

A Compilation

NIGHTSCAPES FROM AFAR

by Tomasz Tatum

Autumn

When I blew into town last night
Adrift in the dark like a leaf falling
From an unseen branch high over your head
Driven by the teasing wind of an autumn storm

As I fell
It was black all around me
Almost foreboding
Without the comfort of a summer moon to light my way
The rain and the wind
Lashed out impatiently, erratically
Not angrily but spitefully maybe
Spraying droplets that felt like tiny needles
Into my face
While it tugged at the umbrella as I walked.

But then sitting next to you
The warmth that radiated and your eyes
Were so natural and pleasant
So iridescent
Like a night sky full of stars
It was strong
So strong
That the wind no longer mattered
And I realized that the raindrops
Which I had dodged on the way
To that welcoming hearth in your embrace
Are the very same ones
That make my garden grow
And burst into full bloom
Whenever I think of you

Intercity

greyhaired men in dark trench coats
stand silently
wordless
without expression
in a deep canyon of shadows
fog-shrouded train stations
as the night express carries me home.

am I carrying any secrets tonight?

That string of lights that rush past
the coach windows
at irregular intervals
under the solemn cover of the night
hide the faces
of those
that stand
watching in the darkness beyond.

Safe Keeping

Went to the bank
Brought them all my silver
But then they asked for more
They wanted my faith
My confidence in the future as well.

What is it about them anyway?
Why does it feel
Like I was cheating them?
Perhaps I owed them more
In return for the paltry bit of interest
They were feigning?

All I wanted on that long day
Was to be with you.
Not masquerading
But moving about in the open.
With only each other's embrace
Providing shelter
And sanctuary
Against the storms which were bound to come occasionally
But which would never be quite as strong
As the bond two people might find
When there is no need
To hide your treasures
Or whatever might be precious
From the prying eyes of others
Who will never understand
Why it isn't wise
To keep your faith in the bank.

In December

Icy cold when I went to sleep last night
I dreamed it was so warm
When I awoke at your side
The smell of your skin
A tuft of your hair tickling my cheek
And the rhythm of your breath
Reminding me of the sea.

I lay awake this morning
Gazing over your shoulder and out the window
There was frost on the branches of a tree outside
A bit of snow on the rim of an abandoned bird's nest.

And in the afternoon
When it got dark again
Walking close by your side
A market where the scent of Christmas saturated the air.
The smell of hot fruit punch
Berries and spices that warmed from within
Cinnamon and cloves
And anis looked like the stars which dotted the night sky above.

While the winter darkness worked incessantly to conceal
Those opportunities we may have missed
The stars were like tiny pinpoints
Illuminating the way to where untold mysteries lay
Awaiting discovery.
And while the night air radiated its piercing cold
It was your warmth which made the thought of winter bearable
And promised me
That Springtime would soon be here.

Riding the Bus

Sitting in the bus
Hum of the tires on the road
Making its way to you

Half of humanity sitting crowded
Behind their tinted windows
Smile every mile I come close to you

The street is like your skin
Every curve takes me where I wanna be
Every turn a surprise see the lights in your eyes

Anywhere and everywhere
Any corner the Greyhound lets me off
So nice to know it brought you closer to me

New World Order

The bells peal
To ring in a new age
Each and every morning
Or every four years
If all goes well.

Democracy as an exercise in pest control?

Sometimes I wonder if
Only a select few
Have the right to know
How many rats there are in residence

Coming of Age

The words you say are the things you mean
Unmasked
And you sip your wine because it tastes so good
And not because it's older than you can remember

When you look back only to see where it is you've been
Not burdened with the hope or the necessity
Of seeing what lies ahead

When your heart is as clear and just as sincere
As the waves you're following from within
And that you can and will pause at will
In introspection
Letting time and maybe others catch up with you
Now and then
Breathless they'll be because you've learned
This time, it's finally OK to be this way
Not because you needed to ask
But because you need no longer beg, borrow or steal
From someone else
The grace and the favour

You will suddenly have every reason to rejoice
To be so glad
That you took the opportunity to learn to walk when you did.

Summer

While the fireflies dotted
The inky blackness outside your window
Like a celestial tapestry
We celebrated our nakedness
My mouth following the contours of your breast
And my tongue
Hiding mischievously
In the stubblefield between your legs.

Maybe I was dreaming
But I thought
You came in more flavors
Than the Baskin Robbins store
Down the road,
That cathedral of bright lights and vanilla and candy
Whose cold but silent glare
Held the fireflies at bay
While I slept in the warmth of your body
At home
At last
In your arms.

The Waiting Game

Staying sane tonight my brain's a sponge mop
Showering blame like petals in the flower shop
Playing those games with you on top
Waiting for the shoe to drop
Waiting for the rain to stop...

Big swig makes me a party to my own revival
A clown a-swinging in a small-town carnival
Patience ain't a virtue, it's about survival
This town's longing for a festival
But I'm just waiting for your arrival

Dodge the confetti raining through the air
When you make it home, you've nothing to declare
Papering over some tainted love affair
Keep your eyes open for a new concessionaire
Look across your shoulder, glimpse some quiet despair

So tell me this
Your beautiful kiss
Is it bliss?
Or an abyss?
Are there even two of us in this?

Bonefish Boogie

Breezing through the wilderness
A leaf carried on the wind
A solstice of sorts
Brain bursting full of ideas
Bookshelves, words and pictures hanging in the air
To feed a badass buzz

A lady reads between the lines
Brave enough to spend some time
Feeling herself that badass buzz

Glad no more bears, snarling hungry beasts
To dodge as we head upstream
Willing to share her time
And the air she breathes
Share the life give us both the love we need

The Lantern

I ran as hard
As fast as I could
As far as my feet would carry me today
From the spot
Where I'd pulled up the roots
While trying to plant a seed.

I was afraid to go back
Because I'd run so far
To go forth
Because I'd not run far enough
I was gasping
Out of breath
Apprehensive
Of losing sight of where I'd been
Not understanding what lay ahead
In your hand
I thought I saw a light
You were holding it high
But not like the beacon I hoped it might be
Suddenly I wasn't sure
Whether you were only using it to light the way
As you emerged from the darkness
Perhaps in retreat
From a blackness that still shrouded
The path that lay ahead of me.

The Ocean

If I could only reach out far enough
Or if I could hold my breath long enough
To reach all the way across
To the other side
Where someone else
Maybe stands at the shore looking my way
With the same sense of wonder and yearning

Sometimes the calm of your surface
Belies the turmoil beneath
While at other times the turmoil on your surface
Belies the calm beneath
Where I would float in a weightless world
Of silence
And broken light

In the dense atmosphere of your deep
A constellation of starfish
Creeping slowly across a sandy firmament
Mutely mirrors the heavens high above my head
Hidden from the view
Of a terrestrial world
That holds me in gentle captivity
Far removed from your watery spell

Sleepless I think of you
As I roll restlessly in my sleep
Just as the ocean does
In its bed at night

The Visit

It felt so strange visiting
The city where I fell in love with you
All by myself
It was warm and the sun shone
Just like it always seemed to do when you were here
I thought of how good it felt to breathe that air
Charged with a kind of electricity
That erased the boundaries
Where my life bordered upon yours
Sharing laughs and drinks
And food and the gift of time

It's all different now
It's still a big stage full of people and parades
And drama and comedies and celebration
And fantasies
But I'm alone in the audience now.
And while I have my choice of seating
The only show worth watching now
Is for those who walk and dance in their sleep
They watch mutely as the old newspapers
Blow through the dark and empty streets
And when the dream is over and the traffic finally grinds to a halt
I awake to find
That you have gone away.

Weekend Wager

People more knowledgeable than I
Warn me often
To watch my head.
Be wary of a sky
Where the strong winds of change
Blow with the seductive scent of flowers.
They caution me to hedge my bets
And to not overstep the lines and the boundaries
And all the borders
Where wild blossoms threaten to spill over
The fences around my heart
And upset their gardener's sense of order.

"I've never been a gambling man!" I calmly answer.
And pleased that their reason is so compelling
They pat me on the back
Impressing upon me the need
To heed
The wisdom which they're selling.
But I'm already smiling as I turn to go
No need to make them understand
That I've already taken my chances
Just by loving you.

Tricked Me into Thinking

Tricked me into thinking
Dreamed I was in love with you

Spent my days digging a hole
Like some goddamn mole
Burrowing his way to the light
Scratch and claw and maul and bite
On our own
That's sure no way
To knead the clay

Contessa selling me them skin patches
Make me invisible when the crowd's a-trippin'
Shielding them with my magic glove
Me naked
Losing my shape
My color
And my sleight of hand

Why don'tcha move
Together with me?
And stop tricking me into thinking
I dreamed I was in love with you

One Hundred and Eighty Degrees

one hundred and eighty degrees
and
everything would be the other way around
different?
Possible?
changed for the better?
the worse?
new?
old?

we will never be the first to know
if we
continue to think in terms of zero
and if we always say no

A Puppet Life

Dangling on the strings leading us round and round
Army of ventriloquists gives us the voice we need

Will ourselves to go when we think we're free
One tug is all it takes you know to
Make us miss our step, dangling helplessly
In the tangle of our strings

Not gonna take it we say
Stern expressions never blink
But cut the string reigning us in
We go lame on the floor beside the scissors
Which were supposed to liberate us

Evenings in the bottom drawer
Where all the broken toys reside
Hear the voice of a puppeteer playing a merry game
And re-tying the knots in all those strings
Which give us life

City Girl

she got the word about her ways
up and down the walls
all around the corners
pulsing to the beat of a neon sign
in the window
of a shop
selling today's aspirations
and promises.

those symphonies of sun
of skirts and a flash of skin
dance like sparkles of sunshine
diamonds and confetti
across the rippled surface
of a river
flowing like the pavement
beneath my feet

lacking pedal digits
she whispers she laughs
toeless is what she means
rooted to the ground
like cornstalks
whose ears
listen for the sound
of movement
of motion

Coming Up for Air

you screaming you can't breathe
any air that isn't free
a few of us are having parties
I'm sure there's one for you and me.
you already have a party?
so we see ...

you know we'll do a wing-ding for ole Joe
without whom, well, where would we be?
a shindig so crass he's not Stalin and he shoo-be-doo ain't Tito
cos he's our man, our man he's hip
he's the real McCarthy.

So you got a secret making you gasp
choke when you think of Hollywood Hoboken 1950?
it's players that change, not the acts
dogs down every alley barking up every tree
don't twist no arms, just twist some facts.

boy, you'd better stop turning blue
when we talk to you ...

Empty Houses

I'll never forget your smile
and how fiercely the cold wind blew
on that November day
I learned the truth
about you and that barren Spanish ground
at Mejadora del Campo.

There's been a song in my heart
since then
for you
about you and
Madrid and
empty houses and me
back in 1983.

Evaporate!

Curious

I watch the water trickle between the cracks and crevices
Rain or condensation melting ice and snow
Watch in detached bemusement as it makes its way
A tiny pool before my eyes
In a basin or maybe a cup
Reminiscent of a heart or a pair of hands
Assuming the shape of its haven
Pausing only long enough to gather itself
Before a hot kiss of sunlight
In the funkhouse
Turns up the steam.

The vapour rises

Leaves exhilarating beads of moisture on my skin
After I've spent the night dancing with you
Warily watching from the corner of my eye
The cold light the full winter moon rising
Wondering whether its icy glare
Might make the water freeze
Glittering ice crystals dusting hair and hands
While I busily plot the getaway
Trying hard to rob your day and mine
Of its tired routines
And rituals
An irrational seed of hope germinates in my breast
Mapping an escape route a summer night's Shangri-La
Like the water that trickles between the old boards
Of a floor not really made for dancing.

Falling Angels

Drag me out behind the shed
Flog me with your values till I'm good and dead
Knock the habeus corpus right outta my head
Then you can go mourn
All woe and lament
Asking where the hell
The spirit of civilization went

Meet me back there behind the bushes
Where neon reigns when your sign flushes
Sucking up your ego all luscious
The stranded raise their voice in scorn
And you dance and sing
While the angels try to figure out
Why the future clipped their wings

Futureworld

lazing on the shores of the mirror lake
my toes radiating in the breeze of chrome
we've got cellular speakeasies we've got protein breaks
we've got custom-tailored chromosomes.

paradise don't tell no lies
with her haunting fibre-optic eyes

livestream skies, matrixes and meadows
live out your life in the broadbands and the shadows
the program's there to tell us when we're happy
it's a cryogenic shame that the content's so crappy

I guess it takes a while now for the word to get around
with all the logic seems to be going on ...

Injustice Every Day

Gave more than you had
They took more than they wanted
In the end
Everyone wondered
Why there wasn't enough to go around
When we needed it most

There are friends there are lovers
Find them looking who hurts most
Enough blood around for all
We wonder 'cos they stopped gasping
When we looked away
Looking out for a bandage instead

Lock our doors throw out the keys
Shut the windows keep out the night
Draw your blinds shut out the light
Then we sit and wonder
Why the hell it's so hot in here
Why we can't fuckin' breathe in the dark

Keep them all at bay
Make them look the other way...

The Invitation

You invited me to the exhibition where we stood side-by-side
Looking at the paintings hanging in neat rows
Upon the wall

The closer I found myself standing to you, the more I began to feel
That I could see through all the colours
And the rows of canvas before my eyes

For a brief moment I thought that I could read
Between the lines formed by the mortar and the bricks
Of which the wall was made
Upon which the pictures presented themselves

And only few days later I saw a rainbow
Saturated till it dripped with the same vibrant colours
I saw at the exhibition
And in that instant and only then
Did I finally recognize you
And understand what you had invited me to be a part of

The It's All in God's Hands Blues

you had the vision to look through walls
of a house
where sinners spinners winners beginners
bide their time.
they push machines they work the clock
they turn the stars they mark the time.

and they tell you when you're gonna rise who you're gonna be
and they tell you who you're gonna leave behind.

'cause you sold them your trust on the day they said
their god was gonna make things easy for you
they knew
they're gonna do a deal with you
but there's only one small thing that you have to do ...

you break your butt you break your back
and all they'll promise is that they'll wake you
when its over
and all you need to do is give them your trust
when they say they're gonna make things
work out for you.
they push machines they work the clock
they turn the stars they mark the time.

and while you're waiting for that shoe to drop
they want to make a deal with you.

Living your Lies

Sick of your kind of poverty
The kind you wear like a badge
Hoping it'll get you through Heaven's gate

Worked hard to give you hope and work
Worked so hard not to give up hope

Worked hard to give you the knowledge you lost
The day you shied away from the horizon
'cos your sea was full of serpents
Dropping out of the trees in your garden
Back when the world was still flat

And now it's flat again
And the line where the sea and sky embrace
Is only a threshold of pain and fear
The line your brother can't cross
'cos you confuse the chip on your shoulder
With a book that holds all the faith a man can carry
Don't heed the message to go out and learn no more
'cos your hands are deep in blood
Red from binding your brother's and sister's hearts
To a past that will never shine
As long as its light can only be redeemed
At the edge of an open grave

Nighttime in America

we be racing down the arteries of the city like corpuscles in its veins
and the air's hot like the breath of a dog all warm and humid
and smelly fetid ozone Purina
while the car lots rolled by our window lights and flags and the stars
all dazzling and radiant overhead
stealing our sense of direction
we be lost in the music the radio blaring a beat to beat back the heat...
share your love your food your life your time i give you mine
no gift in hiding a motherfunkylode gotta play with it
'cos it won't stay with you the day you step into the bright light
body naked and cold your soul a featherweight on the wind
while everybody 'round you mourning with their shovels in hand
how quick the time be passing
all the time we wasted tryin' to beat back the heat...
be warm skin naked free while there's water in the well
dance with me when the music plays 'cos in a dry spell
when the front door falls shut we be wasting our breath
asking desperados to show us the way back to where we left our keys
so we know where to look when we think we've found the lock
the one that keeps us in a cage and safe from diversion
maybe we just thought it was the kind of place we could retreat to
to beat back the heat...
when i stop walking talking to the water's edge
can't go no further no drinking cup in hand but it's only saltwater anyhow
like tears and sweat or jellyfish far as the eye can see
no one out there and i'm thirsty as hell
catch me when i fall no one to hear my call i'm tired as hell stay up all night
chasing ghosts to distract myself so that i don't see the empty pillow where you sleep
when i'm dreaming of you
my stomach growls i'm hungry
while my heart beats a meaner beat to beat back the heat...

Online Tonight

Thoroughly modern me
Waxing and waning
Relishing my connectivity
Can't fall for you
Got other things to do...

My life like a casting show
Busy managing my likes
So damn much choice don't know where to go
But I can't fall for you
'cos I got better things to do...

Swipe me tender little bitch
Let me know that I'm the one
Swipe the icons making my touchscreen itch
But I won't fall for you
'cos I got other things to do...

Thoroughly cool this modern me
Waxing Brazilian all alone
Cut the light I'm relishing my connectivity

Sunset

Yesterday we loitered beneath the blue sky
Marvelling at the mountains and the tiny silver band
Of a river that flowed between them
Twisting and turning as it wound its way to the sea.
We regarded the bridge that straddled the flow
In silence
Nothing but the breeze and the sound of rushing gurgling water
Permeated the air around us

How do you touch an illusion? Can you make a fantasy feel real?
Simply by dreaming of the moment
You succeed in wrapping your arms around it?
Can you ever catch up with your hopes and aspirations
Simply by running as fast as you can?
Maybe mistaking the wind in your face for the feeling you recall
From the time you sailed across a placid lake
To find yourself in a harbour which felt like home might have felt
If someone hadn't roused you from your slumber.

Watching our dreams fade away as audacious and delicious as they were
Sinking before our eyes just like the sun setting somewhere in an ocean
Reflected in the irises of Bonaparte's eyes
On a faraway Island at the moment he saw his dream of grandeur
Being swallowed by a green forest
Which crept up from behind
While his eyes were squinting
And his gaze was fixed
Unaware
That he was looking in the wrong direction