

Robert Arroyo

Collector's Items

At midnight from atop the Sepulveda Pass,
San Fernando is a piece
of silver, multifaceted, reflecting moonshine.
By morning, under a vaulted sky,
San Fernando is a dull penny
left lying on the valley floor.

Mom was on her knees scrubbing the floor
again; this is how the evening would pass:
her cleaning, finding three nickels, a dime and penny
between couch cushions. Dad, came home with a piece
of lemon meringue pie for her, she mumbled a curse at the sky
and returned to bringing the toaster to a shine.

We'd always be praying for the sun to shine;
me, Manuel, Mundo and Pat sprawled on the living room floor
with our eyes closed, sending our best prayers to the sky,
mortgaging our souls so the clouds would pass.
Summer was wasting, we'd promise anything for a piece
of blue. Even if it meant giving up our candy penny.

I was broke, twenty-four and not a penny
to my name. Stumbled outside, squinting in the glare of moonshine
I fished through pockets for car keys, found a piece
of Snickers bar, threw up on a truck's floor
boards, said "God lemme find those keys before I pass
out!" Last thing I remember was a dark sky.

I was hanging on grass, watching the sky
circle beneath my feet. The sun was a bright penny
burning my toes. The Earth made a spiral pass;
I sailed in a lovely arc through a plate of moonshine,
bellyflopping. My teeth shattered on the granite floor;
I spent the afternoon collecting each enamel piece.

We were awake all night singing "Give Peace
A Chance," somehow we knew the sky
would never brighten. The black tiled floor
was as bright as the future I'd trade for a penny.
I went outside, hoping the moon would shine,
but the clouds had yet to pass.

San Fernando, take a piece for a penny,
there's a beautiful sky, rain or shine.
So if you see it on the floor, pick it up as you pass.

Dreaming Catholicism

You kept to a corner
of the bed,
the sheet taut
over your folded legs.
Another match,
another cigarette's cherry
reddening your flesh,
the smoke curling
into tight fists.

You said you found
yourself on the wrong
side of the rood screen,
looking at faces
watching you,
your lips and the waves
of sound each bead
passing between your fingers

created.
The cross
threw a shadow cross
half your body,
dividing resistance,
augmenting the mouth
that repents.

You pulled the sheet higher,
your breasts
left to imagination.
Outside, the moon,
clearing the dead neon
'El Rey Motel,'
slipped light between blinds,

revealing the swift whorl
of your eyes.

You said multi-stained
windows of the various Christs
arched away
along the walls,
mobilizing the apotheosis.
Voices, indistinct

as a hum,
swelled to a chant:
'God Bless You,
God Bless You,'
sounding like a plea
more than a condition.

You tiptoed around the foot
of the bed,
so lightly
your passing would have swayed
no thorned stems,
left no marks in the wet bed
of a rosary.
Your bright legs
stretched to the floor
from where the sheet ended.

In the bathroom
you collected
your belongings:
earrings, key ring,
wedding ring;

closing your eyes,
you raised your tokens,
mumbling words over them.

The Void Monkeys

Because he came to me fresh
from whiskey
and took something
that was ours,
I noticed how dusty
love had become.
How even the buzzard
emotions lost their luster.

If I could raise my hand,
I'd raise myself
and peer over this brim,
suicide the Queen of Cups,
rabbit this hat.

If I could,
I'd move the car
from South Emotional
and park it at the junction
of Fairfax and Third;
I'd wait until he spilled
from 'Malone's,'
talk him until he was blue,
and then empty him
from my life.

If I could

subtract
as well as I multiply,
I'd as soon divide
than be carried over
for another day.

Wintersong

Homes overwhelm the lake front;
hundreds of perfect square,
burnt red-shingled, two-storied dwellings
form a grid
to the lip of the newly frozen lake.

Between blocks of buildings,
bluish like veins run streets
slicked by ice.
Occasional vehicles motor slowly,
chained though snowfall has ceased.

Blinded porch windows stare
down the cold and brittle grass
glazed the night before.
Behind panes
the living room is dark,
silent except for bones of the house
creaking,
settling for a lifetime.

Upstairs, a whispering t.v. throws
shapes of light on the bedroom wall,
while a curled husband sleeps,
clutching the remote
in his right hand.

By an opened window
his wife stands, watching the bluing sky.
The morning tears her eyes,
goosebumps her flesh
and raises her nipples,
aching, empty.