

The Dedication Depends On Where You Are

You know it's winter in the city
when everyone gets to talking
about where they're gonna go
to get away. All great escapes
require careful planning though
they never go quite as planned.

There is one week until Christmas.
The lines skated in folks' faces
seem to run a bit deeper,
like their pestilence had been
frozen in ice that is beginning
to melt. At zero kilometers
plaza the Christmas cone that's
named after a cell phone carrier,
is all brilliantly alight and shining,
strung with golden beads and
someone somewhere's good deeds.

I think it is ten degrees warmer
than it's supposed to be, and
I feel superbly guilty
for not getting anything
for anybody. As is tradition
with all lists, I do not exclude
myself from any of it.

When I was young
in Manhattan, I bought a map
just to make sure I knew
where I was
getting lost. Deliberately
is the only way to deliver
ourselves to unknown corners,
24 hour diner booths,
recondite subway stops,
the harbor view from
a talcum unpaved roof,
The slide in the city park
is frozen over, and snow
unshoveled stuck on
the sidewalk, so we walk
in the road. On the road
is where we wish we were;

out of the cold,
wishing for the world
to unfold like an atlas map,
instead of squeezed, perhaps
inside of a fist. No matter
what postal code can fit
in the corner of an envelope,
we've always played host to
a thousand forms of hope--
historically reserved for the skeptical
or the desperate, so desperate
to be preserved like a turd
on the road.

Muyuk Takin

There will always be trees,
even when the last chicken
has been sold: headless
like old lettuce; and manifold
mustached men wheeling away
what's left of the green grapes,
turned away for not having come
of age, set like a stage
to the side to make way for
a woman with overripe eyes,
stuffing her avocados in a sack
and then heading back
to the room made from river mud
where her sons were born
and her husband died.

How much despair can be pared
off with a knife
and stuffed into a cup,
then sold like a mango flower,
for whatever price
you think your life
might be worth?

Tomorrow the woman
will go back with
her burlap sack
to the Zocalo;
lay herself out
like a deck of cards
among rows and rows
of split papayas, bananas,
cantaloupe and garlic cloves,
coffee grounds, Roma tomatoes,
one million wonder colored eyes
she watched like herself:
growing from a seed.
And to see them seeing her
dying alone, she knows
there will always be trees.

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It's Sunday and the sound
of drums comes drifting in
through an open window.

It's been a disappointing while
since I went to see who it was
outside. With winter coat on

I walk a few miles to the cafe
where they play Bill Withers,
Joan Baez and The Temptations.

I think about what I'd say
in a conversation I'll never have,
with beasts who live in shadows.

I think about what I'd drink
if I could afford to be anything
but bored.

The drums come from a church
with a bishop bathing a baby
in holy water, whispering

in its ear: nothing is sacred,
save for the time you wasted
wishing you were someone else.

And then the choir breaks in-
to song and the baby has a long
time to take itself home

to wonder if whatever it is
everyone told him was a lie;
His whole life, in fact,

to sit in front of empty coffee cups
to forget how he listened to music,
to look out of a thousand windows

until he hears the echo of a drum
and has to ask himself where it is
the sound has been coming from.

To the students in 1°A

Tell me what you love the most,
Not what someone else said,
And you thought it sounded nice.

Nice is not

What I want to hear.
What I want to hear
Is what you love the most,
And I'll bet that it

Is not nice.

I'll bet that you're afraid
To admit it, to be different
For still going shopping

In the paranormal romance section,
Or eating Cheetos with chopsticks,
Or saying 'okay I believe you' when

someone tells you you're not
looking too good these days
And you are

Not is nice.

Browsing Tinder in an Aldi

I get restless in the recesses
of the endless supermarkets.
I check my phone too much
in checkout lines. I think
of an idea I once had and
how I'll never have it again,
and when did I become this
collection of nervous habits?

Was it always everyone else
pressing their noses up against
the glass of the human zoo, or
was it me, or was it you?
Poisoned with honesty, crude
as a carrot tossed in a stew,
I'm too tired of telling the truth,
I guess, to tell you what
is going to happen next.

So instead I will continue
to text strangers while fishing
for change in my front pocket,
throwing away the receipt
only moments after I receive
it; a new message left
unread for hours while
I remind myself how
we ourselves flash and yearn;

so desperate to not appear
so desperate. So desperate
to disappear once again
into the deep recesses,
and to feel less restless
when the basket is empty,
so to speak. So there's no
need to clip coupons, or

be preoccupied with temporal
discounts, or price comparisons
that are so ostensibly odious
that after so much time spent
browsing, there's still so little
to show, save but for this

vertigo of infinite choices,
paralysis from all the potential

options, a thousand different
ways to make spaghetti sauce,
the mascots on the cereal boxes,
the haste with which we cross
one of our flaws after another off
the list, and the faint whispers of
a woman coming from somewhere

like background noise, reaching
from some other deep recesses
herself, flashing and yearning
like an island, putting me here
in this line, asking the question:
who exactly is checking who out?