

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

has been published in Blueline Magazine, The Laurentian Magazine, Signatures Lit and Arts Mag, Words and Whispers Magazine, The Clementine Zine, FEED Lit Mag, and on SLiPNet. Find her at www.chrisbiles03.com / Instagram: @marks.in.the.sand

