

America #7

My mind goes where my body has been  
and I find my soul is soon to follow.  
So do thoughts of you, America,  
flood the wells of all I've come to know.

There is this one patch of grass in Flushing Meadows Park  
where the best parts of me were raised.  
And a bench in the Queens botanical garden  
that sums up the warmest parts of my soul.

My first kiss was under a crisp November Jersey sky,  
in the parking lot of a diner not far from the Hudson.

In the mountains in Massachusetts where I learned how to ski  
there is an abominable snowman that I was warned about  
in camp up in the Catskills that's still waiting to get me.

Standing in the fountain in Washington Square,  
facing the arch alone in the snow at night,  
is where I made a promise to myself that I revisit in my dreams.  
And the cafe on 9th and Avenue A where I first became a writer,  
and that rooftop on St. Mark's where I decided to drop the charade,  
and what the hell haven't I done in Tompkin's Square Park.

There is also a woman up in Vermont somewhere  
that I owe my life to but haven't spoken to in years.

And a small patch of grass along the highway in Alabama  
where three men on an adventure stood in awe  
under a bright canopy of stars  
as the world turned beneath our feet.

Still standing is an aging balcony behind a townhouse in Flushing  
where some of the best meat you'd have ever tasted  
was cooked by an artist who gave everything for his family.

And a fallen tree over a stream in the Poconos  
that my brother took me to for the first time  
where I cried at the suffering humanity causes itself.

Lingering is a prayer of thanks I whispered to the Beats  
for sending me out to meet the earth at Big Sur.

One of the faded motels outside LA has a pool  
that this girl I love and I spent the day around  
drinking craft beer and being ridiculous.

There is a river way up in Estes Park  
rushing down from the mountains  
where I re-experienced the evolution of man.

I got kicked out of a bar on Bourbon Street once  
for exposing myself to the whole place after losing a bet.

Years later I was spitting poetry with a brother of mine  
on a street corner on Frenchman's  
after we'd spent that day walking around the Garden District  
thinking about how we could live there among the blossoms.

There is a parking lot in Jersey City that we had to pull over into  
at three am one time to have sex in the back seat  
because we couldn't wait to get home.

I helped fuel a bonfire with old furniture and liquor at a party  
right up against Daniel Boone National Forest.

In Lexington there is a garage whose side I threw up on  
when I learned that pad thai and bourbon ale are not friends.

There is a redwood about an hour's hike in from a trailhead  
that I cried under in beauty of the everything of everything.

I barely remember a stretch of beach in South Carolina  
where breakfast was vodka and snowcones.

The rocky coastline of Rhode Island will always be tied  
to moonshine and two beautiful women.

That tattoo parlor in Albany where I got my first tattoo  
after that night we'll never forget,  
and that one in South Jersey where I got my second one  
with a friend that I won't,  
and that third one a few years later in the East Village  
after we'd become poets.

Over in East Nashville is a small woman in a blue shack  
who makes the spiciest chicken you've ever had.

In Miami there were put to death certain stories  
that we agreed would never be shared again.

Up in Portland overlooking East End  
is a great hill to go sledding on,  
which I hear is even better on mushrooms.

There are some caves made out of paper mache  
that act as a cafe along the hudson river  
basking in the lights of Midtown  
that my best friend and I visit  
to reevaluate life over tea and ice cream.

And this one park right across the George Washington Bridge,  
being taught on a pink bike, is where I first tasted freedom.

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Since You've Been Gone

Since you've been gone  
I've been taking care of your cactus,  
I couldn't remember if it was a boy or a girl  
so I tied a pink ribbon onto it  
and put these little blue things around the pot.  
Have you touched the lavender?  
Smells incredible, right next to the lilies.  
The basil and the oregano are in the dining room,  
by the way, in case you feel like cooking,  
I don't think they liked the kitchen.  
The marigolds across the street have opened,  
have you seen them?  
one of my favorites,  
but they don't last long  
so I feel bad planting them.  
Oh and did you notice the limes?  
Here, look how many,  
aren't they adorable?  
The lilacs and the daffodils are up by the entrance  
if you want to go take a look later,  
the roses haven't opened yet though.  
Do you remember the tree out front?  
It died while you were gone.  
We put this nice bush there, but it's a little small.  
I think we're going to put a statue there instead,  
like one of those with a little boy or girl  
with a basket or something,  
so I can put flowers into it.  
I know what you're thinking:  
'mom has finally gone crazy'  
but it will look nice,  
I promise.  
You noticed the hyacinths?  
I have been filling the pots around the house with them  
to remind me of when I had all my babies at home with me.

You know their smell,  
I've been keeping them for decades.  
Since you've been gone  
I started bringing them inside though,  
they grow so full of flowers  
that the stems can't even hold the weight,  
they're so beautiful even they can't stand it.  
I don't know why they'd want to be so heavy,  
so full of flowers,  
but they're beautiful.  
They're so beautiful.

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### Ballad of the Beach

The weighted clouds roll in,  
flashes of lightning ignite the thick shade  
as surf lays siege on shoreline  
with waves thundering in the lurking gloom.

Small pebbles begin to litter the ocean  
as pregnant clouds tear open overhead  
and rain careens in with the sound  
of rolling silence, calling for quiet  
so it might lay down its sermon.

I walk, I run, I sprint  
down beach paved smooth by grasping waters  
as toes upturn firm sand in their wake,  
but marks of man racing are fated to falter  
in plans of leaving lasting impressions,  
for roads tread by mortals forever erode  
so we capture and record moments  
in our lone and temporary galleries.

Heavy bulbs now drop  
in oscillating crescendos of hushed rhapsody  
as lines between sea and sky blur  
luring my meandering mind  
towards thoughts of braving with body  
a return to the water  
so that flesh might test the ballad sung  
by soul severed.

The rain falls thick,  
every breath drawn deep in the blaring disquiet,  
horizon only an idea,

heart an open box,  
as sands absorb my feet  
and waves stridently grip my legs  
and reclaim them.

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Wanderer

There are times when my past is unfamiliar,  
When wandering has forced such a consistency of my true self  
That I cannot recognize who that person is,  
Or who I was before it.

In those times I rely on those in whose memories I live,  
To remind me of how I got to wherever and whenever here is  
When I happen upon them,  
When my habits define me only because they haven't destroyed me yet,  
Yet thoughts of my imminent self destruction define my habits,  
As my hands, which refuse to share their memories with me  
And only seem vaguely familiar,  
As though I were a child looking to them for guidance,  
Grasp at attempted semblances of recognition.

In these times only my feet do not forsake me,  
And only in my stride do I feel a sense of home.  
On these days night comes quickly, and lingers,  
Highlighting my solitude in the way only darkness can.  
I look in these evenings to the kinship of strangers,  
Seeking reflections I recognize in the ocean of myself  
As the earth turns and I continue to measure my existence against it.

How far have I wandered,  
How many times has this series of electrical impulses  
Manifested itself through the codex of chemical reactions which defines me.  
I wonder if I can possibly be the first conscious iteration of these cells  
For my mind has woven a strange fiction to justify its own notions  
Of an imagined presence at the dawn of human thought.  
It is the notion of the absurd which defines what I perceive to be my waking days  
While my evenings are host to the tangibility of the abstract.

There are nights when I lay awake considering the world,  
And those in which I wonder of time and self,  
And there are nights in which past loves consume me,  
And those when I am overcome by beauty and the ephemeral,  
Then there are nights when I visit the future,  
And those which make me question my will, and my freedom.  
And there are the nights when I just lay there,  
And wait.