

POEMS FOR LONELY TIMES



Mighty Mike McGee

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Dedicated to a very special
audience on April 1, 2020.

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WIDESPREAD ORCHESTRA

Today, I danced knowing
someone somewhere was dancing with me
Us, cutting two different rugs
that would look great together
if given the chance to sync

This morning
in the shower and the garden
I sang off-key, but somehow
it was in harmless harmony
with someone somewhere else

This afternoon I wept as I did the dishes
a tear disappeared into the soapy water
but I know it will go to meet others
it will add to the upright rivers
and oceans weeping with me
into their own dirty dishes
and dirty laundry

so much to clean
so much time to do it

Tonight, I write this poem-song-biography
by candlelight
a group effort of somehow from
a widespread orchestra
of me and you
and someone, everyone
somewhere else

MY RESOUNDING FAILURE

Faintly, I almost drift awake
My good ear
hears the heartbeat
in my neck
pulsing against my pillow
Sounds like a steady march

So much of me desires to follow the revolution
out of bed and into the fray
to protest whatever today has already become

The rest of me would rather
this prehistoric rhythm
lull me back to sleep

There's a fight out there
that needs nuance and a loving voice
It's lucky this blanket
is holding me back

ON THE EVE OF ALL THOSE SAINTS

Maybe I am a foolish old man
who thinks I might seem younger because I bike
around town
death can't catch me if I keep moving

Maybe there was a moment this evening
when I was pedaling faster than I ever have and yet
my eyelids got too heavy and so
I gave them permission to close
Maybe my machine and I came off the curb
my body lifted up into the nothing above the street
Arms hugging a ghost too tall
A soaring slow-mo waltz
I am certainly not waiting to land
I do not wish for it in any way
So I *sleep into it*

Let's say you are me in this moment
The breeze you force yourself through

cools the tears and sweat
that are cutting through your eyebrows
insistent glaciers passing over your eyes

You are unintentionally serenaded
by the voices of kids leading their parents to the
next house where candy awaits
voices that seem to have forgotten the last house and
will eventually forget this next one and
likely this night
You've had forty-one of these nights
You are lucky to remember seven or eight
But you remember the night your aunt and uncle took
you and
your brother to Los Gatos for rich people's candy
you never forget full-sized chocolate bars for kids and
beers for the grown-ups for doing
god's work dragging these little shits out for candy
but they were cool, young adults who
hadn't yet gone to prison or hell
You once had a sweet tooth, but

it shattered on a \$6 pearl from a 25⁰oyster at a \$12
buffet in Vancouver
sitting across from the sweetest thing
you'd ever abandon
The fragment of tooth that will never leave your jaw
is an accomplice to diabetes

You were a great zombie
Before all this zombie shit
You were a kind clown
A sweet cowboy
You deserved all that candy, every year
because you went door-to-door and you asked for it so
sweetly
It always made sense to live on candy

Right Now is all in for whatever down means
Once zenith is reached, it makes sense to fall
to come crashing down
Like just before bed on November 2, 1987

with such little candy left outside of your body
Where the hell'd it all go!? your mother will ask
Just lie to her, tell her you simply have no clue
Be a good kid because now we focus on Christmas

As for tonight we fall and
we see the ground coming up to meet us, but
instead of seizing every muscle in your body
you expand outward
every one of your molecules moves away from each
other just enough
to make you bigger, looser
you may not be controlling this part
this may be simple universal coincidence and
gravity just happens to be at the end of its handshake
with you, losing grip
And you realize, so slowly
That you are not falling
because everything is always falling
No, you are simply racing the world to see
who gets older first

SUMMER POEM #15

There is a calm
that comes before
perfection.

The surrounding space is
filled with inexplicable
white noise as the mind
prepares the body,
lulling it into a
serenity void.

Nothing can penetrate
the moments during which
the Universe is conspiring
to commit perfection.

For me,
the Universe's guilt
is rarely more apparent

than when it puts me
amongst friends, fish tacos,
and a summer breeze.

Some may call that god.

I am simply humbled, and
grateful for the harmony.

THERE IS A LONELINESS

There is a loneliness that comes with the setting of
the sun
the uncertainty that it will come back
not dissimilar to the painful wondering
if *she* would come back

The darkness can swallow anything
no matter how long it has been burning
the dark can make it disappear
which may as well be the same as extinguishing
I know this loneliness
we met once and
no matter how often I told it to find its own light
it stayed over many nights
making me write all about it
stating what it thinks people think of it
I was it's secretary taking dictation or
a court stenographer bearing witness and swearing an
oath to tell *its* truth

a memoir of darkness and the wrong kind of solitude
Until it was scared away by the sunrise
or my new lover

I learned how to beat it by putting down my sword
and all my pens
I've spent enough time with certain skills
like talking and writing and being annoying and yet
still making friends
that none of it befuddles me anymore

But there is a loneliness I've battled for many years
I know how it feeds and consumes
It is a night owl whose prey is sleepy but alert
well aware of all their weaknesses
I've spent years training
I am no longer weak
I am learning that when you get stronger
it is imperative to help those who need it
There is a loneliness that thrives at 2:47am
and so, when my watch reads 0:01am

I want to be ready for the lonely

□:□ 1 AM

□ □ 1 AM

on my digital alarm clock or my phone
looks like a declarative statement

I am

I am here

I am ready

to pick up this pen and do everything I've trained for
to slice open the dark and let in some light

to bring levity to all this gravity

to slay some demons for both of us

to open my ears for both of us

to be there—to be there for both of us

because if it's not for us both

then I let my guard down

then neither one of us is safe

So come to my place

I'll turn the kettle on for tea and

make some popcorn

We can talk about it

or you can sleep on it
and I'll stand guard
 on the lookout
until the sun can take over

RECREATING DAWN

for JDH

Were I better with my hands
and clay

You are the breathing reason

I would wake up

To pull a moment of

you out of a mountain of rock

I would melt every metal I could find

And pour you out of it

Countless roosters and hens

have awoken and fed me

I have gone 12 rounds with alarm clocks and

chased time around a race track

So that could I show and tell

any and all open eyes

that I once saw you

And here

Here is what those seconds looked like

Let them hear what you taught me, what you took

How long my breath went missing

along with the sun

Orchestra is a strange way to spell heart

But mine beats and pulls and winds

it timpanies and trumpets

conducting itself because

these vocal cords are simply not enough

There is a limit to how long

my voice can sing

I long for it to match

your tireless

willing love

OPEN LETTER TO NEIL ARMSTRONG

Dear Neil Armstrong,

I write this to you as she sleeps down the hall
I need answers that I think only you might have

When you were a boy and space was simple science
fiction
when flying was merely a daydream between periods
of history and physics
when gifts of moon dust to the one you loved could
only be wrapped in your imagination

Before the world knew your name
Before it was a destination:
What was the moon like from your backyard?
Your arm: strong, warm and wrapped across her
shoulders
Both of you gazing up from your back porch
summers before your distant journey

But upon landing on the moon
as the Earth “rose” over the Sea of Tranquility
did you look for her?

What was it like to see our planet and know that
everything you could be, all you could ever love and
long for—was just floating before you?

Did you happen to write her name in the dirt, when
the cameras weren’t looking?

Or surround both of your initials with a heart for
alien life to study a million years from now?

What is it like to love someone so distant?

What words did you use to bring the moon back to
her, and what did you promise in the moon’s ear
about the girl back home?

Can you teach me how to fall from the sky?

I ask you all of this not because I doubt your feet/feat
I just want to know what it's like to go somewhere no
man had ever been

just to find that she wasn't there

To realize your moonwalk could never compare to the
steps that lead to her

I now know the flight home means more

Every July I think of you

I imagine the summer of 1969

How lonely she must've felt while you were gone

You never went back to the moon and

I believe that's because it doesn't take rockets to get
you where you belong

I see that in this woman down the hall and sometimes
she seems so much further

But I'm ready for whatever steps I must take to get to
her

I've seen so many skies and the moon always looks the
same

So I gotta say, Neil

that rock you landed on has got nothing
on the rock of mine she's landed on

You walked around, took samples and left
But she's built a fire, cleaned up the place,
and I hope she decides to stay
Because on my rock, we can both breathe

Mr. Armstrong, I don't have much

Many times have I been upside-downtrodden

But with these empty hands comes a heart that
is full more often than the moon

She's becoming my world, pulling me into orbit
and now I know I may never find life outside of hers

Shouldn't I give her everything I don't have yet?

So, for her, I would go to the moon and back

But not without her

No! We'd claim the moon for each other with flags
made from sheets down the hall
And I'd risk it all to kiss her under the light of Earth,
the brightness of home
 but I can do all of that and more
 right here, wherever she is

And when we gaze up, with her arms around me
I will not promise her gifts of moon dust or flights of
fancy

Instead, I will gladly give her all the Earth she wants
in return for all the Earth she is
 the sound of her heartbeat and laughter
 and all the time it takes to learn to fall from the
sky
 down the hall and
 right into love

I'd do it everyday
If I could just to land next to her

5

4

3

2

I small step for a man

But she's one giant leap for my kind

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UPROOT

When I die
plant a fruit tree
in my belly
Then I can still feed you
I implore you to
climb me
once I am tall enough
Dangle your feet of
my branches
Let your gray hair tickle my green and yellow leaves
When I change colors in the fall
know that I am saying “hi”
and that it’s time for a sweater
The breeze will move me, then you
I’ll stand there, always
holding you
as long as you wish
Then plant a seed from me
next to my roots

and there you can go
when you go
and we'll slowly drop
a family
long after our
bodies
are once again
dirt

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Enjoy!

