

*Cleaning The Mirror:*  
*Selected And New Poems*

Joel Chace

**BlazeVOX** [books]

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## Paper World

Each day a newspaper came:  
almost always in the evening; not too thick;  
nothing special.

But Sunday mornings  
the father left and returned bearing a hefty bundle.  
The children said, *The papers are here.*  
The father glowed and said he was carrying *the world in a packet.*

Sitting on the parlor rug, the young ones smiled and waited.  
Politely, happily, the parents divided the pile between themselves;  
each with favorite sections sank into a chair  
and began.

Soon the air crackled;  
the rustling and snapping of paper was music;  
everyone's heart warmed and glided on its waves:  
the children tingling and swaying on the floor were one land;  
the parents entranced behind the travel guide, the book review,  
were another land;

the spirit of joy, the rustling, the whispering, almost a voice singing,  
 moved on the waters washing the two shores, joining the two lands.

But the same waters that join forever, divide forever.

The young ones fixed their eyes on the walls of print stretched above  
 them

and on the knuckles and knees of their parents.

The young ones waited for the next moment  
 when from their separate, unknowing rapture  
 their parents, unknowing, would send them ecstasies, gifts,  
 when the first sheet, the first piece of the packet  
 would be flung above their heads,  
 discarded, set free and drifting; the mother, the father moving  
 through the packet,  
 the paper world.

Down around the children then the remnants came, the rustling

clouds settled:

the pieces of Broadway and just off; of Popeye; of Wall Street's  
 trend;

of two weeks on Crete for two; of one whole week in review;

of flowers that won in Central Park; of the book  
that won flowers in Sweden; of white,  
white underwear on lovely women—  
the pieces settled, and where they came to rest they stayed;  
the shapes they fell to were the shapes they kept.  
They became a gay, crazy city of tents in a desert.  
And inside the children lived  
and moved not as men and women move down Wall Street,  
Broadway,  
or a road lined with flowers on Crete;  
not as men and women move in underwear or sneakers;  
not as mice move under the cupboards and stoves of men and  
women,  
in their world within the world of men and women;  
not even as the small, invisible people move in their world,  
the world they share with the mice, between the legs,  
around the corners, under the books and papers of men and women.  
  
The children moved on their own voices, moved as moving water  
speaks,  
  
as light falls suddenly on the face of water.  
  
Cross-legged, they continued to sit in their world, speaking, making

stories;

each child, each with its own separate name, each child made a story.

And not by turning to the speaker, not by fixing on the speaker's

eyes or mouth

did the young ones cease being separate,

but by listening and looking outward

as old people speaking memories will look not at one another but at

an evening

sky;

and in the words, in the story, the life of the one speaking goes out

against the

sky,

becomes visible against that great screen;

and in their listening the lives of the listeners go out to meet those

words,

and when the speaking is done, the lives, now joined, mingled, come

back, all into each one.

## Falling Waitress

“And it came to pass, when they had brought them forth abroad, that he said, Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountains, lest thou be consumed.”

--Genesis 19:17

The eye of day, or else  
 the true salt of the earth,  
 one flight above the rathskeller,  
 Daisy, Daisy,  
 sacking, naked, plump, though  
 pleasingly,  
 BEE-YOU-TEE-FUL,  
 some men have said.  
 Pink on five strong gins,  
 hip and hardened bird dived down  
 into her last dive and gig, salt  
 on the old tail,  
 galley-west and crooked in bed,  
 pulse quick-popping in her neck,  
 the only movement in the room.

She dreams

of turning the goddamn tables  
on everyone.

Yes, stop  
the hangings and fryings for awhile;  
hold off on the next hot war; sit her  
down to feast; let the kingpins and top-sawyers  
keep up with her tintinnabulum.

But  
she stirs  
although she is changing to stone,  
to a salt pillar from turning,  
from looking too sadly back.

She thought  
the gash, once opened,  
would never dry and heal,  
once opened, for she did stew, unhandled,  
year after year, yet waited, seemly,

without pedaling, without groping beneath her bed-gown.

Queenly patience got the prize: a burning constant.

For thirty years she's said it was always good,  
even if everything else was shot to hell.

If she were only so noble now  
in her waiting, poor Daisy, so willing  
to let go now, poor Daisy,  
she would not be judged  
or hurt so.

No denying the hurt.

In the hierarchy of pain—  
the broken soldier's agony, the land  
overrun by soldiers, the cruciation  
of the self-adjusting age, the anguish  
of the father for the irretrievable daughter—  
in the hierarchy of pain,  
the hard slap of the cheek  
against the pothouse floor,  
the smart a drunken waitress feels

is not last.

But back;

it is she who chooses to turn back  
and back.

“Mama. Papa.

I’ve not been your girlie for some time past,  
but look what I’ve been given now  
to bear alone. You would not have approved  
of the past thirty years, if you had known me;  
but you would not even have known me,  
the woman about me—the girl away,  
taken away; and now the woman taken away.  
I am becoming twice removed from you.”

Poor Daisy, on the edge of the bed,  
in her satin robe.

“Satin, satin:

the lying, lightly, the light  
little rubbing between these massive thighs.  
Gawd. Satin: the soft tickling.

Gawd. This satin robe is all, it seems,

I ever will remember of womanhood.

Gawd, it's all imponderable.

'Doll.' they said. "Doll,' they said. 'Doll.'

And now they say, 'It's gaudy;

you're too old, and it looks gaudy.'

Gawd, do they have the nerve.

Gaudy. Gaudy. Lawd. Lawd gawd.

It's imponderable. So lightly down,

down lightly the gin, my sixth or seventh.

I may drift away. Away or back aways

I'd cast my eye, and go. I would like to go

before I drop like a stone. Away

or back aways. Because I burned,

I mean I really *burned* for thirty years."

I know,

Daisy, I know. Five years, right?

Give yourself five years, right? At forty-five

you were beyond belief?

“That’s right! You’re right!”

At forty you were almost too much to handle?

“That’s right!”

And at thirty  
you could have taken anyone on?

“You better believe it!”

And at twenty,  
well, you were twenty, and you could do it  
twenty times a day?

“Surely seemed like it!”

Okay,

tell me you were hot when you were ten!

I want to hear *that!*

“No.

I think I was an angel then.

I was somebody's daughter.

Back away

I'd cast my eye, a good one yet, my eye.

I am the heart of the rathskeller.

Aye, and my heart is a lidless eye

that misses nothing, taking everything in

like an amoeba. It jerks

so often lately with the 'ai!' of pain."

But

not the pain of any multitude, poor Daisy,

and not the pain of the revelers' heart. Fie!

How wretched and bawdy, singing, "We drink,

we eat, we surfeit, we curse, we play, we dance, we whore,"

faster in limbo than ever. Such reproach

is wasted, while poor Daisy must beware  
the narrowed charge, the more profound indictment,  
the loud FIE, the FIE in the sky,  
signaling her utter, so unspectacular destruction,  
leaving all these others  
merely bawdy, merely wretched.

The loud FIE against the I. Only the eye  
will judge; only the I will be judged,  
saved, destroyed for turning back, for ire,  
for regret at the loss of the deep loin-fire.

Fire is known to be fire by the heat.

Fire in the eye, fire in the heart, fire in the loins  
all die, and the dying is the heart  
of this whole matter. The change,  
the letting go and taking on, the taking on,  
the letting go, the dreadful letting go  
is sin's chance and the chance for redemption.

Frailty and instability  
and changeability throw the whole thing  
on her shoulders. Sin is the missed chance  
for those who know the change, who will, who suffer,  
who will begin, who begin, who will not miss  
the change. In her skin's fading

is the snake's hiss, and in the nightly closing  
of one flower is the promised kiss  
of salvation: the whole amazing power.

Poor Daisy. Where she missed, where she turned,  
where she wavered is her pillared self,  
and there, where her stone body is,  
there is no pliability.

There is Daisy,  
on the edge of her bed, pulling on a stocking.  
There her pillared self comes down the stair.

A dim

and endless congress greets her:

“Well,  
look who's here! Stoned! Yeah, she's fried all right!  
Well. She's sure fried! Bah. Well we,  
bah, we, we, bah!”

Out across  
the floor, like a stone  
dropping slowly.

Arousal agoing,  
adying, gone, agone,

agone. Around,  
the anxious soul flitting around,  
for any answer  
at all, a little,  
a little armor  
around. And absolutely  
all voices speaking  
at once  
is the answer,  
or the answer is  
absolute silence.

“Gawd.

I may just drift away.”