

Reflections of an Ordinary Man

- Part I -

A Collection of Poems

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Introduction

What follows does not qualify as an exploration. It is a halting, timorous groping into the unseeable obscurity within a mind, as if apprehensively probing an unknown cave, stiff, jittery fingers alternately stretched out as far as artery and sinew permit in an attempt to discern some forewarning of what may lurk in the darkness and then snatched back to shield the body, detect the invading, gross black creatures that may creep in undetected, and perhaps ward off a fall that the oscillation of your arms may instigate, with steps taken and withdrawn and taken again, each footfall adjusted heel and toe, this way and that, to be as sure as unsureness permits that the next step will not slip away into whatever slimy abyss our imaginations can conjure.

There is a look at the phenomenon of love, the perception of love and the delusions, more illusion than reality, love as discovery and familiarity, uplift and burden. There is no distinction between the fantasy and the reality, nor between the enchantment with the state of “falling in love” and the everyday routine, love driven by passion, love dictated by sound judgment. There is a multilevel experience of this emotion that seems to go beyond the billion-year-old instinct to pass on a genetic code to subsequent generations. Whether this is so, I can’t be sure. I can imagine, though, that while reproductive imperatives underlie most of the phenomenon, largely in ways we don’t articulate to ourselves, we add our own nuances from the stories we write for ourselves. Our real lives, bound in good sense and the inner command for survival, lay out before us a landscape too uninteresting to capture our imaginations.

There is a divergence between men and women as well. That members of one sex do not understand the other is probably true, but the lack of understanding runs the gamut from delusion to bewilderment, as everything else here seems to do.

Another illogical emotion is depression. It, too, bears no relation to reality, and drives us in ways we can’t explain. Since it doesn’t make any sense, we can’t fight our way out with logic (although we will often justify the sensation with argumentation that seems very clear to us at the time.) As with love or the delusion of love the intellect, no matter how well versed in reality and the lack of wisdom of the emotion, can’t regain control; there is no alternative but to seek shelter and weather out the storm, and shield whatever tiny ember hope you can generate, that you survive. That is, unless the torrent overwhelms, and the grip opens, and you allow yourself be borne out into the maelstrom, completely detached from logic and uninterested in the outcome.

This is, perhaps, where we shall begin our passage.

Anomaly

I walk throughout this edifice,
performing my inspection tours,
familiar with each corridor.
(I engineered this building's plan,
and most of it is permanently
etched into my memory,
it's space laid out methodically.
The colors are what you'd expect,
all stable, undisturbing grays,
with blue-gray doors and light gray tiles.
The floors all have a polished gloss,
no carpets here, but shiny tiles.)
The uses of each classroom space,
the start and end of each event,
are posted widely every week.
Each door's numbered sequentially,
and left as it's supposed to be:
wide open when events are planned,
kept closed and locked when not in use.

I think of when I first observed
this one specific door - it was
open just a little bit.
I couldn't quite make out from where
I stood what was inside, and so
I crept up slowly, coming near,
'til I was at the opening.
I didn't touch the shiny knob,
but aligned one eye and peered inside.
I still could not discern the room's
unlit interior, but wait -
what was that silhouetted thing
I thought I barely spied, obscured
in darkness at the other side?
I couldn't make it out. I thought,
"This situation with the rooms
is getting out of our control.
I'll leave a note with maintenance,"
but didn't go in. I walked away.

I think about that room all day.

I turn it over and around.
I try to guess at what's inside.
I can envision tender reds,
bright, cheery blues, and qualities
of solace, softness, warmth and love.
(These are enticing, to be sure;
I must confess I was beguiled...
but all I ever really saw
was shadowed, indistinct, and dark.)
Imagination can play tricks.
I could conclude that this was just
an oversight, anomaly,
in this week's building schedule.
I'll write a new procedure (or
perhaps enforce one of the old.)
But now in this dim morning light
as I pass by that room on rounds,
I can't (or won't?) pull shut that door.

Anomaly II

Do you recall when I told you
about a room with door ajar,
a door I'd neither close nor pass,
past which it was too dark to see?
I'm sure you must remember it;
I was consumed with thoughts of it.
You know, I thought I was a fool
to agonize about it so.
After all, it's just a door.
The room behind it's just a room;
I've seen them many times before.
I made a rare decision, since
(you know how hard that is for me):
I'd march right through that stupid door
and look around. (This probably
seems obvious to you, I guess.)
The next time I walked by that place
the door was closed. I strode to it
and grasped the knob. I tried to twist
its silver ball, I forced it deep

into my palm to no avail;
the rigid bolt held firmly shut.

Curiosity drives me insane.
I should have looked - I'd had the chance!
This thing, this obscure, inane, thought -
which someone else would toss aside
as meaningless, a waste of time,
now infests each waking hour.
At first I'd mused on going in
to see what was inside the room,
then agonized about the act
of opening and entering,
and what I'd find inside that cell.
And now I think of what I could
or should have done, how differently
I'd do things now, and - maybe there
was nothing interesting at all!
What froze my steps, so I'd remain
immersed in murky ignorance?
The dark in the forbidden room,
now lurks in tandem with the gloom
that permeates my brain. Goddamn
my vacillation, hesitance...
Goddamn it all, I'm such a fool.

Revelation

You are the room I was timid to enter.
You are the music I thought I heard.
You are the solace I imagined was there.
Yours is the handle I finally grasped,
but could not rotate to unlock.
Yours is the door that is closed to me,
the mystery I will never know,
the agony of my failure,
the softness I will never touch.
the pain that I will not console.
But even though I'll never enter,
and you will never have me near,
though I'll never learn your secret,

I will always attend to you,
and you will be my muse, my sphinx,
undecipherable, unattainable, and eternal.

Ending

Well, this, I guess, will be the last
imprudent poem I'll write to you.
When I first thought of what I'd write
I thought I'd talk about the shape -
you know, just like the toys they make
for tots, where every piece has its
own shape, and every shape has its
own space, a space uniquely formed,
so that one piece will fit in just
one space and not another one.
Each space is like no other space.
I'd talk about the way you made
a space just for yourself, a space
that no one else will ever fit.
There will be other spaces, true -
pieces to fit, and they'll be fine.
My world will not be empty when
you've gone away, and other parts
will take up spaces in my life.
But there will be that one odd space
which nothing else and no one else
will fit; it will be yours always.

That's what I planned to write about,
But when you talked to me today
you stopped me short, took me aback.
You talked to me as if you could
see right through me, read me clearly.
I thought I had this poker face;
I'd show no more than I would want,
conceal the rest, at least so that
I would not make myself a fool.
But there you were, you read my mind -
no, better yet - you spoke so clearly,
simply, thoughts I didn't

understand myself. I don't know how
you always do that, I guess I shouldn't
be surprised, but I was then,
and must confess I still am now,
but with it all, I feel so calm
(a little dumb, I guess) but calm.
And sad, I guess, that you're away
(I can't say that you're gone)
but sort of happy now, and sure
the story isn't over yet.

Intruder

You're there without warning, with cat-like stealth.
I turn the corner and you appear,
so vivid and compelling but
mere vapor, insubstantial mist.

I don't call on you consciously,
but neither do I turn you out.
I merely think, and you are there,
and you are there in every thought.

I've grown used to seeing life
as through a hologram of you,
diffused, pure light without
solidity. I grasp for you, yet you're untouched.

And though I cannot say that I
compel your presence, surely you
cannot invade my privacy
without my granting some consent.

Now I accept you constant here,
a ghost through which I see the world,
silent but for my recollections
and the words I have you say.

Ask Of Me

What would you ask of me this time?
What would you have me do for you,
what task perform, what chore complete?
What need have you for my poor skills?
What can I do to serve you now?
Don't let it wait, I'll drop my work,
I'll stop my games, just let me know
where and how you want me to be.

What old machine has failed to run?
What curtain doesn't hang just right?
What worn appliance doesn't work
when you turn on the power switch?
What text are you composing now
that needs my careful proofreading,
a little tweak, a truer word
before you show more judging eyes?

What troubles have you had with your
old mother, sister, brother... child?
How may they have mistreated you,
to leave you in this state of mind?
And of your lover, what is new?
How has he failed you in his way,
his thoughtless, coarse, indifference
to the tenderness you need.

I know he's really not that bad,
not really cruel, he tries so hard.
It's just the stress, his work, his boss,
that makes him act on edge sometimes.
Why don't you talk to me about
the things that really trouble you?
Why don't you let me close enough
to see, to touch your weary heart?

Why don't you let me see inside
to get to know the real you,

to see the core of molten pain
that you so poorly veil from me?
Or is it merely my creation,
invention of my straining mind
which wants to look upon your face
with sympathy and touch your heart.

It would be so much easier
to know that you had space for me
inside your heart, your tender warmth,
instead of longing from afar,
gazing upon your distant face,
and see beyond what seems from here,
a frozen core secured behind
a rigid and unyielding sheath.

The Unattainable

Can you in any helpful way
begin to understand the role
you play in my pitiful life,
my ordinary, mundane life,
this sore existence so painfully
normal, so unusually without
real trauma outside of the world
I create for myself?

Can you begin to grasp this thing,
this need I have for fantasy,
the need I have for long lost loves,
for unattainable joy, the role you play
in inspiration, a light through the veil
I weave for myself, the drift of fresh
air I barely sense in the dank cave
of my depression.

You are more than
you are; you exist in one way for
yourself and the rest of the world,
and another way for the sake of
my imagination. I create an image

of you as the unattainable icon
of agonizing longing and boundless
despair. The truth I ignore.

Remain for me this source of woe,
Let me keep and feed this pain,
let it root and grow. Let your
flower swell and bloom in my imagination,
be the unapproachable love,
forbidden, unattainable.
You will my misery sustain,
And I will not lie barren here.

Shrine

I carved a shrine for you in my heart,
created a place for your adoration,
but you refused to enter it;
you would not even come to look.
The empty space you left waits, still.
My soul tends silent vigil there,
beside the empty sanctum's arch.
And though some distant god may grant
with endless ages this still life,
each lovingly engraved relief
will crumble, colors fade, the dust
will gently fill each niche
and my sole purpose go unfulfilled.

Brownian Movement

When you see the rays of sun
shine through the constant moving air,
do you ever notice the drifting,
whirling specks of dust that linger there?
They float and turn and fall and rise,
without the slightest effort, now
they move with you, they softly
drift to fill the voids your moves create.

They dance with you, they slowly float
into each space, each part of you,
each deep, soft breath, on your warm face.
Most of the time they go unseen.

They're with you everywhere you go,
so silent you'd forget they're there.
But they are there. You know it's true.
And like those dancing motes of dust,
I am with you, no matter where
you go, in every thing you do,
I'll be there too. Alongside you,
inside of you, in every breath,
before each measured blink of your
most precious eyes, I'll be near you.
in blessed joy and misery,
I'll be with you forevermore.

Oh God, Where is Thy Place for Me?

Oh God, where is thy place for me?
Where is the love professed, the solace
preached to me from your pulpits?
Where will I find the smallest mote
of your consideration, Lord?
You spoke of love, as others have,
eternal love, unyielding love,
“a bulwark never failing” love.

My role in your confusing play
has no real substance, only lines.
These people you surround me with
expound their caring, talk of how
they feel for me, but I can't sense
the least of it, I cannot feel
the slightest warmth. If it is there,
it dies before it reaches me.

If only you could let me sense
compassion still exists somewhere
in this expanse of emptiness.

Why can't you let me sense, foresee,
a little hope. Oh God, if you're
still listening, where is your help?
Oh God, why can't you let me feel
the slightest bit of comfort... *please?*

Abandoned

Oh God, why did you leave me here?
Why did you leave me here alone,
on this forsaken, barren sphere
with not a tree to hide behind,
nor one small leafy branch avail,
to cover up my nakedness?

I fear the beasts which I can't see
but know must lie in wait for me,
with sharpened claws and drooling mouths
and eyes that burn with appetite,
whose gnawing, hungry, empty pits
they'll fill a while with my poor soul.

I sense their heavy, odored breath
I see my meat torn from my limbs,
imagine what great pain there'll be,
when sinew hangs in bloody strands,
when they will coldly pull my flesh
while feeling nothing but their hunger.

And still I wait. I look about
with furtive glances here and there
in hope to catch the slightest move
that might reveal their cunning, slow
and stealthy creep. I see none now,
but they will come, I'm certain, sure.

But that is not what hurts the most.
What hurts me so, what moves my mind
to churn, and turn, and writhe in pain
is knowing that you left me here.
You left me on my own, alone
in this cruel unforgiving world.

What hurts is that this deity
who's shown such kindness, warmth and love
to others in his creation
has simply left, abandoned me
on this post so far away
without one source of comfort here.

No solace, oh my God, no warmth,
no place to go, no one to whom
I may unburden all (or any) of
these lonely thoughts, these mighty fears
that would not be an oozing sore
if someone could just listen... care!

I'm asking, God, why in your great,
infinite wisdom you have chosen
this for me, to leave me here,
cast me aside. I am afraid,
my God, I'm so afraid!
Why couldn't you have taken me?

Affliction

I'm centered in
this cavity,
within this hole
inside myself.
I'm shrinking, cringe-
ing, pulling back
away from my
exterior.
My fragile shell
is seared and scorched.
Unyielding pain
inflicted from
without... within.
I cannot find
a place to hide.
No matter where
my panicked eyes

flinch here and there
to catch a glimpse
of some safe haven
from agony,
there's not so much
as one thin crack
to shelter me.
The threat to me
is everywhere.

There is no way
to shield myself .
No one will come
to cover me.
I am alone,
my nerves laid bare,
exposed and raw
and oozing blood,
incapable
of letting go
my silent shriek,
unable to
endure the all-
consuming pain.
I'm spinning, whir-
ling frenzied, in
the middle of
the vacuum of
the space I have
created by
my own collapse.
Terror engulfs
my mangled heart.
I'm overcome...
I am broken...
I am nothing.

Torment

My cringing, bent, tormented soul!
I'm worse than dead. My living flesh –

it decomposes as I sit,
but I'm too terrified to look.
The Devil's beast gnaws at my heart;
it's teeth are mottled, odor, foul.
but worse than that is those cold eyes,
dispassionate, detached and cold,
as if I were nothing more than food,
no value to my life at all.
It may be right, perhaps it's true...
maybe I have no right to live.
Oh God! There's more of them in there!
Please let me die before they start!

Capitulation

I know I said I'd never quit.
I've seen so many painful things
that kids and wife and family
have suffered when someone gives up;
I've sometimes seen the ones who did
called cowards, weak and crazy, too.
But I can't stand to live like this,
and if life means I'll feel this way
please understand... this pain is real,
it's too much agony for me.
it's not just in my heart and mind,
it permeates each limb and vein
suffuses every cell and nerve.

I'd give away the love I have,
the love of kids and wife and friends
and even forfeit any hope
of seeing God, all hope of heaven...
all my tomorrows, and my soul, too,
deny myself, if knowing that
by doing so, this pain would end,
and silence, calm and quiet dark,
the absence of all and anything,
would then enclose me like a shell,
the dark, the blackness evermore.
At least no pain... I'd welcome that.
I just can't take this life any more.

The Finality

It...

Is...

Finished.

Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.

Father, into your hands I commend my spirit...

...please, Father...

Where is he?

Just silence.

Is there really

nothing?

Or does He

simply

not love me?

I

am

truly...

alone.

Vanishing

I've grown a little older now -
not too old I guess you'd say -
but now I know that things have changed,
the silver threads exceed the dark,
and where once grew an auburn beard,
a field of dotted gray now lies.

It wouldn't be so bad, you know,
if not for one peculiar thing:
I'm disappearing slowly in
ways near undetectable,
and I don't think I'll ever be
successful in reversing it.

There was a time when some sweet girl
would try in gentle, subtle ways
to catch my eye, to start a chat,
to ask me if I needed help
to do some not-too-taxing thing.
Perhaps I'd get to take her home.

There were those, too, who in their way
avoided me. I'm not too proud
to say I've had my share of "no's."
But not so many; I confess
far fewer than I thought I'd have.
(It makes me grin to think of it.)

But now there are no furtive smiles,
no full, soft lips with barely seen
slight upturned ends to indicate
a thought exists beyond the realm
of business-proper courtesy;
there is no hint of warm desire.

There are some compensations, true.
I have some influence, you see,
more power than I'd ever thought
I'd have. The men and women who
report to me show courtesy
and deference - affection, too.

I'm reasonably well respected
in my field of expertise,
my family still loves me and
a loving wife is still at home.
I've everything, it seems, that I
could want or need, but yet...

That nagging sense that I'm not here,
that every day a little more
I have become invisible.
I used to wonder why older folks
Would toss crumbs to the birds...It is
an act assured to get response.

In Love

In love there is the germ of life,
A certain spark, beginnings of
an entity unknown before
to anyone, a thing entire
unto itself, a whole new being,
existence independent from
any other life which may have been
or seen or felt or touched on Earth.

Do you get what I mean by this?
Have you had children - more than one?
Do you recall the time before
you had your second little child,
you wondered if the newest one
would halve the love that you had felt
for that one son or daughter who'd
become the center of your life?

You knew how much you loved that child,
and you could not imagine how
another child could win such love.
How would this work, how could you bear
to share the love that from your first
child's birth, was his or hers alone?
And then came a discovery,

a revelation wonderful.

When your new child entered your life,
You found that you could love it just
as much as you still loved the first.
One love need not be sacrificed
to nurture a new treasured one!
The first need not be cut in two
nor milked, nor bled, diluted out,
diminished, cut in any way.

You found a new love was created,
a new and equal wealth of care.
Just as when a child is born,
its sister's not reduced in size,
its brother not diminished to
provide the raw material
to feed its body and its mind,
it is just so each time with love.

And when our bodies fail and die,
and time may ravage what remains
until there's not one bit of flesh,
some future archaeologist
may, with some easy turn of soil
or gentle flick of bristled brush,
uncover bones attesting to
the being that I once was,

In just that way, no matter what
the fates may dictate for our lives,
the love that once arose from naught,
that could not be seen, or be conceived
in mind, but whose possibility
was understood in silent depth
of knowing hearts, that stole from none
but gave and withheld not one thing,

That love will be discovered there
among the fallen columns of
our sterner visage, and though the stones
may scatter to dumb disarray,
the proof that love is life itself

will gleam among the shifting sands
and never lost but hidden just
beneath the surface, rise again.

Calm

I can't believe this quiet calm.
Its just as if some fierce and fearsome
thunderstorm, having unleashed
its harsh fury from dark and brooding
boiling clouds had just passed over,
the sky now clear and brilliant blue,
the sun breaks through to play on earth
such crisp-edged shadows to make the land
seem black and gold, and nothing else.

I'd never have imagined this.
Where once there was anxiety-
confusion, fear and doubt,

I am, at last, at peace.