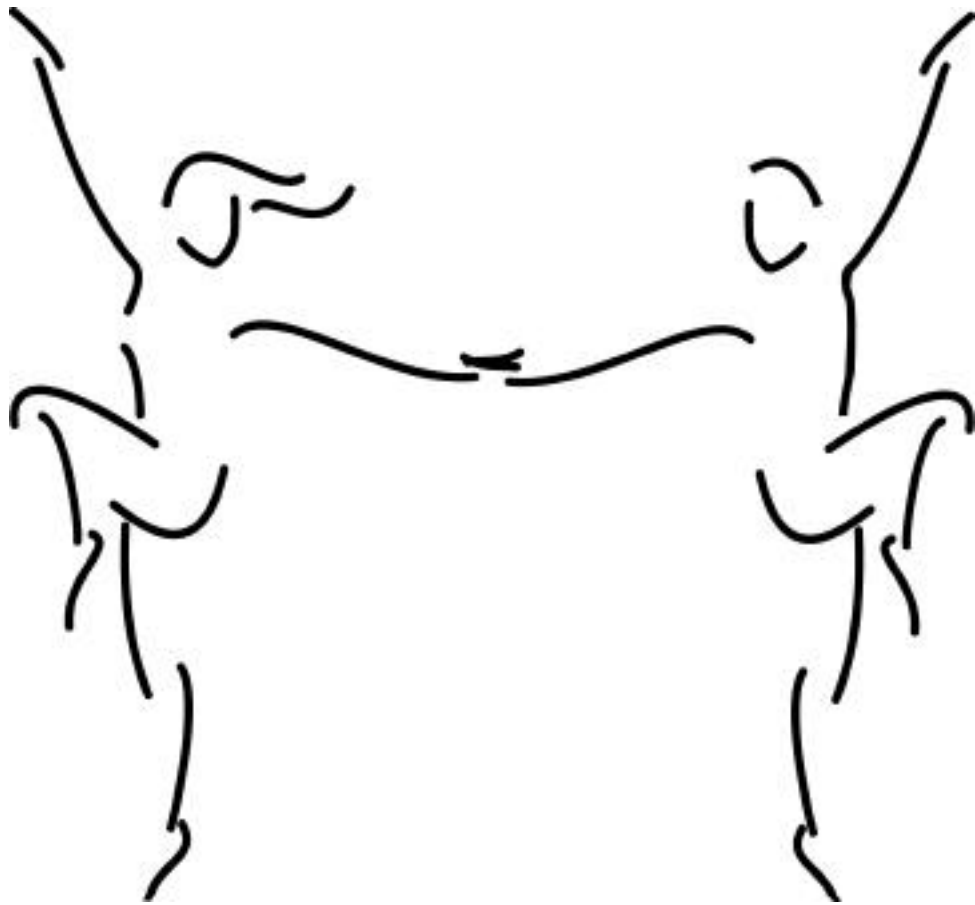


Old Stories



Roger Humes

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by Roger Humes

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Gift

*I speak out of the deep of night
out of the deep of darkness
and out of the deep of night I speak.*

*if you come to my house, friend
bring me a lamp and a window I can look through
at the crowd in the happy alley.*

- Forugh Farrokhzad

Show Me Your Laughter

show me your laughter
that sings
in the dance of your eyes

like a crystal jar
set in the sun
to reflect and prism
the beauty of your soul

i will treat it
with great care
and not let it drop
to the floor

and shatter
like the thousand promises
of so many poems

The Return Of Lazarus

the walls of the tomb are cold hushed echoed lightly
by the hesitant steps of the mourners whose torches flicker
a soft light off the memory of the shroud before them
that haunts their recollections like the land
for which no name can hold a promise

finally one arrives amidst rumors of how he deserted the departed
but all he can tell the expectant is there are days when one does
not control the destiny which even a savior must inhabit

he turns to the body calls forth the breath of life to touch
the resonance of the one who lays there distant
from his own existence and in the ensuing quiet all watch
as the dead rises knowing full well that the only payment offered
for such a resurrection is the long demise

of the slowly forgotten

his final rest will be another tomb that is a grave
of his own creation where no savior will ever return

with the gift named the punishment of life with a conscience

There Is A Story Told In Whispers

there is a story told in whispers
late at night of an angel
who descended from heaven
to tell a man that if he wished
to be free it was required
that he abandon all hope
and ride the tides of her passion
onto the rocks where all journeys
end before they have started

he gratefully laid his gift
of desire at her bare feet
and grasped tightly her wings
lest she disappear
when he awoke from his dream

the old men shake their heads
and utter to those who will listen
such is the way of all fate and love

before we can return the gift
we must give it as before we can let go
of the song we must let its melody sing
free from the bones of our very souls

I Will Meet The Morning

i will meet the morning
where the dawn glazes through
my window and rouses me
from the embers of my dreams
with your name still perched gently
on the edge of my smile

i will meet the morning
where i rise and go through
the motions of another day
sleepwalking as i hold the slices
of your name still perched gently
on the edge of my smile

i will meet the morning
where i attempt to get through
until night enfolds me with dreams
of your image upon my tongue
and your name still perched gently
on the edge of my smile

The Plains of Abraham

come sarah take my hand and let your song
ease for a moment from my mind the ache
for hagar and ishmael who dwell heavily
upon the thoughts of this fading man

your voice is still like honey to my ears
after all the years where you have grown into my face
like an identical twin exiled from my embrace
but who still finishes my sentences with the correct words

come sarah take my hand and let your song
bring forth the memories of when i was young and inhabited
the world of reckless immortality which is the grace
that youth does not know is its true strength

each morning i awaken to wonder why my sleep was troubled
while i know full well that it is the vision of their faces
which sits me bolt upright in bed at night with a sweat
that stares long into the weary hours of the darkness

each day i move through my steps now so familiar
i no longer need to contemplate the chores of my days
or the actions of those around me as we walk the paths
we have perhaps trod once too often to pay heed to their existence

each night returns the same and sometimes i wonder
if even the promises i have seen fulfilled are enough to justify a belief
there is a reason for me to continue onto a tomorrow
where i am distracted by the lack of dreams that remain within my grasp

(beside my bed lays the knife whose gleam holds the memories
of that fateful day where i made the choice and one lived
while the other was exiled to the desert of my affections
for i stayed with you though i still wonder what became of her

the blade placed against my wrist tastes cool to the skin
and tempts me with a sleep where i know conscience would not wake me
but i return it to the stand for the desire to live has not yet left my breath
because in the end sometimes legends are not heroes enough
to know when it is time to walk away)

come sarah take my hand and let your song
ease for a moment from my mind the longings
for you who are a part of the little that remains
from my days of glory because i know in my heart
you are more kind than i ever deserved to find

kiss me once again like it is the first time
and we have never walked before down this road

along the plains of abraham

Some Nights The Quiet Winds

some nights the quiet
winds blow slow and cool

over the grave of
my thoughts where i still

wonder if you try
to remember or

am i merely one
more mishap in

the battles you use
to justify the

mistakes that are best
left to the silence

between you and god

The Garden

the tail of the serpent
lives in two directions
caught in its own mouth
shedding lifetimes like skin

the tale of the serpent
exists in plain vision
told through the mirror
in the name of a sin

in the name of a sin
where the gods change their names
at the foot of the tree
where an angel's sword flames

where an angel's sword flames
and the faces perceived
are the whim of two myths
but which one to believe

but which one to believe
both tales end the same
the tail offers no meaning
for men born out of clay

for men born out of clay
whose destiny
is to accept food from the gods
or the fruit from the tree

or the fruit from the tree
sweet and bitter to the taste
when cast down from the heavens
or sent to toil in the wastes

or sent to toil in the wastes
for when serpent defends man
its legs are removed
it can no longer stand

it can no longer stand
to defend heaven's gate
from the jealousy of a god
who lost control over fate

who lost control over fate
as son falls upon son
empty rivers lie before them
wind breaks before the sun

wind breaks before the sun
and the garden becomes desert
for the tail follows full circle
and the tale is forever

Once There Was A Word That Lit My Soul

once there was a word that lit my soul
as a candle would stand against the wind

when i walked upon the western shore and watched
the ships set sail across the galilee against a sunset

that glowed the ebon red of a rose as its bloom
fades before the dying of the sun or of the blood

of the too eager finger that reaches for the flower
only to suffer punishment from the thorn for its rash act

beneath the glow of a candle against the wind
where i whisper the word that lit my soul

and that word was your name

The Voice That Ceases To Exist

*Then I considered all that my hands had done and the
toil I had spent doing it, and behold, all was vanity
and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be
gained under the sun. [Ecclesiastes 2:11]*

times passes and the fires grow dim
in the morning when the sun rises
and the cool winds caress my face

(when dreams turn to folly they plant seeds
and from them grow the husks of empty words)

time passes and the fires grow dim
in the day when the sun is hot
and the warm winds call your name

(when dreams turn to obsession they plant seeds
and from them grow the husks of wounded pride)

times passes and the fires grow dim
in the evening when the sun fades
and the winds whisper of what was

(when dreams turn to regret they plant seeds
and from them grow the husks of bitterness)

times passes and the fires grow dim
in the night when the sun is gone
and the winds become as silent

as the voice that ceases to exist

(when dreams turn to self-pity they plant seeds
and from them grow the husks of darkness
where the thoughts dwell upon the sorrow
of what we leave behind under the sun)

She Was Not Kind

she was not kind to those
who knelt before her grave

and asked what truly
happened when the angel

rolled back the rock and
they realized that

the body which lay cold
in the tomb spoke of the

only perfection man
would ever know before

the face of god

There Is An Instant

(for Mahoud Kianush)

there is an instant
where words cease to exist
where time is suspended
where consciousness disappears

it comes when i least expect it
when i am totally unprepared for its presence
when i would prefer solitude as a companion
when i give way to its inevitable consequence

the lines roll from my hand
to smolder and set the words ablaze
the lines roll from my dreams
to cover a thirsty soul with a wave

the lines come not from the mouth
but from the spirit and the heart
told in whispers like ancient stories
the lines come and then depart

they come when i least expect it
when i am totally unprepared for their intrusion
when i would prefer seclusion as a companion
when i give way to their inevitable conclusion

there is an instant
and when it comes
i am no longer alone

My Hands Reach To Caress

my hands reach to caress
and hold the empty air
that i find in the dark
instead of your embrace

the only warmth i feel
comes from an old story
spoken from memory
by the old men around

a campfire: once a man
was so consumed by love
that he could not possess
he tore his soul into

tiny pieces and cast it
in the sky so at night
she could gaze up and see
the lights of the final

remnants of his rebirth

Your Words Touch Me

your words touch me
like the poets of persia

solitary
melancholy
but with a hint of grace
as cool as the night winds

come
sit beside me
drink from my cup
tell me of your day

i will listen long
into the evening
while the embers of the fire
grow as cold as the voices
who would mock us

Squandering Eden

when the plagues descended upon egypt
the people fell to their knees and cried in lamentations
to heaven that such troubles should be visited upon their lives
for they did not realize that across the river of despair
there were those less fortunate
who had known only such travails
for generations too countless to number

we are not told why the accident of birth places us
at the chosen moments that we inhabit

all one can do is take up the staff and walk
forty years in the desert of the soul until you arrive
at an oasis where the water is as deep as the moon
that mirrors its reflection over your shoulder

Quiet Overtakes Me In The Late Afternoon

quiet overtakes me in the late
afternoon where i watch the horizon

plunder solitude from my thoughts
that turn to you and the instant

where you first crossed my path too shy
to mention that the light i saw

reflected in your eyes was merely
an illusion of my own longings which now

quietly trace a smile to my lips
that you have never heard say the words

we both know all too well

Magdalene

through the twisting streets and blind alleys she deftly
walks amidst the memories and wonders if perhaps

the salvation he offered was another empty promise
from yet another man who left her though this time

in a way she never expected as she remembers the darkness
that eclipsed the edge of his face while he whispered to her

or some other voice far away that he had been abandoned
when it was she who would have to face the empty

days without his embrace that had once soothed her
like his stories had placated the multitudes who eventually turned

on him as her emotions now revolved around the vow
he had offered before he ascended past her touch

perhaps to return but would it be too late
to do her any good or would he be just another

mark on the tree of life that held some hidden message
on her way home to the light and salvation

she searches for on these twisting streets and blind alleys
that cage her mind like some wounded creature on the run

Once A King Grew So Weary

once a king grew so weary
of the banal tears

of those around him
that he retired to a peak

to watch the dawn wash
away his disenchantment

but he heard the lamentations
of one in such agony

that the rivers cried
at his slightest glance

so the sovereign called the man
to his side where he took up

a mirror which illuminated
the anguish and darkness

until the king shattered
his reflection into a thousand

pieces and together they watched
the shards turn into birds

that flew into the smoky air
where shadow and light become one

Coming Up For Air

my feet trod the earthen street
between the dust of history
and the despair of my soul
where i contemplate

a drowning man

and how if his head is three
feet under water what does
another foot matter

the ages and angst give way
under my step as i move toward
the marketplace and the final
resolution of the moment

inside my shirt i gently caress
the button and feel as much as watch
the world disappear
into the shards of glass and rubble
that dance in the light
with the slumping bodies
i picture in my mind

all starts to fade

the myth of a man ends
where the darkness begins

Call Me From The Earth For I Have Many Names

call me from the earth for i have many names
that our father placed within my soul

to lead a journey from the wilderness of the spirit
into a promised land where i chose to strike a rock

and water not blood poured forth
in promise to the multitudes

who were fed with several loaves and fishes
so that they remembered we all come

from the loins of a man given generations
numbering among the stars

and though his back may have turned upon one
destined to walk within the desert

a father's heart can never dwell far
from the halls of love when it comes to a son

for i wore a coat of many colors
which my brothers ripped from my back

soaked in the blood of the lamb
and placed before the crying eyes of an old man

who watched his dreams fade with the light of my life
until all was forgotten save for his pain

but the journey returned me to those of my blood
and all was forgiven before a sunrise

on a hushed chill morning in a promised land
where each of us has many names

Sunday evening the scent of war pervades all

Sunday evening the scent of war pervades all in this chilled wind that bites deep, turns the bone to ice, flickers the candles that we hold huddled together as much for warmth as in recognition and resignation of the moment.

Voices, sad voices, waver but bravely bring forth a song, a song of life, a song of an earnest appeal for peace, a song to tell the world that, despite all that has happened with the smell of the death of the burning towers still buried deep within our souls, this is wrong, that a nation that lets loose the dam of misplaced vengeance will later have to pay with the blood of its own memories.

My eyes cast across the faces, grim skin pulled taut stretched over the skulls, watery eyes weary, so weary, that once again we are here, once again we raise our voices against a world gone mad crying allegiance to the angel of death instead of the tree of life.

My eyes cast and plead for another to return the glance that says "I understand how this rips deep into the sadness that walks with you at all times," that says "I stare out with you through your eyes and know what moves you when such embers smolder deep within your heart."

I am aware that we all do this. We all do this alone.

And we realize that our voices this night fall on stone ears. We all know this alone.

When the song fades to echoes and memory, drums begin, and I watch a friend dance, her long hair shimmering in the light of the remaining candles, as she tries to lose herself in the rhythm, tries to allow all the pain to release, to fade, to be forgotten, though we know that the torment we feel is closer than our breath, more glued to our spirits than our heartbeats.

I turn and walk away. I do not feel the dance.

On the way to my car the angst intensifies, consumes me in an inferno of anguish as my soul walks the flickering shadows with a sense of hopelessness and despair which grows deeper with each hesitant step that I take.

My thoughts are broken by a piece of paper that moves across the street in a tango with the cold wind and just as quickly disappears from my sight. I stop to watch the whisper of the illusion of where it appeared and ponder the message that it might have carried: perhaps one of hope, perhaps one to explain why such horrors happen, or perhaps the page was merely blank, torn from the notebook and lost before any thoughts were formed.

I cup my hands, blow on them in hope that removing the cold from my fingers can thaw the ice that now blankets my emotions as I wonder if anyone will ever again know the joy of roses when they bloom upon the page.

For I know that we all do this. We all do this alone.

The Gift Of Flight

[Bismillah al-rahman al-rahim] We have been taught the speech of birds and on us God has bestowed knowledge of all things in this world. Indeed, He has been most gracious to us [27:16]

“war,” said the queen, “can only result in destruction
so what precious gift may i offer you for peace, oh my king

i would give you whatever you so desire for my songs
wish to turn your heart and seek out your wisdom”

the sovereign replied he learned from wearing the golden crown
that to yearn with the heart is merely the pride of the foolish

and if one gazes too long into the waters that flow from thought
you will be transfixed by the reflection of its vanity

too long we have journeyed along the borders of caanan
when just across the river stands the garden we have never truly left

for it is easier to stray within the kingdom of desire
than it is to stand upon the cliff and turn all over to the winds of love

so lift your soul upon the currents of that warm breeze
where you will soar toward the light that is our true home

upon the wings of the precious gift of flight

Cain and Abel

oh my brother
the flocks are bedded down for the evening,
the purple fingers of twilight caress across the fields,
the fire has been stoked and our cups are filled,
come talk to me for a moment while we pretend
that we are once again children who are concerned
yet unworried about the effects of the world upon our lives

for too long our differences have stood as a wailing wall
between us who are of the same blood,
for too long the bitter words have stuck in our throats
and raised the heat of passion in a line drawn across the sand

but perhaps that is to be expected when one perceives
a slight given by a father as favoritism to another
and we know full well that mankind searches for an excuse
through us to justify the sins they lay upon the world

i think often of our parents who were set free
by the doom of the knowledge of the consequence of their actions
and of the recognition that perhaps the memory of life
without shame was the only thing that ever separated them from us

i remember them as giants who strode across my universe,
now they seem much smaller yet in possession of a wisdom
that can only be branded on the heart through the acceptance
of the guilt and defeats that life has to offer,
for though i know that they are made of clay
i love them almost as gods who breathed life into my body

however, my brother, for tonight let such things pass,
the fire crackles with laughter and warms
the cold corners of a soul that is weary
from the battles that waged between us

i lean forward to kiss your forehead
so i may forget for an instant the mark that burns upon mine
as i watch my fingers tremble when they stretch to close the eyelids
that stare deep into some tomorrow that i cannot see

soon i will wrap myself in a blanket and lay beside you
who are the only the one who ever knew or understood
just how my angry silence could have driven me to this moment

tonight i will watch the stars for both of us

in the morning i shall be gone

My Name Is Ishmael

my name is ishmael
i come from the desert
where i was abandoned with my mother
by a man whose face i no longer remember
although the defeat shouldered on his back
as he walked away will never leave my mind

my name is ishmael
i come from the desert
where i lay under a bush with no food or water
while the sun burnt through like fire and beneath
the concerned touch of my mother's hand
i fell into a long dream

where i gazed at the stories that unfolded
about three strands that twisted into the same rope
so that only those of each thread
could ever tell any disparity between them

the blood of sacrifice broke the seal
when the knife was stayed for the sake of the child
at the time the lamb appeared to take his place
in a land where man had eaten from the tree of life
and no one was sure if the serpent
was banished for eternity or had become
the guardian of the gate

the mark of cain stained the land
as one man fell by the road blinded for the lack of faith
and a king was punished for lusting another's wife
and a woman danced for a prophet's head
and trumpets brought down the walls of a city
and words on clay tablets too wise for men were broken in despair

i walked the streets of the city of seven hills
as i watched the beast uncaged and the pale rider
thunder forth while the pharisees prayed
in the temple hopeful the audience
that viewed them would accept a destiny
where a brother could steal the birthright of another

then although the bush still burned the air grew cool
and before me i beheld an angel terrible radiant beautiful
who spoke softly that we were safe and i felt
the water of life touch my lips with the sweet taste of faith

the angel said "one day the loss shall be lifted
from the shoulders of your father
and together you will offer hope
to the generations like many rivers
diverging as one until they meet the sea"

he slowly faded from our sight as we arose
and journeyed on into the story of our lives
which is still being written at this moment
when i gaze upon a new sunrise and tell you

my name is ishmael
i come from the desert

We Are Told That Logic

we are told that logic is limited
since like any other belief system it is enclosed
within the confines of its own creation and cannot comprehend
things that lay outside the bounds
of that self sacred realm

this offers me little comfort
when tortured by the self-righteous
who profess to hold the keys to the kingdom of truth

yet even from the rack i shall sound
unto the stars that the earth is not flat
and that no matter what they proclaim
the universe will forever

revolve around you

Sturdy The Hands I Watch

sturdy the hands i watch
which hold the pole
sturdy the hands i watch
which hold the pole that dips the water
sturdy the hands i watch
which hold the pole that dips the water
to carry me across to the land of shadows

to carry me across to the land of shadows
where i taste the hopelessness upon my soul
where i taste the despair before my eyes
where i taste the voices that cry and lament
before the wall stained with the tears of eternity
where i taste the hopelessness upon my soul
while sturdy the hands i watch
that carry me across to the land of shadows

where tonight there remains but one story
where tonight there remains but one story branded upon the spirit
as heavy as the wind and as light as stone
where tonight there remains but one story branded upon the spirit
that is chapped and blistered with the sadness and resignation
that surrounds the land of shadows

where tonight there remains but one story branded upon the spirit
of legend fading to myth
of myth alluding to allegory
of allegory merging with metaphor
to paint a canvas written in blood across the doorways
lest the angel of death appears to demand justice
for those within the land of shadows

where tonight there remains but one story branded upon the spirit
while the sturdy hands i watch which hold the pole that dips the water
to carry me across to the land of shadows

The Eve Of War

a lone crumpled sheet of paper

(perhaps a shopping list
or the reminder of a chore,
possibly a lovelorn note
or some verse best left to silence)

caressed by the fingers of a cold wind
tumbles with the dust
across the darkened road

teeters on the edge of sight

and is gone

The Flood

the rains recede from my soul
the clouds slowly part from my mind
the sun shines warm upon my face
like an old friend whose name i nearly forgot

i await quietly

in the distance a small shadow takes form

it is a dove

i can only hope that it carries
some harbinger of land

Halo Around The Moon (Sangsar)

I am searching and searching to find...constant reminder of-where do I belong to! why can I not find a common ground with those in power? Why I do not understand the language they speak, the ideology they believe in and the life they live? Their belief is covered with thick black ice and I'm a tiny little one- melting away! They know they are the superior race! They have enslaved me... with the direct connection to their God/s! And they make me feel ugly to my bones. And to them...I am a whore... walking in the streets of my life. ...they don't care...But they have their Iran and I Have Mine! – Sheema Kalbasi

you come from the earth and carry countless names
upon your journey that has moved your steps
through many times and many lands
through the voyages of the spirit
through this quest where sometimes you wonder
if exile will be the only home you will ever know

you come from the earth and carry countless dreams
upon your journey that has moved your steps
through many emotions and many lands
through the journeys of the heart
through this quest where sometimes you wonder
if exile will be the only words you will ever write

the faces draw near stones in hand
surround you encircle you
a hive of swarming angry bees
that attempt to drown your voice
that attempt to blanket you with their oppression

an attempt

that will always fail

for beyond the stones you glimpse the eclipse
of the halo around the moon
and in the silver glow of its light
the rose will always bloom

and each step upon your journey of many steps
will bring you closer

to that place within your heart

which is your true home

Within The Heart Exists A Shadow

within the heart of everyone there exists a shadow
that covers with somber smoke the radiance of the rose
and bleeds the laughter from the song and rhythm of the soul

within the mind of everyone there exists a darkness
that steals the illumination from the lips and breath
and makes one ask if perhaps the only answer is death

to liberate the heart from the exile of the shadow

The End Of History

god gives us only so many words in life
and we must choose how we use them wisely
said the prophet as he viewed the warnings
that flamed on the wall before the face of the king

you can place me in the pit with the lion
or turn me to a pillar of salt when i gaze
upon the cities you deem wicked enough to devastate
but my voice shall shine from the mountain
and though the tablets may be destroyed
wise words will always crush the golden idols you create

the end of history is but a moment where we reflect
the tomb before we rejoin the ocean and sail way

to view once more the promised land