

Joe Milford

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i remember when seeing you come out of the bedroom with just my button-up was oasis enough.
later dipped that shirt into kerosene and made a Molotov cocktail and threw it at the church of us.
like when one day discover a colony of millions of daddy-long-legs on the backside of the shed.
when you had to cut the hanging and choking kitten out of the kid's soccer net with pocketknife.
as in when armadillos set up shop under the porch and you worried about their myriad diseases.
the home is never sterile. it is vermin, asphyxiation, pestilence. it is all necessary. it is love won.
it is flu, thrush, insomnia, pinkeye, croup, colic. it's blanket, fireplace, stew, mousetrap, poultice.
Solon, the exiled: "Call no man happy until he is dead; until then, he is just lucky." supposedly.
the desert is sterile. Aeolian processes strip everything of its soft flesh. the wind-keeper reaps.
pull the shawl across your mouth, the sheets up as far as they will go. you are the estranged one.

you want to feel sunlight on your face. you see the dustclouds disappear without a trace. you too.
that first day when you do leave the room as the silent brown ladies make no eye contact. ioam.
that first day you leave the room and the street is different for some reason. new trash in gutters.
the carney gypsies have set up the rides in the dirtmall parking lot. you need to explore this city.
Barnum once said that "Clowns are the pegs upon which the circus is hung". right at home now.
the fire ants are in ecstasy today. the crows in ecstasy today. shining cockroaches are teeming.
your life a fugazi. your life Catch-22. your life an epic clusterfuck. your life a bohica fubar snafu.
remember the sandbox at Papa Joe's as a child? grown-ass-man, look at this dire quarry of yours.
you will go back to the room to clean towels & sheets, clean carpets. TOTAL RESET BUTTON.
but the mustard stain on your shirt, the beer in your veins, and the prize you won are so vibrant.

first time we had sex, you were pregnant with another man's child. we started & ended as dogs.
if that was how honest we were, gods can only fathom the secrets we had. curved as scimitars.
generic sheet slides under the door at 4am. it's time for me to get out. bill like a crooked smile.
i was out of shekels & the wheels and rims were off my chariot anyway. let her sell it for parts. then the
greatest moment of pleasure in weeks. packing my bags. minimizing. new inventories.
all women around you smell this on you. some of them, it disgusts. some worrying. all moms.
remember our daughter was born they asked us to freeze her stem cells to save our lives later?
C.D. Wright called poetry "an ever-shrinking arena for cultural conflict". snowglobes shattered.
my mind then, in the sun at the Best Western lot. like breaking seals. like unbuttoning her blouse.
a mangy skinny dog sauntered by the McDonald's drive-thru line and a douchebag cussed her.

“Myths always condemned those who ‘looked back’...no matter the Paradise they were leaving.”
waiting to see if your credit is good enough for the lease. waiting to see if you can book passage.
memes haunt you about loser-hood. people howl at you from pick-up trucks. own your privilege.
as Scylla devoured his men, Odysseus said it was the most pitiable sight he ever saw on the seas.
like when they told you to get married. like when they told you to be a teacher. then, years later.
knowing this could not be his apotheosis. imagining pyramids only and always from the bottom.
the Chusan Palm. the Windmill Palm. introduced from China. fanned leaves. hardiest of palms.
as the divorce led him from the forest of pines to the palms of the desert. as the ink kept drying.
the Milky Way rotating with billions of other galaxies around the Charybdis of giant black hole.
he was not leaving Paradise he was not seeking Paradise he was gouging the eyes of Paradise.

met a homeless man while city walking. he was holding a King James Bible. it was nailed shut.
seagulls flying over the Kentucky Fried grease franchise just ten miles south of Atlanta airport.
one way to look at the chasing of wyrms is the attempt of a man to follow life to water sources.
to even read the story of the Jabberwock, one's world has to be inverted. mirrored languages.
the desert contains borogroves, raths, bandersnatches, and jubjub birds. glass teeth and talons.
tomorrow, I am going to take a clawhammer, find Jerome, and pull those nails out of his book.
shooting out online job applications like flung black arrows in pitch dark night battle. sad sorties.
patch of woods behind liquor store. trail cuts through to neighborhood. paved by cans, bottles.
there is an oasis in this ghetto, barrio, shanty meth and crack town. Shannon Bend apartments.
the nails that crucified that Bible are in my pocket. there was no fuss about it. all parties in peace.