

Albatross

Two nautical miles from the turbulent coastline of civil war.
Midnight in Mogadishu. Wide awake onboard.
Our UAV just returned from its invisible flight. Like an eagle,
it scanned the landscape with razor sharp eyes. It brought
back *intel*, the sustenance of war. The Captain digested it all.
The stars seemed to increase in number every night. As if
they were the souls of those newly departed. As if each one
was now doomed to wander the waves like an albatross
reflecting forever more on its solitude and misfortune.
I was below deck most of the time. I had machinery to tend.
Fuel to test and feed to the engines. They were always hungry.
So was I. But not for this. One day I heard chirping up on
the flight deck that there would be a government soon.
If only I could count on that like I could count the casualties.
I couldn't even count on my own engines. They were always
breaking down—with grief, I suppose. With stress from being
overworked and out-of-place. They seemed to do everything
except help. And people are more complicated than wires
and bolts and raging infernos of internal combustion.
Especially wartorn people. Especially people fueled by fear
and mistreatment *and* mistrust. How could the machinery
of governance spring up to fill the void overnight? Could it?
My soul began to wonder, soaring above the melancholy
of a gentle mind pushed miles and miles from the nearest
flickering of hope. A mind that was now disfigured and torn.
Wandering waves of unfamiliar darkness like an albatross.

*

Rxeady?

Inside yet another tinted bottle
beneath an innocence-proof cap
ratcheting round and round
on the mind's desperate threads
within this oversized paper bag
distinguished from my kitchen clutter
atop a textbook of side effects
torn mercilessly from its staple
are more than a few pressed pills
compounded to help me decompress.

Rules and regulations restrict access
to my so-called peace of mind
all that's needed is utter despair and
at least one blatantly broken spirit
thankfully, or I would try everything
until I found a way to feel okay
just make sure your pain is believable
to someone who may not suffer
but everyone knows the mentally ill
can't be trusted to fend for themselves.

What would happen if, one day,
one of those hopeless people like me
doomed to dependence on alchemy
to feel part of the modern world
sort of took it upon themselves
to try this or that or the other thing
someone lucky to be alive today, since
nature wouldn't have selected before
until they found an awkward balance for
themselves, just like any other person?

Certain questions needn't be answered,
some thoughts should remain thoughts
that's the spirit, there you go, don't stop
telling yourself exactly what's expected
because medicine is meant to help
those who are unable to help themselves
and go take one of those little souls
eager to fill in whilst yours is away
and even though I've tried and tried
I can't be normal enough to live without.

And so here I sit in bipolar standoff
frozen stiff with fear of losing myself
it's easy, just ask yourself what's better:
being yourself or not being crazy?
one sentient spring madly overflowing
and thirty stagnant little soulcrushers
camouflage for those who stand out
from the crowd of dizzying normality
my thoughts pool with frustration and
my everything is cornered on all sides.

I suppose I really don't have a choice
so to delay is to prolong this suffering
just go ask that mirror on the wall
what it would prefer to see every day
and grief once I domesticate my wild
spirit full of numerous summer days
because even eternal lines wrinkle
turning fair skin harsh beneath the Sun
so I guess this is goodbye, old me
maybe I'll shine like you again one day.

Down the hatch, bon voyage.

*

A few pills a day

Sometimes the words still come to me,
at other times
they must be caught.
Not, like, in a net—
a net is a tool
used for catching fish
or butterflies.

I'll stick with the butterflies,
lest my ideas be harvested
from the depths of my consciousness
faster than my soul can replenish them.

Sometimes the words are so powerful
that they can be heard
in the distance
like a passing ship
late into a night
of no particular importance

that is, until it called out to me.

That is, until it pierced
the camouflage I know as silence—
called attention to
the vessel I know I'll miss
should I continue
to do nothing.

I want to meet the mind
that insists brilliance
must be spontaneous
must be breathtaking
must surrender the lungs
to make room
for the heart.

And I want to meet the heart
that beats agony
as if it were love
(because it is love),
that throbs for anything
sharp enough to confirm
it has boundaries.

How profound a thing:
knocking so hopelessly
on a dark cage,
silenced only
by the reflection found
in the untimely pool
of a spilled life.

Red lines laced
with little white mysteries.
What is blood?
What is wine?
What is the great tragedy of man?

The great tragedy of man
is performed brilliantly
every few moments
by the very muscle
most responsible
for constantly betraying
its own safekeeping
in search of another.

Thoughtless passion—
as if the answer was another;
as if the only reason
it has yet to stop
is that it has yet to love another.

It has yet to hear
what at first sounds like an echo
but, if given enough
time and space
to feel wanted and safe
yet free to flutter
like the butterflies
migrating desperately from yes to no
in the stomach of a young sailor
as he watches his own reflection
sail away forever,

in that charming moment
it will find another.

Love is mysterious

in the way that sometimes
the very mind that “needs”
a few pills a day
to keep the mania at bay
is constantly being asked
to self-identify
in an empty mirror,
to display
what brought the maniac
to this port in the first place.

It beats me.

*