

ALL MY PEOPLE ARE ELEGIES

Essays, Prose Poems and Other Epistolary Oddities

by

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Credits and Acknowledgements

Dear Editors of Esteemed and Tiny Journals,

I know how hard you work for nothing but the love of the art, and how underappreciated you often are, so I have attached no poems for submission, thereby saving you the time of reading them, time that could be better spent reading the better poems of others, or spending time with your lover or your children, or simply sitting in the sun and maybe even writing a poem of your own, one I hope will not receive the sadness of the consequent form rejection that you would have sent if I had included my poems, poems that would have kept you from that party you were going to blow off in order to catch up on the hundreds of submissions clogging your In-Box. Now you can take that subway ride, where you can nod your head with your eyes closed and your earplugs on, listening to that obscure composer you love of sonatas for cello and sousaphone. For the world is rather like the bell of a Sousaphone, or is it love that is the bell? The one ringing now in the high cathedral on the far side of town, where there had only been funerals for the last decade. Where the coffins are cloaked with sunflowers. The old Bulgarian women are donning their black netting. Oh Editor, where are the weddings? Who is writing, as Lorca asks, the Baptism of the new? No, my poems are not, they are old as dust, or dirt, or a broom. Too many of us are bothering you. Turn off your computer, dear Editor. There is honey waiting to be spooned in your tea. There is poppyseed cake. Look out the window. There is wild thyme and fennel.

Sincerely,

Dear Editor Sipping Wine the Color of Posh,

I've been worrying about you because I read on your guidelines that you receive over 10,000 submissions. Just reading that made me want to pop a handful of Tylenol PM and then sit in a chair and stare at the light on the wall. It is oddly warm today, is it warm where you are over in the Midwest? I checked the weather channel and I hope you are not in the rain from the leftover hurricane, as if the hurricane is something we could eat with a giant spoon, not the little spoons too many of my dead used to burn with their lighter and keep in a kit they'd hide in a hole in the wall. Oh editor, I sometimes wonder if not all what we write are elegies. The lost psalms I carry inside me. No, but don't worry about that. Let's talk instead about this new bird I heard this morning. It too is another leftover from the October weather who has not flown south yet. I saw it high up in the tree, this small black and red bird who was signing the air with its voice. It rewrote the whole morning into mourning, its light notes so mapped with grief I looked around to see if its mate had fallen prey to some night time tom cat. Let us pray I say, I say it all the time, these days it seems it is all we have left. I look at the empty air between my two hands and can't seem to push them together. The other day my wife saw a white owl fly over her head, it hesitated in the air like a giant moth, before rising with one big flap and disappearing over the power station. She said she couldn't press the gas pedal to go she was so startled. But she did, she drove away. What I am trying to say is the miraculous is like that everywhere, but we cannot keep it, we must leave. There are children waiting to be fed. We have a pork roast to buy, some potatoes. Our bosses are waiting for us to punch in. But editor, dear editor, that great owl is still out there. He is still eyeing the ball field and the grass on the side of the ravines. He is dipping and swooping at night between the power lines of our backyards to eat the rodents. Can you hear the black bird's grieving psalms? Have you turned away from the blue light of your screen? Have you left your office to breathe in the scent of your sleeping child's hair?

Sincerely,

Dear Editor, Who Made the Remarks about Not Wanting Walmart Poems,

The first thing I thought of was writing an Ode to an LOL, these little dolls that come in ovals that you open to find a different one (surprise!) that my six-year-old daughter is obsessed with and that my wife sneaks off to Walmart to find in the check-out line and bring them home and then of course the shouts of utter glee as she unwraps the crinkly cellophane and opens the puzzle-like oval to reveal what is hidden, what doll with a strange name like LIL Yin B B or LIL SHIMONE QUEEN or LIL MISS JIVE this mix of Afrocentric street speak and Chinese Pop combined into a world fusion of childhood rep. What my daughter does then with this piece of pop plasticine is what we could only hope: she imagines, she makes them talk and dance and sing, her tiny choreography and cabaret.

And such is the music we make now in this the 21st century, no different than that we first made with a carved piece of wood, these endless aisles of detritus made by workers and slaves, bought for a handful of shekels or wages earned by long shifts at night, like the ones I work taking care of people whose brains have been injured and their memories need a caretaker to get them through the day, and I think of D, who was once a foreman in a steel shop, calculating cuts on a CNC machine before an aneurism exploded and he had two strokes, and lost his job, and his woman, and his trailer down in a gully where every fall he would go and bow hunt turkey. Now he walks with a limp and one squinted eye, his left arm held up permanently curled and useless close to his chest, he slowly moves nearly hunchbacked with his cane. But D is all there, he can still do his math though his speech is stuttered and his eyes look crazed, he is still there trapped in that broken body, the one that when we go shopping causes strangers to pause and stare, with a tinge of fear, for what is different has always been the human way to suspect, and then to kill, or the way strangers stare at my autistic daughter throwing a fit in the check-out line, the looks and comments people make. This is how it begins. We other them. We say they are imperfect. We say look. The Spectacle of us: the damaged, the disabled, the different. There is always a them, amid the shining aisles of the things we worship we wander, the poor and broken, nodding at each other acknowledging

Dear Editor, Who Said My Poems Were Almost,

My people drink too much. I'm driving and there's my friend Tim headed to the corner store to buy a 12 pack at noon. I stop, I pick him up. He tells a story about his friend Donny fighting cancer. How he could have been a famous rock singer. He says he's going to drink the afternoon away. I let him out as a cop watches us. My people all are elegies. We are on 16th street, where people often stop on corners to buy meth or junk or coerce with prostitutes. There used to be a great old man bar across the street where old men drank slow from opening at 10 AM to close. But then they all died. The bar closed. My wife is often drunk. She hides bottles of Vodka in our daughter's closet. She lies to my face when I ask if she's been drinking. She lies so much I begin to doubt myself and think maybe I've gotten paranoid. Then she feels guilty and confesses and gets clean for a while. My friends close bars like the rich close factories. With each one, a little piece of my people dies. We drink away our mortgage payments and our divorces. We drink for joy after working 10-hour shifts. We drink to forget our foremen. We drink with our foremen to forget our foremen! We drink in giant sippy cups we sip when we drive. Our mothers and our daughters drink. Our sons are doing time for getting caught drinking and then driving into someone's lawn. We drink after crashing the backhoe. There are a thousand bars with our names of our dead scrawled into the counter. We sit at the bar and talk about how so and so was almost famous. The bartender wipes the clouds from the counter and my people lean over to see their blurry faces. My people count out change from change purses to buy 50 cent drafts. My people drink the light from clouds, they drink the dust from fireworks. We drink the dark. We drink well-scrubbed floors. We drink broken axles and Free Enterprise. We spoon honey into our whiskey. We spoon whiskey into our wine. We put spent shotgun shells on our fingers. We drink cesarean scars. There are accordions in our chests we press as we rise in camo hoods. Our hands are covered with engine grease. Someone lights a match, burns a letter denying benefits, the ashes plume into the air like black butterflies above the bar. And what do we do when the rent is due? When we don't have anything left to pawn? We breathe into an empty shot glass. We tell that same story about who could have been if only. Sentences float from our mouths like meth. A dirge of apparitions that were never. My people's almost odes.