

Challenge of Night and Day,
and Chicago Poems

Michael Lee
Johnson

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Electric in the Sun

I'm electric in the spring sun
nomad in the summer dust
my lantern burns
without fuel,
I lie in the deep grass
with microphones tossed
over my ears
and feel like I'm on a high
psychedelic
blue-green grass
pink sunglasses in my left hand,
teeth pearly white ivory tusks,
muscle tee shirt, with brown sash
from shoulder to hip,
crazy beads around my neck
yellow-orange shaped like
candy corn
life is but a blitz,
I'm electric in the sun,
and there is no cell phone
by my side.

Indolent Sun

In early March
an indolent sun
persists in tossing
volunteer rays of
soft flickering sun silk
through dark desolate
willow tree branches
melting remnants
of snow diamond crystals
from weathered wooden planks
on my balcony.
I'm starting to think life
is an adjective exaggerated
by the sway of seasons.
It's normal feeding time.
Below two floors
wild Canadian geese
wait impatiently
for the tossing of morning feed;
the silent sound they hear_
no dropping of the seed.

Hookers on Archer Avenue

Late evening, early morning,
I search the night for whores,
young and bloody with desires.
The night streets are silent streets
except for the hookers and the Johns.
One wants the pushing of groins
the other green eyes in dollar bills
are sacred treasures
the snatch of the wallet, a consecrated craft.
Both hit the streets quickly
satisfy the needs quickly
finish in different directions quickly.
I'm an old buck now rich with memories
more than movement, talking the trash,
taking the porn pictures,
peeking Tom expert with a naked eye,
snooping around department store
corners, and dumpy old alleyways.
My hair is gray, my teeth eroding,
my thoughts leaning toward prayer
A.M. Catholic mass,
finishing off the early morning
with a lethargic walk
to pick up my social security check
comforts my needs.

Charley Plays a Tune (Version 4)

Crippled, in Chicago,
with arthritis
and Alzheimer's,
in a dark rented room,
Charley plays
melancholic melodies
on a dust-filled
harmonica he
found abandoned
on a playground of sand
years ago by a handful of children
playing on monkey bars.
He hears bedlam when he buys fish at the local market
and the skeleton bones of the fish show through.
He lies on his back, riddled with pain,
pine cones fill his pillows and mattress;
praying to Jesus and rubbing his rosary beads
Charley blows tunes out his
celestial instrument
notes float through the open window
touch the nose of summer clouds.
Charley overtakes himself with grief
and is ecstatically alone.
Charley plays a solo tune.

*This poem also appears
in the January 2009 issue
of ccc&d magazine (v192)*

Harvest Time

Version 6

A Métis Indian lady, drunk --
hands blanketed as in prayer,
over a large brown fruit basket
naked of fruit, no vine, no vineyard
inside -- approaches the Edmonton,
Alberta adoption agency.
There are only spirit gods
inside her empty purse.

Inside the basket, an infant,
restrained from life,
with a fruity winesap apple
wedged like a teaspoon
of autumn sun
inside its mouth.
A shallow pool of tears
mounts in native blue eyes.
Snuffling, the mother offers
a slim smile, turns away.
She slithers voyeuristically
through near slum streets
and alleyways,
looking for drinking buddies
to share a hefty pint
of applejack wine.

California Summer

Coastal warm breeze
off Santa Monica, California
the sun turns salt
shaker upside down
and it rains white smog, humid
mist.
No thunder, no lightening,
nothing else to do
except sashay
forward into liquid
and swim
into eternal days
like this.

*This poem also appears
in the August 2010 issue
of ccb&d magazine (v211)*

Gingerbread Lady

(Version 3)

Gingerbread lady,
no sugar or cinnamon spice;
years ago arthritis and senility took their toll.
Crippled mind moves in then out, like an old sexual adventure
blurred in an imagination of fingertip thoughts.
Who remembers the characters?
There was George, her lover, near the bridge at the Chicago River:
she missed his funeral; her friends were there.
She always made feather-light of people dwelling on death,
but black and white she remembers well.
The past is the present; the present is forgotten.
Who remembers Gingerbread Lady?
Sometimes lazy-time tea with a twist of lime,
sometimes drunken-time screwdriver twist with clarity.
She walks in scandals.
Her live-in maid smirked as Gingerbread Lady gummed her food,
false teeth forgotten in a custom-imprinted cup
with water, vinegar, and ginger.
Years ago, arthritis and senility took their toll.
Ginger forgot to rise out of bed;
no sugar, or cinnamon toast.

I Brew in Broth

When the silence of my
life tickles in darkness
delves into my daily routine
caught in my melancholy music
at times, not exact;
then exuberant auto racing playing
at times, not exact_
a new poem published or a kick in the ass_
kick smacks like tornado alley
in the tomato can
left over paste
of my emotions
at times, not exact;
I realize the split of legacy,
of loyalty on its knees fractured
like a comma or sentence fragment,
naked like a broken egg
between friendship and hatred,
I stew like beef broth
simmering
sort of liked, sort of hated,
not exact.

Nikki Purrs

Soft nursing
5 solid minutes
of purr
paws paddling
like a kayak competitor
against ripples of my
60 year old river rib cage-
I feel like a nursing mother
but I'm male and I have no nipples.
Sometimes I feel afloat.
Nikki is a little black skunk,
kitten, suckles me for milk,
or affection?
But she is 8 years old a cat.
I'm her substitute mother,
afloat in a flower bed of love,
and I give back affection
freely unlike a money exchange.
Done, I go to the kitchen, get out
Fancy Feast, gourmet salmon, shrimp,
a new work day begins.

Rod-Stroke Survival, With a Deadly Hammer

Rebecca fantasized that life was a lottery ticket or a pull of a lever,
that one of the bunch in her pocket was a winner or the slots were a redeemer;
but life itself was not real that was strictly for the mentally insane at the Elgin
Mental Institution.

She gambled her savings away on a riverboat
stuck in mud on a riverbank, the Grand Victoria, in Elgin, Illinois.

Her bare feet were always propped up on wooden chair;
a cigarette drooped from her lips like morning fog.

She always dreamed of traveling, not nightmares.

But she couldn't overcome, overcome,
the terrorist ordeal of the German siege of Leningrad.

She was a foreigner now; she is a foreigner for good.

Her first husband died after spending a lifetime in prison
with stinging nettles in his toes and feet; the second
husband died of hunger when there were no more rats
to feed on, after many fights in prison for the last remains.

What does a poet know of suffering?

Rebecca has rod stroked survival with a deadly mallet.

She gambles nickels, dimes, quarters, tokens tossed away,
living a penniless life for grandchildren who hardly know her name.

Rebecca fantasized that life was a lottery ticket or the pull of a lever.

Willow Tree Night and Snowy Visitors

(Version 3)

Winter tapping
hollow willow tree trunk-
a four month visitor about to move in
unload his messy clothing
be windy about it-
bark is grayish white as coming night with snow
fragments the seasons.
The chill of frost lays a deceitful blanket
over the courtyard greens and coats a
ghostly white mist over yellowed willow
leaves widely spaced teeth-
you can hear them clicking
like false teeth
or chattering like chipmunks
threatened in a distant burrow.
The willow tree knows the old man
approaching has showed up again,
in early November with
ice packed cheeks and brutal
puffy wind whistling with a sting.

Manic is the Dark Night

Deep into the forest
the trees have turned
black, and the sun
has disappeared in
the distance beneath
the earth line, leaving
the sky a palette of grays
sheltering the pine trees
with pitch-tar shadows.
It is here in this black
and sky gray the mind
turns psycho
tosses norms and pathos
into a ground cellar of hell,
tosses words out through the teeth.
“Don’t smile or act funny,
try to be cute with me;
how can I help you today
out of your depression?”
I fell jubilant, I feel over the moon
with euphoric gaiety.
Damn I just feel happy!
Back into the wood of somberness
back into the twigs,
sedated the psychiatrist
Scribbles, notes, nonsense on a pad of yellow paper:
“mania, oh yes, mania, I prescribe
lithium, do I need to call the police?”
No sir, back into the dark woods I go.
Controlled, to get my meds.
Twist and rearrange my smile,
crooked, to fit the immediate need.
Deep in my forest
the trees have turned black again.
To satisfy the conveyer.
The Lord of the dark wood.

Poem From My Grave

Don't bring the rosary beads
it's too damn late for doing repetitions.
Eucharist, I can handle the crackers and wine;
I love the Lord just like you.
Catholicism circles itself with rituals--
ground hogs and squirrels dancing with rosary beads,
naked in the sun and the night, eating the pearls
and feeling comfortable about it.
Rituals and rosary beads are indigestible
even the butterflies go coughing in the farmer's cornfields..
Cardinal George, Chicago, would choke on the damn things;
some of his priest would have thought it a gay orgasm or piece
remote found in scripture from Sodam & Gamora.
But my bones in ginger dust lie near a farm in DeKalb, Illinois
where sunset meshes corn with a yellow gold glow like rich teeth.
My tent is with friends there we said prayers privately like silent
moonlight. Farmers touch the face of God each morning after just
one cup of Folgers coffee Columbian blend,
or pancakes made with water and batter, sparse on the sugar.
Sometimes I would urinate on the yellow edge of flowers,
near the tent, late at night, before the hayride, speak
to the earth and birds like gods.
Never did I pull the rosary beads from my pocket.
It's too late, damn it, for rosary beads and repetitions.



*This poem also appears in
the August 2008 issue
of cc&d magazine (v188)
and the collection book
Hope and Creation*

*Photo from Arlington
National Cemetery by
Janet Kuypers 10/25/03*

Illinois Farmers

(Version 3 09-09-09)

Illinois writer in the land of Lincoln
new harvest without words
plenty of sugar pie plum, peach cobbler pie,
buried in grandma's sugar
factory sweets and low flowing river nearby-
transports of soy bean, corn, and cattle feed
into the wide bass mouth of the Kishwaukee River.
It's the moment of reunion,
when friends and economy come together-
hotdogs, marshmallows, tents scattered,
playing kick ball with that black farm dog.

It's a simple act, a farmer gone blind with the night pink sky,
desolate farmer, simple flat land, DeKalb, Illinois.

Betsy and Phil invite us all to the camp and fireside.

But Phil is still in the field, pushing sunset to dusk.
He is raking dry the farm soil of salvation, moisture has its own religious quirks,
dead seed from weed hurls up to the metal lips of the cultivator pitting.

The full moon is undressing, pink fluorescent hints of blue, pajamas, turned
inward near midnight sky against the moon now fully naked and embarrassed.

Hayrides for strangers go down dark squared-off roads with lights hanging,
children humming school tunes, long farmhouse lights lost in the near distance.

Humming till dawn, Christian songs repeated over God's earth.
Dead go the sounds of the tractor, with the twist of a switch off,
down to the dusk and off the road's edge.

It's the moment of reunion.

Thoughtful

If You Find No Poem

If you find
no poem on
your doorstep
in the morning,
no paper, no knock on your door,
and your life is poorly edited
but no broken dashes
or injured meter
and you don't wear white
dresses late in life
embroidered with violet
flowers on the collar;
nor do you have
burials daily
across main street,
and no one whispers
in your ear, Emily Dickinson-
you feel alone-
but not reclusive-
the sand lady
still sleeping in your eyes-
wiping your tears away-
if you find
no poem on
your doorstep-
you know you're not
from New England.

First updraft
late September
at the door

almost asleep
remembering
what I forgot at the store

my ex-girlfriend
shows up
on my doorstep
with no place to stay
my birthday.

Raindrop Baby (Version 1)

I'm a Chicago raindrop baby
silhouetted in the night,
single-ringed single person
minus the 24 carat gold.
A harvester of night life,
star crystal, seated, well
proportioned,
a gatherer of sluts
in my imagination.

Bird Feeder

Baby,
born
just
a
sparrow-
first flight
from balcony
to tree limb.
A chip of corn falls
from the feeder
to the ground.

Fog Feathers

(V2)

I am old frustrated thought.
I look into my once-eagle eyes
and find them dim before my dead mother.
I see through clouded egg whites with days
passing by like fog feathers.
I trip over old experiences and expressions,
try hard to suppress them or revisit them;
I'm a fool in my damned recollections,
not knowing what to keep and what to toss out.
But the dreams flow like white flour and deceive me
till they capture the nightmare of the past —
images wrapped up in a black blanket —
and wake me in front of my psychiatrist.
It is at times like these I know not where I walk
or venture. I trip over my piety and spill my coffee cup.
I seek sanctuary in the commonplace of my life.
It is here the days pass and the years slip like ice cubes;
solid footing is a struggle in the socks of depression.
I am old frustrated thought,
passing by like fog feathers.

Rose Petals in a Dark Room

I walk in a mastery of the night and light
my money changers walk behind me
they are fools like clowns in a shadow of sin,
they're busy as bees as drunken lovers,
Sodom and Gomorrah before the salt pillar falls.

In a shadow of red rose pedals
drunken lovers walk changing Greek and Roman
currency to Jewish or Tyrian money-
they are fools, all fools, at what they do.

Everyone's life is a conflict.

They are my lovers and my sinners
I can't sleep at night without them
by my bed or the sea of Galilee.
Fish in cloth nets are my friends and my converts.
I pray in my garden alone; while all the rest
who love beside me sleep behind their innocence.
The rose is a tender thorn compared to my arrest.
and soon crucifixion.

It is here the morning and the night come together,
where the sea and the land part;
where the building crumbles
and I trust not myself to them.

I am but a poet of the ministry,
rose petals in a dark room fall.
Everyone's life is a conflict.
But mine is mastery of light and night
and I walk behind the footsteps of no one.

South Chicago Night and Day

Short Version

Night is drifters,
sugar rats, street walkers, pick-pockets, pimps,
insects, Lake Michigan perch,
neon signs blinking half the bulbs
burned out.

In the warmth of morning sun, lips grinning,
sidewalks folding open,
the big city drifts, and sailboats
lean against the Lake Michigan sand.

Mother, Edith, at 98

Edith, in this nursing home
blinded with macular degeneration,
I come to you with your blurry
eyes, crystal sharp mind,
your countenance of grace-
as yesterday's winds
I have chosen to consume you
and take you away.

“Oh, where did Jesus disappear
to”, she murmured,
over and over again,
in a low voice
dripping words
like a leaking faucet:
“Oh, there He is my
Angel of the coming.”

South Chicago Night

(Version 2)

Night,
south Chicago is filled with drifters,
sugar rats, street walkers, pick-pockets and pimps,
a few whores on 95th street south
fill out the night agenda with silent whispers;
thousands of tiny fingers of greed snitch
dip into pockets other than their own.
The night air is full of insects and Lake Michigan perch smells.
Ladies diligent in the night,
High on the rise of condo balconies and drugs
Paint a picture, gesture to strangers on the streets
below, “do you want a date?”
The neon signs are blinking and half the bulbs
are burned out.
Mayor daily or is it Daley, is tucked in sleeping blankets tonight
in south Bridgeview; while most of the trouble lodges at the Salvation
Army where Christ lives with sinners.
Parents, despair. Surrender their children for
bucks and old silver coins traded earlier at the pawn shop;
some drink gut-rot sweet cherry wine and act as slave pushers-
but the children continue to roam the streets in designer clothing.
Before the warmth of morning sun, lips grin,
sidewalks fold turn up and open to foot traffic,
the city of Chicago trembles from the taste of delicious dew.
Just a map image and picture-frame shadow
of the city with the “big shoulders.”
Mayor Daily or is it Daley is sleeping and ducked away sound tonight.
The big city drifts, and in the morning light, sailboats
lean against the side walls of Lake Michigan sand and shoreline.

Chicago

I walk in a pillow of cinder
flames apart from the night they ignited.
I don't know where I live I lost my compass
and my bearings for directions fell to the under street.
The L trains still flow on tracks decrepit, decried
I toss feelings toward the sea, no
I toss feelings toward Lake Michigan,
a loyalist at heart no memory to me
I will be forgotten like lead to water;
or lead to fish, or a forgotten park
that the Mayor Daley thought significant.
I lie in the shadow of the grass.
To simplify all this
I lie in the shadow of grass.
I drop words to honey
to cactus and let it stick
in the history of Chicago and the old brick buildings.
Apart from the boats and the docks
and the harbors, let's not be fools,
Al Capone ruled this town.

Catch on the Fly

Full barrel up 53 north,
heading to Lake Zurich, IL,
Christian talk radio 1660
on the radio dial,
crisp winter day
sunbeams dancing down
on the pavement like midgets.
85 mph in a 65 mph zone,
just to aggravate the police,
black Chevy S10 pick up,
shows what a deviant I am
in dark colors.

Running late for a client appointment,
creating poems on a small hand held recorder
knowing there is not payment for this madness
in this little captured taped area of words.

Headlights down the highway for a legacy
into the future, day dreaming like a fool obsessed.

Working out the layout of this poem or getting my ego in place,
I will catch up with the imagery when I get back home.

This is my life, a poem in the middle of the highway.
Scampering, no one catches me when I'm speeding
like this.

*This poem also appears
in the January 2008 issue
of cc&d magazine (v180)*

Forked in Itasca, IL.

I am so frustrated
I want to chew
the dandruff
out of the internet hair implant
and dislodge it,
for a lost love affair I never cared
about and hardly knew.
Don't tell me about my sentence structure,
I am human in these simple words.
I swear to you I curse.
Then the ram of my affair falls short
frustrating my approach to the world
at my fingertips.
No Yellow Pages here my love.
The dial up of my local connection
is wretched, stuck unincorporated
in the land I approved to live in,
monopolized by Comcast the
robbers of the poor and the humbled.
All I hear is the rambling of the railroad tracks.
I grow numb in my deafness faint with my hearing.
Did I ask for your opinion?
I am a frustrated foreign camper
in my own community.
Of a village I don't live in,
but I love this local village I lie about.
I am estranged.
I tie knots in contradictions
when I travel light and far,
visit home I long for a journey
past where I have never been.
Is this the reason I am lost
forked in between
the poet I think I am
and the working man
my bills dictate?

Bird Lady

(Version 2)

(Photo available on request)

They call her old maid Misty, as in fog, she misses the sun.
She runs a small pet store, more for the injured and lame,
alone and half the light bulbs have burnt out.
In the backroom everything smells of dust and feathers.
The cockatoo is cuddly and named Brenda, but has bad toiletry manners.
The macaw is well hidden, and fetches a high price on the open market, called Ginger.
Misty is surrounded by wired bird cages,
jungle noises in unfamiliar places,
and sleeps on a portable cot.
When parrots or parakeets shout shrills in the night,
her eyes squint and flash out in the dark but no one sees it.
Squinting is a lonely habit.
Misty works alone and is getting old.
On a wall, near her cot, hangs a picture
but is it Jesus, or St. Jude Thaddaeus
carrying the image of Jesus in his hand or close to his chest,
difficult to tell darkness dimmed at night.
Misty sometimes sleepwalks at night from small room to the other
she bumps, sometimes trips and falls, her warfarin guarantees bruises.
Misty tosses conjectures: “I’m I odd, old school, or just crazy?”
Her world is eye droppers, bird feeders, poop in cages, porcelain knickknacks.
Love left Misty’s life years ago, when World War II ended and so did her marriage.
As she ages eve rything is measure in milliliters, everything seems short and small
medications in small dosages day by day.
Today is dim, raining outside, and old maid Misty still misses the sun.

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