

Paul T. Hogan

Clearing the Last Path
For Sean

He talks aloud suddenly about things
Dreams tell him will clear the path
For him to die. My sister hears
His dreams, resigned, contrite
As confessions and stops
Herself from stopping him.
He feels a strengthening of some kind
From speaking them. Not of body,
But ... something. The uselessness
Of regrets, all of which flow by
Like landscapes out car windows:
Just fast enough to miss the details
And not care. He feels he's being given
Something, an offering in quiet space
Directions from a stranger to a stranger
But whether he chooses to take them
Or not, his path, he whispers to my sister,
Is that way, and soon
He will be strong enough to go.

Birdsong Notes

About writing, she'd been peculiar. Like she'd thought she'd had a curse, as near as I could figure. I'd start to write something down, and her eyes would start to bug. She'd start to humming, not too loud. Rock a bit in place. She wouldn't watch directly, but more like cats do: sideways, looking off in different directions, and then that sudden, direct stare, like a pounce is coming. Then off again. All I'd ever got from her was once when she'd said words written down were killed, and their poison could puff up like mushroom dust, at the slightest touch of curiosity. Mind you, she wasn't crazy. Or not so much. She'd claimed she wrote a lot, once.

The most sense she'd made of it was to ask once whether I'd ever write down the notes of birds' songs. Did I know what then? What would happen? I'd said they sound the same to me. Most mornings anyway. She'd looked at me long, like hearing someone else, or trying to decipher. If that were so, she'd whispered, then there'd be no need.

Bang Out

I wake up thinking urgently
I must begin to lie, to bend
the truth in much the way
gravity bends light
around thick planets. It no longer
seems to be an option even though a fiction,
like the truth, will weigh no more than light.
My stories, in one impossible flash, have
outrun their courses, and I tinker manically
at edges of random explications
that should be set as stone.

Why it should be this morning
isn't clear to me. But a wholesale change
seems warranted given
the level of alarm. What I say of me
must be rewritten. Not just
revised. An astronomical shift.
Others who have noted me
for years log this new anomaly, testing
how weights of random words distort
around me. They're conferencing
on where this all is going as suddenly opposed
to where they've always plotted it,
where I've always indicated,
and the only proof I see to offer
is to pack a single lie
incendiary enough
to bang out a new universe.

Groupdream

Always was the vision of people looking back
Over their shoulders, faces half-lit by whatever
Light, fire or moon, to see if I'd moved closer yet
Into the group of them, their smells and songs,
To see if I would make some sort of declaration
I belonged or didn't or gave a damn at all. I'd read it
In the way they narrowed their eyes, even as they
Spoke or sang or spit. If you're not in you're out.
It was harsh and I stood distant – not so far I couldn't
Feel the throats and bones of all of them rumble –
Knowing that the purpose was a tuning, getting
Every voice and soul at one clear pitch and no room
For ragged edges. My distance was a pebble in the pond
Of them, a nick in the weave of the fabric. But
I was resolute, finding the quarter-pitch higher
Or below, convinced it was keeping them safe, holding
Them here, rather than – at a certain single note – letting
Them vanish, gone with the smoke and the sparks snapping
Out of the fire.

Damn Stone Bones

-- For Manny Fried, Among Others

A man made of stone wanted to help fix things.
He was made of stone but he wasn't a giant
but he had the biggest damn hands. He wasn't sure
exactly what he wanted to fix, because he didn't care much
anymore about himself. He knew he was stone and he had
damn big hands. He knew things needed fixing. As he moved
around, people backed away. They saw his damn big stone hands
and didn't reach out to him. They didn't run but they stood
aside. They weren't sure what he could fix of the things that needed
fixing, except for the things that needed breaking before
they could be fixed. Sometimes that happened – things got to a point
where only a stone man with damn big hands who could knock things
apart could help. So to do what he wanted – fix things – he had to break
them. And then he had to leave because breaking things made people
who weren't made of stone angry. But he was stone and he had
big damn hands and he fixed things that way. And thought
this is purpose and he must be content.