

# People are only people through other people...

Poems by Chris Biles

**WHY I LIKE IT:** *Poetry editor Hezekiah writes:*

“Blessed are the cracked / for they shall let in the light.”

*At first I thought any poet that quotes Groucho Marx can't be all bad; and then I read on to find that it was all good. Biles' words are comic, caustic, caring, caressing and complicated in their implication. Oh so many great lines and so little space:*

" Nothing quite like a lone tree / that can still stand tall / in the midst of monotony." "like window raindrops / we fall sliding collide then / running together".

*If I was only allowed one more, I would choose these two:*

"kissed the inside of my wrist" She has introduced me to a new erogenous zone; and, "the way I am transported / through the windows of my skull"

*These are a sorry too few for me—seek your own, but don't miss a single morpheme..*

*Five stars.*

*(Spacing and font size are poet's own.) HS.*

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### Memories

Empty here,  
I'm scraping  
the jelly jar,  
but the knife  
comes up clean.  
I want that sugar  
like a dedicated  
honeybee that can't  
find a flower.  
Honey, I need  
some nectar.  
I need a journey.  
Road trip with me  
so we can trip  
on the road  
and come out  
less than clean.  
I'm empty here,  
and searching –  
for the plum  
juice in my dead  
Grandmother's ice  
chest, for the scent  
of white pines  
and the sight  
of their fallen  
gold needles,  
for the warmth  
of a cup of tea  
on a chilly autumn  
day as my only  
companion.  
Memories: the air  
in my jelly jar.  
It's empty, yet not.

## Dinner in Paris

The accordion pumps out its notes  
and a man effortlessly lets  
melodies flow from loose lips,  
striped shirt and red neck tie  
giving the look of a boy  
to a man  
who simply sings  
of a life not yet lived,  
of a longing long ago realized,  
long ago accepted  
as life-long.

Red wine flows  
as a clarinet joins the mix  
now more upbeat  
and the driving force of a bass  
plucking the deep melody  
of a pulse felt in the chest  
profondément  
to the core.

And so goes the rhythm of the night.  
We tap our feet  
nod our heads  
close our eyes and watch  
the music  
take form:  
rising and falling  
flowing  
through the maze  
of streets and down  
to the never-ending path  
beside the Seine,  
to the river  
flowing  
in color  
in black and white  
red as the wine  
driving us on  
driving us away  
driving us home.

## Perspective

“Blessed are the cracked  
for they shall let in the light.”  
And shine we shall  
through our reversed chasms  
into the world of raised eyebrows  
and pretenders.  
Nothing quite like a lone tree  
that can still stand tall  
in the midst of monotony.  
We know it.  
We’re all just *symbolically* crazy  
like Mr. Rochester’s wife  
locked in her attic upstairs.  
So no reason to raise the alarm  
because I say I saw the clouds eat the moon  
– they would’ve kissed  
but then the wind blew.

Yet still  
you put up the chained link and barbed wire to boot.

But know that whatever way you cage us  
we can always imagine ourselves out  
watching you through the windows  
of our own attics.  
And be warned  
that a flicker becomes flame  
and flame becomes fire  
and fire: conflagration.  
Then maybe one day  
you, too, will see the moon  
nearly kissed by the clouds,  
and the moonlight will be your own,  
shining out  
through reversed chasms.

"The wound is the place where the light enters you."

Heavy, heavy, marching along a path of iron stones  
each turned bloody reflecting the setting sun.  
You found me as I contemplated the sky  
smashing itself against the distant mountains.  
Quietly you spoke, kissed the inside of my wrist  
showed the tenderness I'd only dared to dream.  
You collected my tears and drank them down.  
We strolled along some seashore naked, in and out  
in and out of the waves, we found ourselves lost together.  
Fingers entwined, I gave my thanks to Rumi, as I gave myself to you.

Haiku

like window raindrops  
we fall sliding collide then  
running together

A Wonder

is what it is  
when your narrow torso  
carved from obsidian  
studded with rough-cut diamonds  
fills my vision –  
the lack of polish: your beauty  
hidden mysteries coating your being.

A Wonder

is what it is  
when I write prayers  
    – words woven from dewy grass –  
that I might one day  
run my fingers upon your hills  
within your valleys  
and yet I turn from your gaze  
afraid to listen  
to the waterfalls  
that originate  
from the sun.  
Afraid  
to trust.

A Wonder

is what it is  
when you breathe the sweet air  
held by yellow flowers  
and I do too  
but it's just a coincidence  
as I neglect to open my arms  
when the time comes to warm us both  
and you walk away  
while I stand  
shivering  
trying to see the beauty  
in the rising moon  
in the haunting calls of the loons.

A Wonder

is what it is  
when finally  
the sun rises  
with no mist or fog or clouds  
and dries the dewy tears

of the woven grass;  
when our eyes lock  
and we each accept  
the challenge of the other,  
taking us  
into the next morning.

## Stillness

There is something about a body  
when it is dead.

You notice more the curves,  
the way the skin stretches  
over muscle  
over bone.

You notice the wrinkles  
now relaxed  
worn into the hands, the face:  
    on the brow  
        – from too much to ponder,  
    beside the corners of the mouth  
        – from choosing to see joy.

You notice the summation  
of day after day  
written in that skin,  
in the elegance of each finger,  
in the tired way the arms rest on the table.

The power in those arms  
such strength  
only now:  
its remarkable absence –  
no pulse to vivify the veins  
no sweat to glisten in the light  
no breath to fill the lungs  
    to soften the skin.

There is a stillness  
that makes the familiar  
seem so terribly foreign.  
There is a stillness  
that breaks the breath of the living  
as – rigidly –  
we gaze at frozen grace.  
There is a stillness  
that cools your blood  
as your pulse trembles within.

His Smile

Helplessness rips raw your voice:

*“What did I do?*

*What did I do?*

*What did I do*

*for God to take him from me?”*

Your frantic eyes search mine  
as if I could give you a reason  
as if I could tell you why –

I can't.

I shake my head  
tears running  
I rub your callused hands  
crying with you  
weighing you upright  
hunched  
shoulder to shoulder

He sleeps across the hall  
your husband  
in the dark storage room  
wrapped in a blanket

Soon the only roof  
under which he will rest  
will be one of cold soil  
six feet down  
he will join the earth  
he will hear the call  
of God  
on Judgment Day

We will remain  
blessing his journey  
as his essence seeps into the landscape:  
his smile  
will always await us there –  
his smile, and your soul.

## Purpose

Longing for the nameless  
can't quite pin down *what*  
not a certain smell on the air  
not a certain slant of light  
not even the sky beyond the stars  
More so  
    the nameless feeling

because truth is beautiful  
but so are lies  
and some people willingly wear  
handcuffs  
willingly stand  
in the path of a tornado  
willingly bury  
themselves  
beneath the leaves of last year

because guilt can convince us  
of all our evils  
suffering exists  
and all the religions  
even the occult  
point the blame back on us  
so we sin and we sin and we  
sin  
and we're all just a jumbled collage  
of memory and dream  
fear and desire  
and pain  
playing the game  
of sunlight and shadow  
wondering what we did  
for God to make life so sad

so let us sin  
and sin and sin  
searching for that feeling  
searching for that longing  
searching  
for the nameless

## **THE POET SPEAKS:**

*This principle of Ubuntu (known best in connection with South Africa) always grounds my life within itself. It allows me to accept and appreciate my experiences and interactions with others – the light moments, the dark moments, the shades of the gray moments in between. Each one shapes me, erodes some parts to accentuate others. This is how it's supposed to be and that acceptance helps me breathe.*

*The poems featured here exemplify some of these moments – articulate how our connections to other people can impact us and make us who we are. This will always be the inspiration for my work: a study on what makes us each tick, observations of cause of effect, the way that one word can deepen the furrows in his brow while making the edge of her mouth twitch with some upward momentum. Unified in our differences, each and every one of us is both singular and interconnected.*

*Beyond the underlying hum of humanity as my inspiration, when I encounter a word or short turn of phrase or the image of an entire world painted with half a sentence, I jot that down. Some things sing more loudly to me than others, and I like to record those notes that ring fortissimo. Sometimes, I use the images they inspire right away in my writing, other times I let them sit and come back to twist the imagery up into a poem later on.*

*In terms of stylistic influence, I think it depends on the day, like so much. But I will always love the simple observations within the work of Billy Collins. I will always allow myself to be swept up in the blunt power of Allen Ginsberg. And I will always strive to emote beauty like that which radiates from the unflinching words of James Baldwin. So, to sum it up, my stylistic influence is whatever feels right in that moment.*

*Poetry is important to me, both the reading and the writing, because it is art. Quite simply, it is a bridge – the lines that connect the dots to create the greatest of constellations in our skies. Not everyone may see the exact same pictures up there, but poetry fills my canvas and that makes my world complete. We used to navigate by the stars. Well, in this way we still do.*

**AUTHOR'S BIO:** Chris Biles lives in Washington D.C. and works for the Foreign Agricultural Service. She enjoys playing with the light and the dark, and losing herself in music, anything outside, and of course some words here and there. Chris

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