

This Ain't Wonderland

I was expecting
to chase a late, white rabbit
into its burrow
and through a wild adventure,
but didn't realize
I had to find my own.

I was expecting
a caterpillar with a bong
who mumbled cryptic sayings
fortune cookies would be envious of,
but didn't realize
I should listen better.

I was expecting
to eat myself small
and drink myself huge
but didn't realize
I was already just the right size.

I was expecting
to paint roses
but didn't realize
I had been for quite a while.

I was expecting
to lose spectacularly
in a passionate game of croquet
with hedgehogs as balls,
but didn't realize
my flamingo isn't so difficult to manage.

I was expecting
to worry about

keeping my head on,
but didn't realize
loosing it might behoove me.

I was expecting
To one day ponder
(though not in a very hopeful tone)
my future life as a Duke,
but didn't realize
Knave have much more fun.

I was expecting
to be oddly disconcerted
by the troubling grin
of a Cheshire cat,
but didn't realize
how many times I had already seen it.

I was expecting
to have to run
from a terribly frightening,
steam-billowing-from-the-ears,
furious-red-the-color-of-consuming-embers-eyed
Jabberwocky,
but didn't realize
I had already faced him.

I was expecting
Alice to be bold, brilliant, and beautiful,
but didn't realize
she doesn't care as much about adventure
as she's supposed to.

I was expecting a lot,
I guess,
but didn't realize
this ain't Wonderland.

Eventually the you

I write to
And about
Will be someone.
Eventually, my lady, you
Will have a
Name,
A personality,
A face.
Eventually I will know
Just who you are,
You, about whom I have
Wondered for years.
Eventually I will not
Have to settle for a
Good time.
Eventually I will
Find you,
Know you when I
See you,
Hear you,
When your soft, light
Footsteps
Finally echo from my
Dreams to my floor.
Thank God I'm
Patient.

A New Drink

It's noisy here, slurred thoughts, staggering speech;
A glass flows past me with the surest head in the place,
Leaving a trail of tears behind it, like the wood's crying.
There is no tear in my beer; it's a dry martini,
Shaken-not-stirred because I had to order that just once.
But it didn't make me feel like a super-gentleman,
And the mirror didn't change at all.

Maybe I need a new drink.
A cup of tears, a glass of fears,
To weep one by one,
Because my old ones are almost done.

The jukebox is so loud no one in the place can understand it,
And no one pays attention to the muted television.
Conversations are rampant, though there aren't any topics;
Just stray words spilled, god forbid on someone's pants.
Laughs last so long their owners forget what was so funny,
Giving way to easier smiles;
Big, semi-coherent grins like Alice found so disturbing;
Maybe she just needed to loosen up.

The bartender is a big guy with arms as big around as my legs,
He's quick when he has to show someone the door.
It's big and solid and the only entrance around;
I'm not sure how anyone could miss it in the first place.
They rumble and stumble against each other;
Inevitably some asshole decides no, that wasn't an accident.
You got a death wish, man, me and my guys, you know,
We can take you out,
Unless, of course, you want to order me a new drink.

They just want to escape the hard stuff and the mixed,
Something safe to take their minds off it all.
Sometimes they find it, but everyone come back for more,
Because it's too hard to face it sober and clean and rational.

I hope we get out of here, but we all need one for the road,
Because it's long and winding and badly paved and we have
enough trouble walking as it is.

For What It's Worth

Oh, you're so cool with your tambourine haircuts,
And you're so lovely with your foresty eyes.
You're serene as the breeze off the waves of the ocean,
And I could follow you like a star in new winter's sky.
So guide me on, dear lady of mine
Straight on to the light of a newcomin' dawn.
And when I get there I will offer it to you,
Whatever you ask, just don't lead me on.
'Cause you've taken my dreams and you've given them
meaning,
And you've taken my soul and you've given it hope.
So now will you take all of my love,
And will you do with it whatever you want,
For what it's worth?
'Cause it ain't worth nothing if you're not receiving it,
So please won't you take it and simple my life?
Take my words and my gift and my every meaning
Take my head and my hands and the work they might do.
Take my eyes and ears if they can't see or hear you
Take my tongue and my lips if they can't taste or kiss you.
Take my hope and my joy 'cause without you they're nothing,
Take my magic away 'cause without you it won't work.
Take my wish and my life if they can't be for you
And take my self and my faith if they can't be in you.
But mostly just take all of my love
And you can have everything else I can give,
And you can do whatever you want,
For what it's worth.

Factory Life

I live
in a sheet-metal working facility.
The light is canned,
fluorescently glaring down on me
as if in judgment
by some industrial being.

All day and all night long,
I place tiny metal beads
in tiny metal clamps
and measure them
precisely,
adjusting them if necessary,
all the while knowing that should I
miscalculate,
people will die.
Even though they always have,
and do,
and will.

My coworkers continuously talk to me.
I try not to let myself get distracted
from these tiny steel beads,
but it is difficult;
whispers in my ear,
and their voices itch
like wool in my brain,
but I can't scratch it.
They shout, sometimes, too,
loud, discordant voices like metal scraping metal,
hard, sharp angles in my ears.

Sparks fly
every which way
and blaze brilliant-orange-golden
before burning themselves out in the air.

Sometimes
I feel as if someone
has struck me on the head
with a large rubber mallet,
and a blinding flash jolts me
from my small, chrome stool
with the worn polyester top.
I look around
as I rub my face
because it feels like
egg yolk is running down my cheeks,
but my hands are always clean.

I worry
about the water here.
They have coolers into which
snake white lines from the walls.
Who knows what venom they inject?
Everyone drinks it
except me,
and I wonder if they know,
if they suspect
that I know
their suspicions.

Sometimes
men in white coats come
and smile,
ask me questions.
How am I?
How do I feel?
Is today better than yesterday?

They give me
tiny, circular, yellow tablets
that dissolve on my tongue,
and then they leave me,
and I feel as if
I am wearing a new safety mask
to protect me from the sparks
and the laughter
and the voices
and the water,
but I can only see the world
through the tiny,
grey,
scratched
lens.

Inspiration Point

The town spreads out below us, looks up to us, admires,
Wishing that it could be where we are for a moment.
We're on top of the world, blessed in our youth;
We'd better enjoy our positions while we can.
The stars look down on us without our condescension;
They all wonder what happened to God.
They see what we have done and are doing
But never realize that we can change.

The moon shines down on us its scornful eye;
We are uncomfortable though others are less moral.
It is only half there, but where the rest is I cannot say.
Perhaps it is with God, waning philosophic.
The wind moans against wood and our flesh,
The same sweet nothings we whispered earlier.
And when it howls like fury through the darkness,
It almost seems like it knows how we feel.

Moisture like morning dew beads blades of grass;
Tiny, clear jewels of dripping condensation.
The whole world smells primal and visceral,
And it glistens in what little light there is here.
There are sounds all around us, some loud and some not,
From furtive, unknown sources in the darkness.
They seem to be everywhere at once and yet nowhere at all,
And isn't that exactly how we are sometimes?

There is night all around us, overhead, up above,
Silk and satin and dark to the touch.
It is almost oppressive but somehow refrains;
It shows more restraint than we did, earlier.

And so we stare down at the town with a smirk on our lips,
And look up at the stars and feel less than we are.
We throw an 'up yours' in a scream at the moon,
And whisper nothing in reply to the wind.
We let the moisture bead and then drip off our skin,
And the sounds gradually become unnerving.
But we live this night, my lady, on Inspiration Point,
Despite darkness' trying to steal the only one we've got.

Deserted

I.

The desert
is all you can see.
Monochromatic, golden-brilliant;
the sun glares down on you so hard
your whole body squints.

You don't remember how long you've been out here.
Your skin has leathered.
Your bones form odd angles and crevices beneath it.
It hurts to breathe.
The acrid air burns your lungs.

You mutter to yourself
under your breath.
You may be the only person
who has ever heard your voice.

Your lips are chapped,
cracked,
broken and bled and scabbed over.
You would cry if you could remember
what moisture was.

You shuffle-shamble along.
Sometimes a burst of energy makes you sprint;
most times you are deliberate and going is slow.
Eventually you stop,
thinking you cannot go on.
But there is still much to say,
and so,

unable to find a stick with which to trace in the sand,
you gnaw into your wrist,
letting your blood.
You stain the world.
Whorls and swirls and symbols,
and you write:

II.
In the beginning,
because that's when the words started.

In the beginning,
before the dryness and the brightness and the sand.

In the beginning was the word,
and with it you create the world.
You populate it with your thoughts and your dreams.
You create your gods to protect yourself;
you create love to save yourself;
you create madness in which to seek sanctuary;
you create cities of gold and jewels,
underwater,
because your dreams remain thirsty.
You create the universe
in your eyes
which,
if you are lucky, and good,
no longer remember your image.

In the beginning,
and on and on and on.
Stars explode in lonely distances you'll never know;
civilizations thrive and prosper
and are conquered.
People live and die and curse and fuck,
in the beginning,
and eventually,

if you are lucky, and good,
the coyotes come out.

III.

Servants of a trickster god,
they see into your dreams because they are part of them.
They wish to be shared.
And so they give you tools.

They offer you a pen,
which you take,
in exchange for what you are not certain.

They offer you a voice,
which you accept,
and use to ask for
water.

And help.
And salvation.
And redemption.
And a chance.

And they give it to you.

IV.

With your pen,
you record your new stentorian voice.
You speak with authority and conviction.
People hear you.

Your voice carries farther than you had expected.
Sometimes
it says things you did not expect it to.
Some of the time, you regret that.

Your voice carries you to new places that are not the desert.
Places in which water falls from the sky

like a miracle.

Places where you meet other people who feel the same
emotions as you,
Who see the same world and work with hands like yours,
and so,
when you see a mirror,
you are surprised you do not look like everyone else.

When you see the ocean for the first time,
you cry tears in waves;
it all tastes the same.

V.

You are able to exchange your words
for currency in this different place.
This world of skyscraped clouds,
of hurrying,
of hummingbirds, whose wings blur,
whose hearts beat so fast
just thinking about it makes yours want to burst.

With their long beaks,
they seek single drops of nectar
for sustenance.

And you look out your window
to the city beyond its pane.
The sirens.
The brilliant lights,
the lovers of the night
and the traders of the day.
Cars and engines belch their fumes into the acrid air,
which burns your lungs.
You can't drink water from the faucet
because it is treated with chemicals
whose names you cannot pronounce.

You lose track of the time,
as you stare out that window,

And you think about
and dream about
and write about

the desert.

VI.
And so,
finished,
blood let and soul exhausted,
you collapse to sleep,
at peace,
deserted.