

The Dogs of Hiroshima

A collection of poems

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The Dogs of Hiroshima

The dogs of Hiroshima
barked until the very end.
One slept on the ground, in the shade.
Two pups played and chewed on each other.
One dog came when it was called.
Another sat by the side of her master.

When the great white light came
they were sent to the realm of nothingness,
the realm of atoms ripped apart,
the realm of torrential wind
and flame as hot as had ever been on earth,
even when Moses faced the burning bush.

The dogs of Hiroshima,
until the very moment of the light,
moved as dogs move, and sighed as dogs sigh.
They took upon themselves no cause,
and judged not a living soul,
but they were judged in their innocence,
and the dogs of Hiroshima were no more.

Giselle Beckons

Under the blooming harvest moon,
a still life of browning apples
fermenting to sweet scented cider,
decomposes and poses in the ivy,
where Giselle and I,
prowl the crabgrass slope,
manicured and cured of wilderness,
but not of life and death.
Our mooncast shadows slink
across the parched and trampled lawn,
strewn with chewed tennis balls,
apples, plums, and rose petals.

By the ruined shed an aging hippy
yodels at the goddess Selene.
Giselle crunches an apples and says:
"Come smell the yard with me."
She prances backward in an arc,
then points with a slender leg,
and beckons with her paw.
"Follow me," she says.
And I do.

The Last Plum

The last plum has fallen,
a sweet and juicy plum,
fallen from the rented tree
(rented month to month --
comes with a small house).

The owner dropped in,
like an old friend,
to fell the dying apricot tree;
and my dogs licked his hand.
I never asked permission
to keep dogs in his yard
(required in the lease).

The plums (landlord plums)
came in early abundance;
their ripeness splotched
the hard packed earth.
Some plums were too high,
some adverse to picking,
and some fell to earth,
to wither into prunes,
to be eaten by my dogs
who chew their flesh,
and grind their pits.

Hidden in the harvest
of one plum tree
dwells the essence of all things,
and the wily breeze,
swaying purple leaves,
murmured secrets too,
of always and everywhere,
and for a moment,
harmony.

The Union of Gray Beings

There is a union of gray beings,
the color of soot or tarnished silver.
The one with whiskers sneaks up on me,
bumps her head against my leg,
flops on her back to present her soft gray belly,
stretches blissfully and shows off her hidden claws.
The one with a beard cocks his head
at the sound of my harmonica,
and howls like a heartbroken wolf
tracking his lost mate under the Cro-Magnon moon.

Here is what they have taught me:
So long as you are a gray being,
you will find your way
without a book or a map,
a clock or a compass,
a thought or a doubt,
a prayer or a regret.
So long as you are a gray being,
you will find your way.

Phoenix Lake

Birds pluckstep
through muddy shallows,
and honey billed ducks,
with green sequined necks,
taunt a snooty egret
with their lordly quacking.
Giselle prances like a pony;
Zac pronks like a goat in ivy;
while I (of all people)
zigzag toward the finale,
haphazardly contented,
indiscriminately charming,
irregularly obnoxious,
capriciously questioning,
undependably friendly,
occasionally approachable,
a man and his dogs,
down by Phoenix Lake.

My Dog Zac

My dog Zac flaunts his teeth --
ivory fangs in a vaulted cavern;
his lips and his nose are black;
his tongue, a pink party favor,
curls between fell incisors.

Zac greets me with abandon,
as if I've returned from the wars.
His love is the love of Christ,
without conditions or judgment;
his eyes are the eyes of Buddha,
opalescent pools of onyx.

We daydream the day away,
his silvery head on my thigh,
loving every minute together.

He sniffs the butt of Daphne the cat,
then tenderly nibbles her neck,
but the meter reader says he's fierce,
because he barks and snarls.

Zac hurls himself aloft
to snatch a tennis ball in flight;
he digs up the backyard,
or the bed with equal fervor;
he sings as I play my harmonica,
and he croons with the siren's wail.

My dog Zac,
the yodeling carnivore,
gentle and bestial,
just like you or me --
only better.

Summer Dogs

Summer sky without a cloud,
beheld through plum tree limbs set rocking
by my creaking hammock ride,
and on the brokenhearted lawn,
the barking dogs collide.

Collide collide collide collide,
and then come bounding to my side.
They bring an apple from the tree,
they squash a plum against my knee.

They don't write poems,
they don't make rhymes,
they don't plant 'tators,
they don't plot crimes.

Dogs are perfection,
dogs are grace,
much less wordy
than the human race.

A Word to Fanny the Cat

Be a wise old cat,
and forgive Zac his dogged dogginess.
Don't creep up like a phantom,
and swat him when he sleeps.
He takes up space on the couch,
but there's room for both of you.

He doesn't smell like a cat,
or walk like a cat,
he can't climb like a cat,
and he will never meow,
but he feels the cold in winter,
and fleas nag at his flesh.

He was born a dog;
he makes no excuse for it,
nor he does he brag about it;
he celebrates his inheritance
twirling like a vortex,
catching a ball on a bounce,
digging up the bedding,
singing with the piano.

Fanny, deep inside of you
the tangled strands
of life's code whisper;
here's what they say:
a hundred million years ago,
you and that dog Zac,
came from the same litter.

The Raccoon

The raccoon turns up each night,
to wake me from my dreams.
At first the dogs bark,
and then they plead.
They rap their paws on the door,
and through the glass panes
we see a wild animal,
frozen in the moonlight,
like an ice sculpture.

"I will clamp my jaws on its snout,
and turn it over on its belly," says Zac.
"I will tear out its gut," says Giselle.
"We are hunters and killers,
and we remember the old ways!"

The animal and I stare at each other,
then it beckons with a little hand.
"Go to sleep," I tell the dogs,
and walk the cold wood floor to my bed.

The Wind

A wind comes up by the plum trees,
a wind to celebrate,
a wind to blow on a hot day,
blowing under the hammock,
where the grass has turned to straw;
I can pluck a blade for a toothpick,
or I can watch a ladybug climbing up a stalk,
and the sleek bodied dog,
with the rumpled face,
licks my hand like she loves me,
and it's as good as if she does.

The wind blows through my shirt,
which billows like a sail,
pink stripes on white,
or white stripes on pink,
and the wind blows between my legs
and curls from the bottom up,
a wind that wraps itself around my body,
a living wind,
a wind that plays the chimes
hanging from the apricot tree.

And the chimes sing:
It's the wind that makes me play;
my pipes come alive with the blowing wind,
the invisible wind, coming and going,
in the bright hot sun.

Fred and Ginger

Fred and Ginger live on the beach at Haena.
Fred's a fussy eater but Ginger knows better.
Fred lopes along, a big tan puppy
with bat ears and a long thick tail.
Ginger is dark with warm brown eyes;
she flops over at my feet
and shows her worn nipples
covered with coral sand;
she licks my hand
and gently mouths it.

Fred and Ginger,
under the sun and stars,
feeling the trade winds,
sniffing in the tide pools,
running across black lava flows,
digging their bodies into the sand
to ferret out translucent crabs
which they swallow in a gulp.

Fred and Ginger swirl across the sands,
Fred in top hat, black tie and tails,
Ginger in a yellow strapless gown,
a print of tropical flowers.
They dance and we cheer
as Fred impishly kicks a breaking wave.
Together they skip above the tide pools.
They dance away from us,
down the arcing beach,
toward backlit hills,
covered with jungle gardens.
Fred and Ginger will dance forever.

The Hills of Hanalei

Looking at the crisp winter stars,
through my surplus telescope,
dogs running between the tripod legs,
I remember one night on the beach,
tradewinds blowing and my toes in the sand,
Comet Halley an unassuming smudge,
in the sky above Hanalei's hills,
but tonight it's Jupiter,
a crystal disk of brown bands,
and four little lights lined up in a row;
Jupiter so bright and easily spotted,
this first clear night in a month;
Jupiter calling with the speed of light,
insisting we're not the apple of God's eye,
telling me existence is centered everywhere,
beneath my toes or within my dogs,
or on the green hills of Hanalei.

A Walk through Kyoto

A cloudy day at the zoo;
snow starts to fall.
A monkey in a cage
bangs its head on the bars.

At the Shinto temple,
people buy fortunes.
Those they disown,
are tied to the limbs
of an ancient tree.

Hunching into the driven snow,
we trudge across the bridge,
over the gray river,
two slight figures
in the foreground
of a Japanese painting.

The figures have thoughts
of abandoned prophecies,
and a monkey in a cage,
solemnly beating its head
against cold steel bars.

Armando of the Rain Forest

Elizabeth has returned from the rain forests
and the cloud forests of Costa Rica,
where she met the jungleman Armando
and his steadfast dog Joaquin,
who followed every spoken word with his eyes
as they roamed the tangled valley bottoms,
through rivers stocked by satan with deadly snakes,
and flowered slopes, the babel of evolution,

always Armando,
Armando the day of the flood,
always Armando, shirtless, squat,
powerful with his blond-streaked hair,
warning of the danger of the floods,
and how she must follow him,
because she did not know his jungle,

so she followed Armando and Joaquin,
trekking to deep pools set in solid rock,
and there at that moonscape Joaquin
howled for he heard the roar of the gathering flood,
and Armando commanded:
“Elizabeth, climb the rock cliff,
Climb for your life,”

and Elizabeth's arms became cut and bruised,
as the climb took the strength from her limbs,
Armando urging her on in Spanish and English,
while Armando pulled her by her aching arms
up the last jagged slope of the rocky scarp,
from which they looked downward
on a wall of water sweeping away every tree,
for a wall of water had risen
to rip the forest apart;

for days Elizabeth wandered
the jungle with Armando and Joaquin,
hearing the growls of the jaguars,
the gibbering of the monkeys,
and the medley of the parrots in the treetops,
which Armando climbed to scout the way
to his mother's homesite which they found
in an open sward, the house part living tree,
where she fed them plantains
and the juice of the parchita,
and slyly winked at Elizabeth,

and at the end of their journey,
when at last they were safe,
Elizabeth yearned to stay,
for she had never felt so safe
with any man, not even her father,
because Armando was like a rock,
like a rock she could count on,
but he would not return with her to California,
and she would not stay with him in the forest.

Elizabeth's mind returns awake and asleep
to the peninsular of torrential rains,
of clouds and the flash flood,
where man and animal and plant are like one,
Armando and his bright eyed howling Joaquin,
Armando of the rain forest,
Armando of the cloud forest.