

Threadbare Coat

My Dad stands outside on the sidewalk
on his way back from the hobo camp.
Time magazine, coupon for toothpaste, whiskey bottle
all randomly piled in his walker basket.
Thomas map book open to a Berkeley neighborhood—
 he always likes to be clear about where he's going.
He's talking with the neighbors—he loves to talk.
 When I come down the stairs
 he asks for money.
I got a twenty in my hand; I beat him to the punch.
He talks with everyone
but he never takes the time
 to talk to me.

I'm quite a bit different than he.
 I never say a word to anybody.
I like maps. I curl up with National Geographic.
 I dream of far off places.
I spend my days listening to the songs of the angels.
When I get restless I play with my toys.
I don't bother anyone, I keep to myself
 I don't make even the tiniest waves.

In the end it's the stillness that hurts the most;
in the end the longing tears me apart.
Hard asphalt
 weeds growing in the cracks:
 If you don't know where you came from
 you can't know where you're going.

Please come see me sometime and teach me some words—

bring some food and a little water.

My hair is brittle and my lips are parched.

We were both the eldest.

We share the same threadbare coat.

The world is made from darkness and light

twisting like the DNA molecule.

I drink myself stupid most every night.

I'm that forgotten boy who never found his place.

My throat is dry.

Dark springs gurgle in the cavities of my body.

I should drink more of that clear, cool water.

II.

There's an equal measure of chaos and order

woven into the fabric of the world.

Once I had some talent and a few coins for giving;

now the screen door is flapping on its hinges.

The cold cherry skies stretch from horizon to horizon.

I'm licking the salt—

I think it might be doing some good.

A tree will never grow straight

from a seed planted in rocky soil.

Freedom for me is a freedom from hope.

They're penned up in back and they're brainwashed good

they fetch a high price on the auction block.

I'm too receptive, yet I help when I can.

I still think there's someone out there

who cares.
I'm blind and I'm broken, but I'll carry a little more.
I'll leave a big tip—
I don't want you to go out of your way.
Wrap me tight and brand the barcode—
whistle's blowing; jammed tight and jostled.
Our eyes widen as the train pulls away.

III.
He who holds the heart of humanity
within His one heart—
He is passing out from the pain.
She anoints His feet with oil
and He is whole again
momentarily,
the silence within the suffering
like the leavening of bread.
What is the gesture being made
through the humiliation, the despair of Christ?
What is being placed in the world?

Within my blindness and folly,
my relentless self-destruction
inside that darkness
lies a living grace.
Sometimes I feel it:
a quiet presence
hidden, young, mostly mute.
The foot soldiers of this world are fodder.
The discards, the worthless ones—

they sacrifice themselves at every breath.
The abandoned and the forgotten,
the blackened and the buried,
they are often
the ones who care the most.

I'm on the road; I burnt my maps for warmth.
The old neighborhoods I'm leaving far behind.
They bombed Mom's house;
Dad was soaked in electroshock
until he signed the papers confessing his many sins.
I'm wearing my threadbare coat; I've got my back to the world.
I'm running for that high nameless mountain.
I knew a girl once but I've forgotten her name.
She gave me a piece of rose quartz
before leaving me behind.
She slipped out the back door in the middle of the night
her path as hidden as mine.

There was an Easter ceremony decades ago
back when I was still a boy,
when I was still wearing shoes.
The pastor held the service outside:
the sweet air, puffy clouds of early springtime.
When I think of the greenery, the billowing white air,
I fall to my knees.
My salt and tears becoming the clay of the world.

Quarters and dimes I give to the rich man up the street
desperation and openness I give to the world.