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It's Not an Escalating War

It's not an escalating war
like that of our alcoholic uncles
or the old coots we snickered
at who guzzled vanilla extract
in the kitchen of someone's Sunday dinner.
Their slow boats pale beside
second generation drugs,
and today, it's love at first sight,
instant addiction before
the gauntlet hits the play yard grounds.

And on the losing side,
I must report,
the whole "war on drugs"
turned out to be a bust—
we mustn't say that anymore--
“sensible drug policy” better evokes
the warm fuzzies
and allows catchy buzz
free rein: destigmatizing,
safe consumption sites,
naloxone access,
bail reform, decriminalization,
codependency, but in the end
we are still staring into
the mass graves of our children,
our children having
starred in America's
greatest tragedy,
and the closest thing to cure
is the professionals acting
in what turns out
to be Old Western movie sets
held up from behind
by flimsy scaffolding—
facades sporting signs:
drug rehab, detox unit, AA,
long term treatment,
stop battling addiction alone,
we're ready to help,
100% private insurance accepted,
avoid tragedy now,

and shiny best sellers
by savvy professionals.

It takes seven druggies
to support one helping
professional's happy family.

So, it's them *and* us.
And there are those of *us*
who inhabit a place
in the wee hours of an eternal nox—
where a mother chases a drug dealer
down the driveway with a dressage whip,
where a father howls the airways of a morgue
into a new frequency never before heard by human.
If middle C is 261
it's about a kajillion,
or think of it this way,
the throat sometimes
gets this one singular crack
at wisdom.

A Mother in Chongqing

A mother in Chongqing
has chained her violent son
in a ruined barn for 23 years.
He is naked because
he tears his clothes off.
He sleeps in dirt because
she can't afford straw.
The neighbors donate food.
This doesn't precisely dovetail,
but perhaps explains
the feeling I've fallen down
some amazing child's
backyard dig to China.

The happy families in our town
drive their Teslas' smooth
suspensions, still under 60K,
imbibe their organic vegetables
and grass-fed beef,
grow solvent children,
who have solvent children
of their own,
with nothing more
tragedian than maybe
a touch of adultery,
or someone's heart blipping
cholesterol. They are only denizens
of a time and place
like we are, we who nod
sagely when we remember
Tolstoy's first sentence:
Happy families are all alike.

We are unique among ourselves
because each of our children stands beside
the same gate under the same moon entangled trees,
yet each leaves us differently,
memory by singular memory.

Back When I Still Went to the Bahamas

Back when I still went
to the Bahamas with Randy
I understand now
I was seeing my own future.
In Straw Market a zombied
young man with great
hollowed out eyes,
a shoo-in for some Holocaust
blockbuster, if Holocaust movies
have blockbusters,
young enough to be my son
(there must have been
crops somewhere, or boats
in the harbor he could
have been tending)
sold me hematite,
the healing stone,
from which everything
not a turtle
had been chipped away.
He got his first price
because he told me
his brother ODeD
just yesterday and anyway
I never liked to haggle—
“they love to barter” must be
made up by shrewd travel
writers for tightwad tourists—
I don't believe it.
Whenever I pay the original price
no Bahamian
has ever spit in my face,
or run off down the beach
screaming in frustration.
He, the surviving bro, described
the death sighs from the rough
woven pallet, the pupils
two black holes, (I'm imagining now),
mom, little sisters prostrate with grief,
and as he spoke his voice alternated
softly with the other bargaining
profaning the air as white people

white peopled, gathering their treasures
from the emaciated paws of those
with AIDS maybe, or in drug stupors,
or both. It is always spring break in Nassau,
and always Hotel California
on Paradise Island, for some.
Then Randy and me—
you know your name means
horny in Britain I told him once—
ducked out from under
the sailcloth ceiling
hung with baskets,
and glass jewels
and irregular shells and wild
colored blankets and back scratchers
and jolly caps sewn with fake
dreadlocks into the open
under a blue sky—
how I have begged
my students never
to write those two words
together—but it was the blue of
oxycodone 30 milligrams I know now--
and made our way
to our hotel--number 3
on a list of what not to do
in the Bahamas
(stay in New Providence)
between number 2
(rent a jet ski)
and number 4,
(miss out on the conch).
Horny and me hopped in a taxi
without negotiating (number 5)
and all along, the original price
was holed up, sleeping like a crocus,
and I held my stone turtle,
which seemed to be
slightly shaking
as spirit animals will
when the world around them
has been hacked away.

All The Mothers

All the mothers in Alanon resemble Pietas.
The fathers are invisible. Or when they
do appear they smack
of having been dragged,
of being inevitable,
of clinging to one last macho bootstrap
they are trying in vain to bequeath
to the sons or to the daughters
who have been their undoing.

If the mothers are Pietas,
the fathers are Ed Sullivans,
elbows metaphorically akimbo,
stiffs at best barely
faking cooperation
for this reeelly big shoo.

The Pietas are enablers, messes,
know-nothings, wannabees, sorcerers,
teeth gnashers, causers, curers,
beggars, pleaders, page turners,
shriekers par excellence.
They weep, this morning my son
was given 2-5 prison time,
I was actually happy when
my daughter was incarcerated,
I thought his own child
would make him stop using,
my ex-husband and his stepfather
have given up.

There is another one
I always admire,
in her P.F. Wraggs,
and tasteful gold chains.
I cannot imagine her
wailing in confusion
at whatever *haute* holocaust
has presented
itself. I cannot fathom
her gormless, gauche,
and choking on shame and rage.
Softly strong and thoughtful,

most likely wearing
matching underwear,
she quotes Marcus Aurelius,
A Course in Miracles,
and Addict in the House,
none of which any
of the rest of us
have cracked.

But tonight, under a curdling howl in stereo
we cross an event horizon together,
fall toward the center of a black hole,
stretched, bifurcated,
then split into eight parts.
We're spaghettified
in a place where gravity
is so fierce light cannot
escape. Something deforms
and it is not space time.
I think it is our hearts.
Our hearts are burning up
in quarkly conflagration,
and though Stephen Hawking,
before he died, came up
with a way to escape
a black hole, in my panic,
I disremember.
You see, tonight,
her son is dead.

Long ago, I came to believe
in the avuncular nature
of God, dim-bulbed, using us
poor saps for vehicles
to expand his/her Experience.
My mantra became,
who's afraid of nonduality?
which would make this God-driven
monolith simply a psychobabbly
spouting slab. Strange gift,
you should have shrieked.
Though changing nothing,
what the heart records,
must count for something.

So Whoever Said Pain is Inevitable

So, whoever said pain is inevitable
and suffering is an option
must have never sat
in church house semi-circle clutching
the Twelve Steps pamphlet like
a batch of white roses,
or felt obligated to let insult
skid off their brains
like poorly aimed
ball peen hammers,

must never have seen pass
some stranger's funeral parade
and bore the burgeoning yelp
in their own throats,
the one poised in parturition,
ready for delivery.

To be sure they
must never have mulled
Edvard Munch's pastel
captured in the vicinity
of a slaughterhouse
and a lunatic asylum
overlooking Oslo,
maybe inspired by an 1889 Exposition
Universelle mummy on display
in Paris, which had been buried
in a fetal position, the hands alongside the face.
Notice the tumultuous background,
compliments of an orangey
red sky inspired by
a helpful nearby volcano.
All our screams
are like the eruption of Krakatoa.
All are inspirations for paintings,
if sound could be painted,
and if sound could be painted
The Scream would be the *Mona Lisa*
of all lost tribes sitting in a circle,
on folding chairs.

Someone Somewhere is Googling

Someone somewhere is googling
the meaning of the burnt spoon
found in the sock drawer,
or aluminum foil that has been
missing from the kitchen for weeks.
Mystery solved. Consider turning
a corner where a good part
of your day is spent in nostalgia
for your BFF,
fat frumpy ignorance.

All the gold panners
from the old country
ran on hope and hoopla.
All the Puritans came
to Plymouth and to the realization
they were not God's chosen,
and their only recourse was to rewrite
the covenant, hang the witches responsible.
All the new settlers, appalled to
find themselves lowering oxen with ropes
down gorges as deep as outer space,
eating their families in a few unthinkable
cases, had initially been conned.

In letters home,
in travelogues,
in God suffused poem,
the brass tongues painted paradise,
not mosquitoes as big as all-terrain vehicles,
nor native land holders, wild
with fear and rage.
Plato had already covered that—
bah, poetry, he said,
and bah poets, proxies for lies.

So, small pieces of burnt foil
may be a sign your loved one is lying to you.

In that case I lower my oxen daily
into the bottomless valley.
They are trussed in terror,
and flimsy rope.
In their wild eye is the reflection

of my eye and their flailing hooves
run in air, away,
ostensibly, from the lies of poets
exiled from the republic.

True, the government did not
exactly promise roads--
But perhaps you have seen me?
The one following an ambulance
into a lavish darkness?
The one sitting in the waiting room
of a dead of night hospital?
The one who just that morning opened
that soot smudged,
pre-apocalyptic door?