

Because I Breathe, This I Must Write

## A Tree at Night

A tree at day has the sun  
to sparkle its leaves  
and to make vivid  
its browns from its blacks from its grays from its greens.

But a tree at night  
without this light  
is ghostly gray  
with its twists and turns  
drawing the eye  
into the black.

I walked among ancient oaks  
stars sprinkling their light  
into spaces  
encircled by darkened foliage.

One tree called to me  
“Lean up against me.  
You who take refuge here from city noise  
listen to my silence.  
You who take refuge from city lights  
behold the dark.  
Rest against me.  
Look up.  
Lose yourself in me.  
I will hold you.”

And she held me  
a tiny child in the embrace  
of her elder.

## The Eyes

I was alone.  
It was dark.  
A lone woman in a car in a dark city parking lot.  
Suddenly  
A single soft, silent blow  
Struck my car  
Startling my eyes upward  
Through the windshield  
Into a pair of eyes that were looking  
Straight into me.  
I saw not male nor female  
Friend nor stranger  
For I saw not the body  
Nor the face  
But only the eyes  
No, not even the eyes  
But the intense soul beyond them  
A soul as startled by the unexpected encounter  
As I was.  
All this happened  
You understand  
In the second  
No, in the less-than-a-second  
Between my eyes being jerked upward  
And my seeing that there was a black cat  
On my carhood  
Looking in.

## Hey, It's Part of Me, OK?

For just as long as  
a small child somewhere in the room  
can tempt the slow falling of my hair across my face  
to evoke a smile  
or even laughter,  
or the sweetness of those tiny fingers reaching up  
into it  
to play

and

For just as many years as  
the breeze will dance in with my hair,  
combing across my scalp to lift it  
tossing handfuls of it  
into my face

and

For the duration of time in which  
music continues to strum my hair  
making it dance to the rhythms  
and float on the melodies -

Well?

For just as long as there are children, breezes, and music  
I shall never  
cut  
my  
hair.

## Shh! A Poem is Writing Itself

In this quiet place  
I open myself  
so that life's horrible and joyous realities  
its silliness and whimsicalities  
can find my mind to play in.

There with no rules to confine them  
no necessities to rhyme  
nor march in metered time  
– unless they want to –  
they can toss themselves  
slide  
glide and  
collide  
till they tumble themselves into wordshapes  
and splatter themselves into ink blobs  
across my page.

The Disarming

Seething

he stands there.

His hand grips a rock  
ready for the battle.

Breathing the air stirred by the bricks and the bats  
clenched in the hands of his buddies  
undoes, somewhat, his sense of helplessness  
as if the hands of this horde all were his hand  
and  
together with them  
he feels strong.

The closeness of the enemy  
just beyond that wall  
quickens his blood through his veins.

How dare they be!  
They marched in here, their demands enraging him.  
“Equality” they said, claiming humanness  
as if the color of their skin  
were at all equal  
to the one in his childhood box of colors  
labeled “flesh.”

How dare they?  
For if he is to have no lives lived beneath his feet  
how could he bear living beneath those  
of the boss man?

Then  
suddenly  
inexplicably  
from out of nowhere  
a man appears before them.

He himself.

The lead troublemaker.

Alone!

And approaching them.

The man with the rock tenses.  
His fingers press it into his palm  
through nerves gnarled up  
from the inherited humiliation  
of his ancestors being called “po’ white trash.”

Seeing the enemy  
his ears embrace the words barked out around him  
the same words he tastes in his own mouth  
the disharmonic sound of hate  
and sweet rage.

Their task is seemingly simple now:  
to evoke in this hated stranger even a touch of the rage  
that they direct towards him  
goading him to tear off his famous cloak of nonviolence.  
This would force them, of course, to crush him  
“in self-defense”  
exalting in having proven the superiority of their white race.

There would, then, be nothing left to do but to cheer  
as the police haul him away  
(as they are now waiting to do.)

But  
they had not planned  
for this.

He approaches them,  
his only weapon  
and his only armor  
being  
his complete  
vulnerability.

A stone’s throw away from them and coming closer  
this black man walks  
his eyes reaching in through theirs  
walking right into where  
the air was so filled with delirious hate  
only moments ago.

(For this man they've come here to hate  
has not come here to hate them.  
Though his home was bombed by such men as these  
he understands the crushingness of their childhoods  
fed on hate  
and refuses to feed them more.)

So  
he walks up to them.  
Looking past the rock in the quivering hand  
he touches something inside the angry man.

Now standing in front of them,  
close enough for their breath to flow among them  
he  
smiles.

Yes, he actually smiles.

And in a voice soft enough to silence their shouts  
he says  
"Excuse me."

What could this man with the rock do?  
This compassion for him has  
(at least for the moment)  
inhaled all the hate out of him.  
So what else could he do  
but  
stand  
aside?

He moves –  
part of a wall of men melting open –  
and the reverend walks through  
exhaling their hate into the gutter behind them.

Oh.

But what of the man with the rock?



Confused

he has no explanation for whatever that was  
that just happened.

His muscles ungrasp his fingers, releasing the rock  
(that impotent thing)  
and it falls uselessly to the ground.

Of course

he doesn't yet realize that he'll never be the same.

He doesn't yet know it

but

he was just

healed.