

The Collected Poems
of Jared Smith

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Jared Smith

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Not the Lone Ranger's Horse

I am the dark horse
you ride the fields of evening with,
but my eyes cannot see beyond the wood frame of this stall.
You have walked away
after pressing grains of the field to my mouth
and having pressed the scent of your flesh into my memory.
You have walked into the shadows beyond my harness
and left me to carry the night on my shoulders,
left me to support your world on my too-thin legs,
standing here wide-eyed at distant sounds while you sleep.

Master, I am alone
bearing myself with dignity
on cold days when you do not come.
The dark earth calls to me of roots and of seeds
growing from last year's graves and bearing fruit,
and you parcel that out to me touched with your flesh...
For that I carry you over the evening fields,
but I would have carried you far away, so far from where you want to be
had you not closed me deep into this stall.

Eyes,

What have you done with the lakeshores
I have fished along each spring among the tall grasses
speckled with goldenrod and fiery purple loosestrife,
tinged with sunset swallowtail butterflies
 hastening each to each?

Wherever you have stored this
it is inside a hollow skull. Your hollow centers tell me this,
your round portals of hope leading into despair.
Yet the halos of tiger's-eye that border you
reflect the fringes of meadows that are always with you.

Why have I carried these vacant spaces with me
to fill them and carry them on mile beyond year if only to leave them here,
having no bottom and containing nothing or everything?
Why have you swept the horizons and stared into star-filled nights
and sought the inky darkness of words on pages written by the dead
if you are going to filter them into a bony bowl to be left behind?

Evening, Yes, but a Man Is Still a Man

When shadows grow from Chicago's alleys
and rattle garbage can lids with gusts of wind
that come in across the heartland,
an old man's attention flickers like a cigarette lighter.
He stubs the morning's sales beneath a worn boot heel,
and looks to stars that have not been seen for generations.
Babies are hung out to dry from fire escapes.
A truck becomes a German steelworkers' family
clearing their throats outside a vacant echoing oven in Detroit.
A broken hydrant leaks into the gutter, becomes a flood,
washes years from a plot where the pavement ends.

The man is a newspaper soaked into his own days,
where one page becomes glued onto another indelible
and indistinguishable from the stench of drunken nights.
The bottle to his lips has no name but darkness,
though it was filled from grains growing beneath the sun.
Call him stockbroker, and he will sell you a steer
with a wooden mallet buried between its eyes,
and he will follow you from city to city across our nation
offering up his family on every empty plate you come to.
Call him a tradesman, and he will trade every iron worker
for one closed out steel mill and a teenage soldier.
Tell him he is a product of the Rust Belt
and the infrastructure of every city will come uncoupled.

Do not try to sing his song on the radio.
Hunt for it instead in the loves he has left behind him.
Do not try to tell him what his interests are:
they can no longer be recognized for what they were.
Do not try to buy his wages or his time:
his is the Midwest voice newscasters dream of catching.
Tell him you're from Wall Street and you can offer a better living.
Tell him that, and he'll brick you in.

This Poem

What can you write that cannot be photographed?

I want *this* poem to go along the parallel lines of force
you have carried from the factory floor in your eyes on leaving work,
the heavy beams that shape everything you see sitting here
reading these words and adding to them the images you've seen.
I would have the images of the signal fires of forgotten cities find fire
and reflect along the linear tunnels of time inside your mind and meld
with the lovers lost, the songs sung, the dreams dragged to dust,
because they too are singing the songs of you across all time
and this is bigger than we have known since data shrank itself to data.
Volumes of Homer, Shakespeare, Archimedes, Einstein, and Plotinus
and grunting guttural lovings and semen in the night are not data dots.

I want this poem to flicker in the electromagnetic spectrum of your mind,
reaching across our darkness like a candle in a sawdust barroom inside
a plastic globe encasing a flame that reflects only from your eyes and
then goes out across the universe as light rays do in never-ending time,
without echo, without ever coming back, but leaving a trail to follow
 between stars;

I want this poem to be of many facets that flicker unexpectedly in the mundane.
I want its awkwardness to jangle in your pockets so that you pull it out
and think about the twisted pieces of metal and see how they light up the dark...
this to be human thought expanding for eternity even as the insentient objects
of our first being in the Big Boom expanded across electromagnetic boundaries
with echoes still seen that have meaning far beyond our understanding.