

How the Music Came to My Father

Sort of a miracle, you might say because
I never saw or heard him practice. Just one day
there he was playing an accordion in his baggy pants
and white shirt looking like he was holding two bags
of potatoes, squeezing the air in and out of them.
The miracle of it—so sudden and unexpected—I now
picture God reaching down his wavering finger to touch
some other man with musical sensibilities, some father
two doors down, but accidentally touching Glenn.
And there he was, blessed, in our crackerbox house,
playing some nickering old-world polka and a passed-over
father down the street pulled his belt from his pants
and went looking for his boys.

The cosmic error was corrected eventually by
whoever it is that fixes God's mistakes. We went back
to our yelling and the whippings and the accidental
Myron Floren moment passed. The world I knew
made sense again, and the holy finger must have
only barely brushed against him—he never said this
is going to hurt me more than it hurts you. And now
he is in a sort of band of accidental squeeze box angels
on 42nd Street in heaven and there is a champagne bubble
machine, and sometimes they go marching in their old
army uniforms down that gold paved road,
shaking with palsy, tickling the ivories,
singing *Leaning on the Everlasting Arms*.

Kindly Give Up

Kindly give up these seats for the elderly and the daft,
the arthritic abuelos singing pharmacy songs.

Kindly give them up.

Where they have been you are going.
Where they are going you are also going.

Give them directions, not to there-
they will find there easy enough, soon enough,
to where else they are headed before there
with always bags of stuff on the bus.
Kindly give them your seats
your help, your hand, your memory.

Eyes magnified by thickening lenses, leopard spotted.
Less admired certainties, less effective remedies.
Less likely recoveries, less remembered memories.
Like strollered babies eying their peers,
they watch each other disappear.
Landmarks of long lives, having passed by here before,
creased old maps, now everything's changed,
what with the by-pass and the one-way streets to the shiny
spotless hospital on the hill where

Once upon a time

 cows stood.

What is most depressing about cemeteries is the heavy yellow
machinery—once just a couple of bums with shovels
lowering themselves, making it last.

Please give up thinking of their movement as mass transit.
Picked-up pilgrims along the road, slowly boarded,
carried to clinics, casinos and churchyards,
deposited on corners. Speak to them
in African, Spanish, or Serbo-Croat.
Nod in understanding,
yes, yes.

Babies once, transported in arms, never alone,
tiny fingers, pink toes wee wee allthewayhome,
soothed, sheltered, spanked. Kindly do not
spank them now, just give up your seats, soon
the return, to the corner of
Here & Gone, en memoriam,
the gray guests of honor.

Borrowings

Here is the imaginary library
where you can borrow a father—a book
you didn't finish. Old books about fathers
and grandfathers with brittle pages,
pictures and maps of Kansas and Iowa
may show signs of wear. They are anecdotal—
the price of a horse, the hot weather in September.

Here, the reading room.
Empty chairs and morning sun
slanting through the windows,
the slow quiet turning of pages. Shhhh.
No howl here—no keening, no Shall We Gather,
but someone has written these books because
someone needs to read them.

I will be your father if you'll be my daughter.
a loaner to get you around the town;
oh what a family we could be—
understudies, bound to say
sorry, I loved you,
and goodbye.

Saturday Night Watching TV

She drifted off when the weather report
said nothing would happen as it usually
never does—no storms of grief no blustery love,
no *tormenta* of longing, no carrying on
or taking off, no red high heels, no shabby room
no muffled phone calls, no French perfume,
no black lingerie from Victoria's Secret,
no red convertible turning south on 101
under a yellow half-assed moon.

He wonders idly if Queen Mab is galloping
“*by night*” in her little cart, cracking her whip
of cricket bone and tickling his wife's nose
“*as a 'lies asleep*” and so wrangling her dreams
into a stampede of rowdy leathern love, a dustbowl
of desire, a rodeo of western bareback
lasso work, and so on. But more likely, he knows,
the applause arising from the chair to the north
is just the sawing of household logs.

Write 50 Times
(for Dave Moses)

1. I will not chew gum in class. I will
2. not chew gum in class. I will
3. not gum in class chew. I will
4. in class chew not gum. I will
5. not sing The Marseillaise in class.

6. I will not, just incidentally, ever work for the telephone company.

7. And I will NEVER put my hand in my shirt like Napoleon Bonaparte.
7. Well yes, I suppose it all started with the gum chewing.
8. And some things just happen, of course.
9. I will remain gum-free, attentive, and responsible,
- 9a. but possibly not in class.

10. I will not chew gum at my Uncle Inor's funeral.
11. Tomorrow afternoon at 2 pm. Thanks for asking.

12. I will not chew more than one stick of gum in class.
13. I will not, as a rule, respond well to petty discipline in class.
14. I mean, who the fuck really cares about gum chewing?
15. With all due respect.
16. Or bloody prime numbers. Or King Whatsit. Or wretched poems.
19. Like going to school ever did you any good.
22. Poopy the Clown probably makes more money than you
29. and he drives a red Camaro.

34. Christopher Columbus chewed gum and he discovered Virginia or someplace.

37. Actually, chewing gum is a sedative.
38. It helps me concentrate.
39. It's a health issue really – I could get a prescription.
41. You don't want to see me when I haven't had a chew for a few hours.

43. Thousands of people work in the chewing gum industry.
44. Good decent Americans with mortgages and car payments.
45. Next I suppose we won't be permitted to sleep in class.
46. What is this class about, anyway?
48. We the People demand to have the right to chew gum!
49. Give me liberty or give me some gum!
50. E chewibus pluribus gumbus!