



The Abbey Stone

Bartholo Dias



Phosphene Press

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This book is dedicated to Lazaro Aleman, Christopher Dow,
Julie DeGar Dow, Kathryn Stewart McDonald, Rebecca Reiss,
and Steven Robinson.

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The Abbey Stone

Who Gains No Wound

Who gains no wound
Makes no sound.
Who would be lost
Has wisdom found.

In a Room

In a room, a fireplace is bricked over.
Beset by incredible spirits
And shaking spires,
I sighed and sought solace.
Sickened by smog, I trafficked
In self-denial, haunted alleys, searching
For what I knew not. A new knot?
The seaman's haven, craven liberty,
Lost horizons, and sterile, cratered caverns
That cascade through honeycomb dreams
And slide, oozing sweet memories.
And though I don't usually wear make-up
On these occasions,
Today I donned my mask and dropped my robes.
My umbrella thumped into the elephant's foot by the door,
And gleefully he stomped my ass into the ground.
Yes, yes, I said.
I'm as sure as a nine-pound hammer
And pure as light!
But how have we soared when
Our days are dark and nights so bright?

Semispiritual

Yesterday the good Samaritan watched
The men shotgun the woman in the trunk,
And being a good guy, turned the other cheek
And lectured his pet sloth on courtesy's own reward.
Then he turned toward the penciled pain
Of leaded trumps and the ace of spades.
He was caught in a demon card game,
Didn't even know how or when it had begun.
Two red knaves dwelt in his trembling hand
And jested as two knights with lances
Of ideas double-barbed
Carping about like headless clowns
Seeking the stacked deck to live their dreams
With faithless queens. And the spheres
Rave for mortal attention with atomic fires,
Fierce gravities, and unceasing
Planetary rounds. Girding and weaving
He spun around and around then shot out
Like a bottle into space, into the shrine
Of hereafters—a seemly departure
For a dead woman lying in a trunk.

New Year Litany

Expanding paper vistas, littered with ink stains,
Glass of Coke, paperback book, ashtray full of trash—
It's just a style, a way of being in the world
Along the lines of ink's flow, the grain of wood be.
Downstairs a door slams. The wind blows, time ticks
A silent storm, and I meet a beast
Of arctic temperament, of glass-eyed scheduling.
Burned-out dreams and washed-out expectations
Crease the razor fold of experience, and anger
Makes tomorrows for the fallen, in this the new year.

The Moon Is

The moon is a crescent cup, its points to the heavens.
The world will come to an end soon—
Cosmic bomb or Russian cockatoos or Chinese punks
Lighting strings of firecrackers, exploding
Sequenced splashes like movie frames reeling.
Have the image, know the line, play the game—
It's all the same. Just a matter of rhyme.
And I feel the wane of this sad epoch,
And lament the passing of its silver cities,
And I feel the wave of pox
That dents the jazz of silvered pity
Deep as a pit of iniquity blazed across
By a scarlet violence and black rage.
Because the questions were the wrong ones
And the right answers never came,
I walked away into the night
And gave up trying to find the light
All the time so tenuous on the lip of the cup.

Rats in Traps in Mozambique

Rats in traps in Mozambique.
The price of survival in these revolutionary times
Is the price of survival in all transitional times—
The cost of traditional effects gone out attractively.
The killing trap is kind—harsh but swift—
Kinder than the hours' numbing drone.
But then again, I'd rather live a humdrum existence
Than die a bone-crushing, suffocating quick death
That smashes all semblance of form to pulp,
That leaves only waste in its wake.
Is the soul the commodity of mortality?
There must be more to the riddle,
And, yet, why do I sink so low as to label it
A riddle? All that lives must die, surely.
Aren't we all riddles, eating life or its leavings
To sustain our own lives in the face of dissolution?
If wants are negotiable, needs are profound,
And those who hunger will consume what they must,
For that, after all, is the purpose of life.

Cat's Paw

The radiator sighed, Cuban crackers
Kept the beat. Nursing her prey, the feline,
A cat no more than three months old
Stroked the air with her claws, rent the atmosphere
In slivers, and scattered stars in this common heaven.
What's on top is news, the events of the decade
Brought to you by the prime of time,
Most deft of ministers.
Yea, brethren, I say, forsooth, verily, amen.
What mask will you wear tonight for your intrigues?
A two-faced mask will I wear tonight for my intrigues.
It is the cat's paw, the silent shadow, the cold caress
Come in on the tenure of night's breezes,
Dispensing the comforts of finality
To my nourishers, pride of prides,
Heart of hearts, cheek of chiefs,
Bone of my marrow, and tomorrow's sauce
Of pomegranate red waste on the tide of door
Knocks and door knobs lying on hall floors.

The Mad Smile of the Half Moon

She stood on a burning bridge and beckoned with her eyes.
Plasticized girders began to melt like gray butter,
Dripped in spurts of steam into dark water below,
Where they drifted past glass-eyed fishes that fed
On gems among the rushes a fathom down
And drifted past the jetty's end, past the pier,
Beyond the turquoise-colored water. And in the sky
A thousand arcs of light lick the hollow of the firmament
Like split instances of time passed unnoticed,
Illuminating in dim effigy the courses of mud's rise.
So we spend our time, and dream, and hope, and finally die
To complete the illusion, that others may come in our stead.
And the woman's breath was hot on my cheek.
At the touch of her fingers on the back of my hand, memories
Rose of a mountain fastness soaring high over
The reaches of desert wastes, a mountain
Of crystal white snow peaks vibrating in the cold blue air,
A colossus of the West in infant's eyes,
Eyes that roam among the flares of bridges burned
Before the consummation of crossing.

Summer Dream

My bed is cold on this dark side of dawn,
With the star's brilliant counterpoints flickering light
On a crystal clear night in cold February.
Venus rules in the southern sky, alone
And low on the horizon's morning edge.
A pink light breaks, heralding a new day.
Time to be bold as the gate swings forth
On the open lawn, as the pastured field of summer's grace
Blossoms forth in new greenery after the long cold.
As always, fortunes are recovered and new blood beats
Through the hidden courses of corporeal body's flow.
New vitality springs eternal like the shuddering blues
That clear in retrospect, never on future consideration.
And so play safe, and never lose but never win either.
The world is rife with moral spinsters
Plagiarizing meanness in brittle bones and acid baths,
Burning my sideburns and causing my brain to babble
In alien expletives—just one of those things
Terrible to contemplate, impossible to hold.
But oh so good when you finally get it!
In a second the alarm goes off and
The bed is warm as I head for the door.

Postcard

On a postcard, big bellied black women with sagging
Breasts walk single file past thatch-roofed houses.
They carry urns on their heads and rough
Thatched baskets of grain are cradled in their arms.
Callused feet scuff on the dust left
In the path by centuries of these hardened
Vehicles of locomotion.
Meanwhile, in a dusty yard with scruffy
Chickens pecking in the dirt, a fat little
Boy sits in the sun and watches the flies buzz by.
One hapless creature ventured too close
To the child's impassive face and was
Struck with a snake-like tongue
Whose forked nature settled about it,
Befuddled its mind, twisted attention and inspiration
Into the schism between fact and fiction.
At the same time, in a country not so far away,
A woman and a man drifted down a rain-swollen
Jungle river. On the shore, alligators watched, egrets
Waded knee deep in the shallow brown water.
The chilling eyes of an unspeakably horrible beast
Watched them from the shore. Its trance hypnotic
Spilled across choppy waters in a wind of ire
From beneath lids drooping at night's darkening glance.

Just a Thought

A thought flashed through
A brain too numb to
Know the meaning of a message
That isn't in black and white.
Like a word racist
Unwilling to blend
To shades of gray,
He stuck to a pallid superiority,
Where things are simple, shadeless.
As things should be but rarely are.

The Light

On a ceiling, in a room,
Two light bulbs aim, poised
In majestic transport.
They live outside of time,
Their message immediate, forgone.
Ride the ray though eternity,
Through the roof of the heavens,
To dissipate into dark distances.

The Morning I Got Up

Though it was still outside when I arose,
It began to rain at 6:29.
The beating on my air conditioner
Convinced me the phenomenon was real.
Streams poured from the roof
And spattered window panes
Through warped screen.
I will leave the windows cracked,
For my vinyl couch
Can stand the damp.
Monday has become
The best day of the week.

Benefit Punks

Benefit punkers in tandem with kung fu.
Hip and kick on a hot Sunday afternoon.
Yeah! Hot rod jive. Sassy tones!
Who sets the pace with a clip and snip,
And breathes the mists of shadows,
Pit of pandemonium, ripple of time?
The constant confusion of the cosmos
Intruding on my senses baffles me.

Seeing my reflection, I know what
It is. I am not daunted,
But bewildered. Adrift, I
Persevere. Anger rises and dissipates.
Tempest blown, the hand has thrown the bird,
And to the west it flew,
Above rooftops and into the sunset,
To gaze upon the silent night's drape of darkness
And dream of sky acute and vast
As the interstices between mind and spirit.

The spectrum becomes distinct,
Radiant colors, high intensity, bright hopes.
Close, the colors run together
In muted blend of one tone,
Only one tone.
One hue, one fabric.
Language is mute.

Joey the Bishop

With feeling: Allegro!
Fox Harold looked Jack O'Hare in the eye.
The sky above like slate, separate, trembling,
Shattered the senses and shook the dwelling.
They digest the gingerbread of their home.
Ah, but it's only a symbol . . .
As true a measure of time, melting,
Receding into the dream of the hunter
Dearly met, easily spent, wakening to gray.
The stars, galaxies, cosmic dust, spaces between
Two desperate stares reveal the synapse,
Lapse, lapping at the ocean's endless entreaty,
Like love, licking at the lips of infinity,
Like pulsing moments of impending
Girth awash in newness. A field of promise.
Mirth, that promise of tears
Broke from his throat. "Mr. Fox,"
Said he. "Go elsewhere.
Go where the hounds chase the feral
Rooting among the hedges, scratching the earth,
Dancing and delivering Demeter's child in hell."
At the back door of entreaty
Where the alley leads to pooled streetlight,
An old vicar ground a Camel into the pavement.
His lungs foggy, and mind fading fast,
He realized shadows were only suggestions,
Hinting at fate.

Bringing the New

Bringing the new to the process
Means something of the old must die.
It is the price of integrity, and dear do we
Pay with green, pay with the enemy's
Systems of expresidential portraits.
Illuminated by various gravity-reducing orbs,
Black holes, and other galactic graffiti, they sing
Dirges of fire, symphonies of the quest.
The night was hard as marbles,
And the smoke stacks of his factory heart ached,
For the empty aching in his belly persisted.
Tremors reverberate through the lines,
Causing earthquakes in Los Angeles proper
And fervid consternation in city hall.
Japanese auto dealerships promoted
Harmony, good will, and fortune for all.

The Fisherman

Feeling the rod jerk, he tensed—
Struck by a savage wave
That shimmered like a cyclone field of daffodils,
The realms of silence overwhelmed
Through sediment's final silting slide.
He lay dormant a hundred thousand years
And sifted sand in the haunted land
Of twilight, of dark-cornered shadow's lost music.
In dusty chambers by forbidden stairways
He screamed, "My Rubicon is Bitter Creek!"
And quailed at the hunter's tyranny, the hunter's robes.
Red as blood they were—blood on snow.
Smitten with the ancient lust of Eros's breath—
Crying for the fleet of Greece and the fleets of Rome,
Crying to meet midway in the sea between the two
As if Nature could compromise itself
And migrate to shelves of a thousand books
Marshaled in line like so many soldiers on parade—
He was caught up by Fate's final line
Where a laughing ghost burns electric heaters
To take the chill from the room.

The Abbey Stone

I stood on the Berkshire plain,
In the vacant sanctuary of a Norman ruin,
And wondered who dwelt in this place
Where monoliths train old temperaments on primitive rites
And teach to bleed lambs in the name of religion.
As a midnight neon rainbow shattered in a purple onyx sky,
I returned to the eleventh century,
And the universal sense is as yet unconceived.
The countryside is wild with unreason's fearful habitation,
Where the cold hostility of stars' glare pierces
The night and sears the garment of respectability.
I see it in a small gray stone in my path.
It is too easy to ignore impending designs
While engaged in revels of the past,
Until the flood whips around feet long past escape,
Captures with a surging undertow's terrible attraction,
And drags them under heavy depths of black seas,
Only to have those left living blind themselves in light
Born of all the yesterdays, so tomorrows remain unseen.
Against the crags of the stone teeth, the constellations
Of appetites disintegrate in zillions of sparkling particles,
Falls so their facets reflect the soulless sun.
I pick up the abbey stone and place it
In my coat pocket, its secrets a gift to the New World.
A bit of sand has drifted over my shoe. I shake it off.

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