



Lucky You

Poems by Mike Finley

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THIS POEM IS A PUBLIC SERVICE

Listen when I talk you little nothings
Little zinc-heads in the cupboards
By the rattling plates
And the nutpicks and the mallets
And the napkins and the forks --
When it comes it will come
As a surprise.

Inconspicuously they are laying tracks
Up every porch of every home in this city.
Into each room and every squeamish store.
Through the backdoors of slaughterhouses
Where sides of nothings, rubber carpets
Hang on hooks
Circling the sour and bloodstained floors
Like pedestrians.

Stop doing what you're doing.
Stop tapping your feet.
Stop asking can you be excused.
And what are you going to do about it,
For your lusterless bodies?
And your partners? And the children?

By now you have noticed no one signs on
For the detail of love anymore.
They say get yourself another stooge.
Let this one have the dirty job. Am I
Your slave?
It was called cooperation.

At the depot boxes and boxes of kits of lives
Pile up on the loading dock
Squealing for hands.
You can't count on the help
To lift a single finger.
We expect a little something
A special extra some kind of bonus
For his type operation.
You're better off dead
The rich get richer.

At night freight trains cross state lines
So no one can see the lines of giant zeroes
On their backs, three to a flat.
Each one weighs tons and enemy agents
Are snapping them up,
They think they're our replacements.

The other tracks they let decay
Like rows of teeth a thousand miles long.

The enamel starts to chip, the sugar
Does its work.
Between the lean and rotting ties
Grown dogs howl
Like flapping cloth.
You blind little ninnies cry for sweets.
You ten ton babies kick at your baskets.
You've outgrown your usefulness,
Why don't you go home?
Who can take care of you in times like these?
Who can put up with the things that you do?
If you knew a trade --
If you worked with your hands --
There must be someplace else?

Monday they stuffed my secretary in the outgoing file.
Followed by a cut in pay.
Thursday my office turned up missing.
I miss my memoranda.
Now they're asking for my shoes back.
It has just been announced, we have
Run out of weekends.

I am lifted on a stretcher and carried
Out of court.
A paper airplane where my eye should be.
I had taken my complain to the top of the top.
For a judge he struck me as immature.

Plain and simply we caught up too far too fast.
Now no one is safe in his own suit of clothes.
No one is secure for a second.
The machines have started to nag
They say
Well
We bitches are hard to satisfy.
What we have in mind is a generation
Of animals.

Desperate losers mechanical slapstick
You dumb seamsters you have snipped
Your antennae.
What happened to your sense of humor?
You've been trapped for days
Between floors on an escalator.
Think. Everything
You see you make gauze.

Businessmen walk the streets
Wet with expressions of loss.
They stop and speak with everyone they see.
Where are all the buildings,
They want to know.
There used to be buildings.
Hold my hand, I couldn't bear
To jump from a tree.

Good sir can you direct me
To the nearest revolution?

Listen you dumb nothings brown nettles
Red gristle dumb people.
The housewives in our city are
Grinding their arms into sausage.
All our shops are boarded up.
Newspapers lick our streets and broken glass
Makes pretty sparkles.
The president has taken to wearing his shirts backwards,
He's taken to giggling.
You can beat this thing, he says,
And explodes.

What nonsense, this town
Is crawling with reptiles and pimps
And you know it.
Each one of them busies himself through the night
Plotting your underground surprise.
Your luggage was sent on ahead.
A list of patrons is circulating,
People you spoke with only this morning
Have signed up for double
Triple hitches.

At night mechanics rub burnt cork on their cheeks
And drum till dawn on the hoods of junked autos

With hammers and socket wrenches.
Children all around the world have
Stopped falling down. Their nails are clean.
They've stopped hurting themselves
And stopped needing you.
In your company they have started
Crossing their legs.

If you hadn't realized
If this comes as a shock
If you didn't know by now
Things are coming to a head.
The lonely beast you keep in the cellar
That wails and wails
Only last night pulled all the red pins from his map.
All your lovers have written your name
A dozen times and torn it up again.
Every stone in every field takes careful aim
And flies. Things are getting
Sticky everywhere.

What can you do, you want to know,
To help yourself through this difficult transition.
How to defend yourself or explain yourself
When what has been heading your way all your life
Arrives with its vengeance.
Are you prepared, the trains are pulling out
Everywhere, bound for unknown destinations.

Fuses are lighting in every bedroom.
There has not been a successful suicide
In weeks, and you sit
Playing with your hands in your lap.

What is it oh what is it, oh,
The name of the song, our song
That's been stuck in your head like a rusty needle
For what seems like years.
Are you coming? Are you going?
You pitiful people you
Tiny nothings your fractured lives
You can't rise up from, can't speak out of,
Can't pierce the membrane that you
Call home, can't break
The quiet that's killing all that you love.

This poem is a public service.
When it speaks to you
Listen.

IN THE BARRACKS

If God made men to march to the sound of bugles,
then who are we to stick nails in our ears?

The reason we're here is because we were hungry,
and we loved our country -- there's
a lot of pacing in nuthouses, too.

If I don't wind up hating
the bourgeoisie it'll be
a miracle. At this point
could please me better
than squeezing a trigger, and every civilian
a target. We right now
are strong as hell -- two years
from now we'll be famous.

ELEPHANTS

they shoulder their way like elephants
through the town & erect a blockade
of mahogany and teak

businessmen evacuate by ladders in the air
from a satiny box the mayor produces a key

this is a city that keeps its promises
the dark good smell of manure

MINNEAPOLIS

The white sails of noontime flapped and flapped.

This year we intended to travel, this year

it is always July in.

There are sidewalks now without any cracks

and the cars are much smaller and old people

want to relax in the sun.

A dog and a stick race along the beach.

The sand dries up and falls off your chest.

I mention again the garden in Spain

with the kings and the fountains and marble steps.

The lighter you are the harder walking is

and there are guitarists and men with recorders

like a procession of lamas.

Twelve Julys have come and gone this year alone

in Minneapolis and everyone is humming

a familiar tune, I feel the earth move

under my skin, I feel the sky tumbling down,

tumbling down, but not the kids who never get tired.

This was to have been the summer of Austria,

now the sand dries up and falls off your chest.

The leaves on your houseplants are burned on the tips,

it's the tapwater you say, the water burns.

The sails on the sailboats flap and flap.

The wheels squeak and the sirens sing

and the dogs chase sticks alongside curbs
on the streets of modern Egypt.

White shoes and white furniture and the smell
of white lotions and the trees they grow indoors
shimmer and shake in the radio breeze.

The grinding of skates and the sundial squints
on the first day in July.

Minneapolis wears her blue skirts high
and the poor sweat and the air conditioners perspire
and the sun stands still on the beautiful shore.

IN MY APARTMENT

the slightest movement electrifies

a flick of the wrist

the lights go out

the bulbs grow cool and swing

a mathematical arc

furniture huddles

it whispers your name

inside the refrigerator

the pounding has stopped

the onions have chiseled through the back

and entered chrome passageways

i must leave this place

if the car stops at this floor

i am getting off

and never coming back

LETTER FROM COMO

Taking course to ospreys and antlions and the mauve noodle
stacked like rosaries in the outer office

Tonight it is quiet it is too quiet tonight

Taking course from the trail of rags and broken webbing
and the natives trembling under the giant banah leaves

And taking course dead reckoning from the moon
directly chuckling like the Old Bombardier

Take my course to the sailor awash and aflat
on the tarot deck

Take it to Queens and Pawtuxet and the all-nite laundromat
It steams like desire in the sleeping pile of woolens

And the natives pressed themselves thin as knives
pressed against the quivering chandelier

take it to Mom and Pop and the aging cheerleader
who ten years later still presses the torn photograph
against her ribs

It is too quiet it is sinister

It is number than any number

And what do I do oh what please say

is a pawpaw and a bobtail nag all the doodah day

Take it to America America in the springtime springtime in Am
erica

because this is the garden of animal delight
the clean scrape of the dish on cement

Taking course to red jackals and jaydaws and the red noodle
Nailed to the waiting room like old
magazines

It is better than that it is steadier than that
How do you do and welcome to Fabricburg
You can't tell the fours from the threes
You can't tell the flowers from the screams
No wonder they say we were made out
of mud

Come out of your trees and your rivers and
Come to America come to Minnesota
Come to the click of cleats and the children
straddling the giant tortoise they have come
They have come for miles around

Come to the land of long letters of love the land of love
his is the land of the crackling barn
and the land of the infernal flower
and the land of big shovels

This is the home town this the sublime
This is the black underside of a million raw tabletops
Love scarred like burnt pleasure and bubblegum
These are its children and those are its
heights

These are the fingers meshed and twined like cotton candy
Peanut shucks and gosh the divine crimentlies
Come to the straw and the cane and urine flowing like soda
Come to the land of poultry and the love of the condom
Come to the rinsed kidneys of the lost tribes

And the land of small children and dogs
They teem in the refuse like ambassadors for change
Come to the Como when the hibiscus are in bloom
and the drunks are in bloom and the tree sloths
Parasites bloom green in the skin
Come to the green swarming pond this year
we dredge there our memories
of kindness and jewels and breadloaves
and cannonshot rakes and quicksilver
Come when the tuna are jumping
and the children are jumping at cornbread and promises and tim
e
and the secrets of time This spring
the tiger is muttering remonstrances of love
And the banker noodle sits like a patient in the vestibule
Come to the 24-hour urgent care centers cursing
the revolving doors and the No Parking Zones
and the decisive victory in the field
Come to the spreading joy of a thousand elm trees
Two years from blight and the skinny roots of love
And the thousand children jumping in the night
Taken in dreams to a place beyond mountains
and the thousand mattresses no one turns over any more
Come to Como Brother John and Alphaea
Take to the hard streets and the harder walls
And take course to the parklights bathing the lost kids
And take course down the trillion rows of lilies and rot
take course to Como at a certain time of year

now here now gone forever now at the tip
of every tongue take course
by hunted animals strung by ropes
their bodies opened to the wind and to love
Flies singing seafaring stories in the breeze
Open and battered to the slim
curve of love

SOMETHING NOT HEARD UNTIL SPOKEN

the world is being worn away by wheels
speeding past tomcats
bitter as usual about the poor
choice of scraps

the street is gone, the road is gone
every little path is gone
as its lines are reconciled'

leave this place with unmeasurable step
and shooshingly
great understanding is the uncle
of silence

that syllable lives forever in your ear

MISE EN SCENE

Up on the roof you hear the pitter patter
of tiny sandwiches.

In the basement the friends you keep have broken out,
they are heading for the salt.

Outside your window a policeman is caressing his gun.
Before things go too far he will arrest himself.

You lie in bed.

You can't feel a thing below your waist.

Your legs who know you for what you are
have chucked you
and raced down the street
to the auditions.

Your arms packed a lunch.

Your genitalia wish them good luck.

Your ears waved goodbye, wraithlike, when they left.

Deep in the shaft in your head
there is an abandoned vein.

You follow it on foot for a hundred yards or so.

At the end of the final corridor
you see a wire stretched taut
from wall to wall,

with a unicycle in the crow's nest.

You remember a line:

"Love leaves you and you must go on."

Behind, the curtain rises.

THE FIRE LANDS

for my sister Kathleen 1945-1961

more than before i am aware of my body
each one of me a lifetime of explosions
shrapnel painted to luggage and lovers
calendars marked for a short life

i stutter and wish would die or turn blue
these dreams won't quit they come and come
the covers on fire my dear sister trapped
in a house of her flames

he is so sick poor angel
he props himself against a stone

for a moment i am noninflammable
my sister says we are safe in this place
even on fire it is different here

she takes off her dress
on one patch of her scapular is her own face
she holds a blue sphere in hand
on the other she has crayoned my name

i was wrong about flames

it is october in the woods and the red leaves
of the fire lands lick at the falling air
i suck at my fingers and cry

the night skips away like a sister i can't catch
one by one the curious rabbits of stars go out
night takes its stick to the shadows
and drives them into morning

i was losing and losing the days of my life
it sprang from me and dribbled from me
like gas from a punctured can
i lost you at home and on the road home

then in the special room where candles burned
sumped in the furniture i held your hand
the room that faded into darkness outside
the ragged edges of a ragged room

i still see you stepping backwards from the room
backwards from the stairs to the dark corridor
i see you frozen in the dark in the amber like a wasp
soaking into the earth like blood red wine

make up my mind not to lose you again
planning to track you down again
and find the death that wears your body like a name
and find my death that was your death

find the death that beats on my life
and hunt it down

sick of losing and having to lose
and hating this life so i take yours
and place it on your tongue
like a dirty host

please stay out of the woods kathleen
please do not come into the woods
where i am proprietor of the soil
and i am where my sister was
the days we spent in the flickering leaves
a tumult of blood falling like feathers

turn from the faces that are backing away
faces creased with tearful stories
faces turned away from the light
faces that slept in shoes
faces that danced for rain

a pair of faces passing through silk
a pair of faces dreaming of life
closed-eye faces backing into the trees
a face that was only a face
and the one face turning
with the quarters of the moon

we are fooled into heaven
pick fruit from the air
we bleach the mountains
polish stones
we comb the grass with ancient hands

