the oncoming arc of the sun's rays.

I stand beside a knot-hearted old tree,
Its arteries sending skyward soil salts and water
To join transmuted light in leaves
Budded, greened, past green, now falling,
To land upon the ground like scattered gold medallions.

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Morning's cold hangs heavy in the air
Making every inhale a sip.

In the river, rock-filled water rolls wild and on.
Moss-covered granite stones, boulder behemoths,
Stand sentinel along the trail in stillness,
As they will be—still standing—
The day after our hotly anticipated days,
Come what may.

We are the dust. Not the ground.
Our selves and our societies are so many scattered granules.
The earth is serene, steady and lasting,
While our troubles heave then retreat,
Flare then fade faster than days.
The land we inhabit holds,
And nature nods farewell at our departures.

There is a refuge in Nature's abiding,
And a release in our passing.
May what comes bring the solutions we seek,
But may our wisdom outlast such things.
May our salvation stand like stones
And fly like starlings.