

10 Poems

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Fishy

A quiet morning in a little boat -
with the motor up there's just the
breeze for propulsion as we cast
lines left and right to tease some fishes.
That's a good place for a lesson.

The *whirrr* of Dad's reel spun droplets and
wet the hairs on his outstretched arm which I copied
and I was proud that my line flew so well.
We rocked quietly, the oarlocks squeaking and then
he said,

“What would you think if I wasn't around so much anymore?” And
with purpose he looked elsewhere along the shoreline.

In this manner was my suspicion first raised, and
my sense of the impermanence of all that there is.

A Better Time For Us All

There is a picture of me sitting on the boyhood porch sorting baseball cards. The top card on the stack is plain to see;
it's Billy Bruton. Both of us wear that pleased half-smile.

He was a center fielder for the old Braves --
base stealer, fast as the wind, not a star but certainly of some use.
He was in the middle of his days.

I had all my hair, a crew cut, skinny arms
hanging out of a white tee shirt, my summer uniform.
Not much past, all promise.

The books say he hit .273 lifetime.
That he played a few years with the Tigers,
hit three triples in one game, twice.

My own record is less distinct.
It's fuzzy as to wins and losses,
the chances accepted, the missed opportunities,.

I keep that picture of me on my desk. You suspect narcissism.
No, this is love of another sort.
It was an easy afternoon and the porch was safe and the sun was warm on my arms.
The picture sits beside those of my own children.

The other who was part of that moment lived for sixty-nine years before a heart attack
behind the wheel. He hit .273, lifetime, and then a tree.

Billy Bruton is gone, the cards are gone and so is that particular boy and, I should add,
the man who took the picture.

A Stormy Sunday Morning

The wind howls, as if this were not May.
Elms wave leafy branches like
pom poms, as if to cheer the rain.

My backyard, with soaking, is dyed
a deeper shade of green.
A phone voice (with apologies for the early ring)
cancels our golf.

The dog, forced outside against his wishes,
acts scolded as if for some mistake.

Inside, Spring smells --
a flower gift from dinner guests.
Ghosts just a few hours dead linger --
their laughter, my show-off bottle of Chateau Margaux

In a far room of this big house a good wife sleeps.
I gather clothes taken from her in
last night's lovemaking.

Rain puddles under the swing set
in canyons gouged by little feet.
And inside me

a wind howls, as if this were not May.

A Couple of Philosophers

My cat was on my lap napping, as was I.
Two retired fellows, we tend to do this
from time to time, living the good life.

There's still a little chase in us –
 a dust mote,
 an errant fly,
 a deal,
 and now and then a comely figure.

They may have that aphorism backwards.
There's still plenty of willing left in the flesh.
It's the spirit that goes a bit weak.

Mostly, this is a time for reflection. What's done is done.
I having rocking chair access to it all, give it a grade.
With tricks of mis-memory I re work it more to my liking.

What does this gent on my lap have to regret?
With what does he tickle his pride?
Wiser than me he has let it all go.
Sleeps with a greater satisfaction.

The Brotherhood

I slip into the cool sheets beside you,
to join you for some sleep.
Then comes the dream of a chain
that unhooks at the post at bedtime.

In the dream morning I re-snap it
and go off about my day,
pulling the steel links along
from the back of my belt,
mostly without effort, length enough,
only an occasional tangle, it clanks a little
but I try to keep it quiet.

In the real morning I remember the dream
only after coffee and a cold good bye.,

I keep you in mind throughout the day and wonder --
check in with a phone call and hope
to hear a mood that offers some hope.

No. Maybe later.
Maybe tomorrow.
Maybe after awhile.

I think about organ grinders and circus bears
and literature's troubled ghosts.

Acceptance

I woke up this morning lamenting
the way I used to be.
There are a couple of ways you can take that
I'll leave it up to you.

There was once a more hopeful face in the mirror—
tighter, eyes dancing with energy,
a face absorbed with itself.
One might have called it feckless.
Some undoubtedly did.

Knees and fingers and back and hips
complain about it all again.
Do they recall their easier times?
Their service to a younger body that had
scant regard for the grave.

Lamentable too, that shameful young ignorance
off which time has mercifully smoothed the hard edges.
Still, so much ignorance will outlive me.

Yet, I see graying men still enraptured with their opinions,
button-holing and loudly holding court,
demanding respect for their stupidity --
prideful, pleased with their self accounting.

My own appetites have abated. I've learned my fair portion
having lost the fire of acquisition. My discernable wealth diminished
with every morning paper that carries the success of younger men.

Gone is the boy. Gone is the tough up and comer,
the boasting father of babies. Gone...
Desire has become acceptance. Joy just a quiet.

I woke up today lamenting the way I used to be.
Maybe you have had such a morning.

The Leaderboard

Vic beat Jack,
Mike and Doc tied twice
and Tom lost to Freddy.

I'm the scorekeeper
for this little golf league of ours,
that comes together when we all
are not off being other things.

The contests are not so heated.
It's not like anyone really cares.
Just a chance to get away from
the wives and other tedium.

We speak to each other about life,
seldom of troubles, mostly our triumphs.
In these the standings seem pretty much fixed.
Mike regularly beats Tom who never seems to catch a break.
Vic and Jack trade success stories
that keep each other pretty much within reach.

The other day after beer afterwards,
and of course a soft drink for Freddy,
Tom held back until the others had traded
payments and gone to their cars.

He spoke low and calmly, "I've got to go in for this procedure."
I showed him some good listening and bluffed my confidence.
Now we've got a separate game going.

Mexico, November 2 – Day of the Dead

That vine clings, inexplicably,
to the cement wall much as our
beliefs attach to reality.

This wall, painted yellow and orange
in the Mexican style, sits beside a cemetery
teeming with life --- and faith.

The living walk among their dead
with pictures and surviving trinkets,
and wash the headstones with soap and water.

In the town square, in the Cathedral's shadow,
vendors sell balloons and toys to assist the
children with their make-believe.

And we give thanks for miracles and
celebrate the unexplained –
like how that vine thrives on so un-yielding a surface.

Unfinished Business

Looking at the paper tonight I heard a siren
from an ambulance down the block

I popped back to 1983, a busy concourse at O'Hare.
Friday travelers getting home to what was theirs.
I was quick-stepping to a cab and wife and new baby.

A man in a nice looking suit had gone down near the newsstand.
Paramedics were working under his open white shirt.
His jaunty tie loosened, his briefcase sitting properly beside him, waiting.

We slowed, watched them work the tubes and the tanks, looked
at the stone face and then moved on. He wasn't doing well.
But all was being done that could be.
We needed to keep going. We had plans.

These days the wife is off on other adventures and that baby has two of her
own and I have the time to think about strangers.
I worry about what happened to his briefcase and papers and how his family
took the call and how their own weekend was filled with surprise, and
arrangements.

He did it. He fulfilled his part of the contract and like a good executive left it
to others to sew up the little details.

For you and me, however, we still have that promise to deliver on, that big
meeting.

A Caution For the Forgiving Heart

You find your way into my thoughts lately –
a little like I'm being stalked.
Yet, I welcome you kindly.

Almost as a defense against the weakness that
shows itself when I think that we might try again
there was a dream last night that re-lived every hateful moment
and I awoke sweating.

You were full of the usual suggestions:
 That I leave my shoes at the door
 That I chew more quietly
 That I might try to help out a little more
 That you just needed a little time
 That I should forget about the sex thing
 That I get a lawyer
 That I engage some movers
 That I free up alternate Saturdays
 That I get the fuck out of your life

All I did was welcome you in – but there you were again.

