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Oneironaut: New and Used Poems

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ONEIRONAUT

NEW AND USED POEMS



MARK
BONICA

ONEIRONAUT

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Mark Bonica

Recalcitrant Egg Press

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an apology

I want to apologize
for appearing in your dream last night -
the vodka martinis with the glow stick umbrellas
were the penguins' idea.

as was the slip and slide from your bed
to the laundry room.

I can only guess what symbolic value I hold
in your internal pantheon -
what your subconscious was reaching for
when it put me in a tuxedo -
then added penguins to drive home the point.

for the record, I want it noted
that last night wasn't my plan.

I would have preferred to stay home -
cool cotton sheets and a down pillow -
but I have to confess
the Fred Astaire number I did at the end
(with your mother-in-law)
was pretty cool.

Settling with the House

She has old gambler's hands -
her shake stabilized by hearts and diamonds.
A tired curtain parts
and she emerges for 500 points of Rummy.

Family myth recounts a lost month's rent,
and no heating oil one Boston April -
frost on the bathroom mirrors,
pipes cracking in the night.

I remember learning to count -
magic seven,
crazy eight,
big niner -
and lessons in sophistication -
the Ace can precede the Deuce
or trump the King
depending on her mood -
but that was already in the Bingo Years.

I throw a queen
and she plays it from the pile -
a run royal.
"Next time," I smile,
and deal again.

first hours

in the first hour of morning
they say the mind is soaked
in its own dew.

things are undone in the night:

bows untied, and the ribbon left dangling
from the back of a white dress;

there is a gap in the fence
where slats have been removed -
no twisted nails, rusted heads looking
in all directions -
the weathered wood is just gone.

are your feet wet?
is that a blade
of grass on your toe?
where were you walking to
when I saw/was you in the moonlight?

sharing a bed

you're from the future, so you might not remember
the ads running today about how your bed
doubles in weight over 10 years
from the skin you shed.

does this nocturnal math mean that the person
who will be lying in my bed 10 years from now -
perhaps around your time -
will be someone entirely different than me?

will that still be my wife he is lying next to?
or will that be someone entirely different, too?

will those people buy a new bed, as the ad recommends
and drag what's left of my wife and I down to the street
so that some desperate person
will come along and take us home with them,
only to find their selves mingled with us
in our most intimate histories?

evening gods

there are evenings
when I look out across the stockade fences
dissecting my subdivision's backyards and
the moon meets the street lamps
and the ambient glow of the city
not so far away
that I can almost transform
contractor grade siding
into white stucco walls

and you will have to forgive me, my friend
for saying that I am in Greece
and not some tract housing
no one will want to remember in 50 years,
let alone a millennium or two.

pass me the ouzo,
the gods are about tonight -
do you not see Hermes slouching there
by the mailboxes?
(he's the one with the skate board).
the one with the Mad Dog 20/20 -
that's Dionysus, of course.

if you can't see them just yet,
sit and wait awhile -
they aren't going anywhere

unlike us.

correspondence from caring strangers

the king of some African nation wrote again
to inform me that I have unclaimed wealth
in his land - all I need to do to make it mine
is send a very reasonable deposit -

immediately -

preferably by Western Union.

this after I received very special offers
for various enlargement emoluments,
and another message in Chinese - no doubt
from someone else who has my best interests
at heart,
but has yet to learn my language.

those of us who set out

not one of us

who set out

was able to follow the map

we had drawn in our hearts.

not one of us

who set out

has returned whole.

we thought the dragons

in the wine dark sea

were just cartographic illuminations.

resilience is a half smile;

recognition, a proffered hand.

the casualty notification officer

"Two more Ft. Polk soldiers were killed today in Iraq.
Their names are being withheld until the Army notifies the families."
-- Local TV News

my neighbor has the duty.

I see him pull into his driveway late.
he climbs out of his car,
face grave,
and wearily withdraws his class A jacket
laden with medals and badges
from the back seat.
his tie is loose,
he doesn't bother with the beret.

he walks quietly into his house.

later he sits alone on the bench swing
in the front yard.
his feet push against the earth,
and the swing responds
by rocking slowly
as large, heavy things should.

Chaos Theory

Beware of angry
butterflies
continents away --
they'll blast you with tornadoes
or at least low-pressure systems
if you piss them off.

No telling the havoc
you
wreaked this morning
when you spilled your coffee
on your fresh white blouse --
the Dow and FTSE were already
slipping
following the fractal logic
that swelled exponentially
from your curses flung
at inevitability.

Chickens at the Bronx Zoo

You might think
just because a kid grows up
in public housing
that he never saw a chicken.

But he heard the rooster
crow at dawn
in the next apartment
where Mr. Perez
had ripped out the cabinet doors
and replaced them with wire
and the family kept chickens
in the kitchen where other families
kept their plates
and cereal boxes.

Sometimes he would hear crowing at midnight
through the plaster walls
when Mr. Perez and his brothers
would stumble in and flip on the lights,
all the while
singing songs in Spanish
about Puerto Rican independence
and women sweet like cane.

It wasn't until they filled
the porcelain tub with coals
and were slow smoking
a pig in the bathroom
that the chickens and
the salsa music
finally disappeared.

The tiger is in a shoebox jungle.
The monkeys climb in a forest
of three trees.
But there is no salsa music
at the Bronx Zoo.
No sweet smell of plantains
frying in the evening
floating up from the cages,
no colorful flags

waving from the golf carts
that scurry between exhibits.
How does one understand chickens
when they are so far removed
from their natural element?

Dark Matter

Isn't it comforting to know
the stars are suspended in a mold
not unlike something
from a 1950's sitcom picnic?

We hang like grapes
and mandarin oranges
in an invisible gelatin salad
made from the crushed bones
of Science-Past --
Twins, a Bull, a couple of Bears,
even the remnants of an old ladle
and a worn out belt --
ground into cosmic powder, boiled
and cooled till firm
in this new paradigm.

There is more out there
than we had supposed.
We think we recognize it now --
neutralinos, charginos –

or we may be completely wrong.

Do you remember when we knew
the night sky was an overturned bowl,
the stars dangling like celestial fruit?
before radio and X-rays,
when we could not even speculate
on the existence of waves,
let alone an ocean of darkness?

for Karol Wojtyla

A man who renames himself
uniquely understands the Logos.

We last spoke Karol's name
26 years ago
when he went to stand with Peter
(once Simon),
then watched in awe
as the words flowed through his mouth
berating walls
and salving wounds –
some new, some ancient.

In nine days the Conclave –
but today
they announce the Doors of Heaven
have been opened
to a man once again known
as Karol.

A Performance of Handell's Messiah by the Leesville Community Choir

In this little chapel far from any city
their voices rise and fall
with remarkable song:
altos snatch the lead from tenors
while sopranos and basses
lunge musically from the sidelines.

There are twenty-four of them
in simple black and white.
The fact that in some cases
the cut is finer
is apparent even
from ten pews back.

Later some of them
will climb into pick ups
with gun racks and fishing poles
to lumber down dirt roads
back to trailer homes.

We do not ask how we came to be here,
on the stage or in the audience -
it all seems so arbitrary -
because tonight they raise
all of us up
to be something
so much more exquisite.

heading west

I'd like to head west -
on foot -
since horses scare me.

I'd like to walk amongst the sunsets
and canyons
and mysterious Indians -
all full of shamanic wisdom -
not one selling genuine artifacts made in China.

I'd like to leave the past behind,
so wet and mildewed,
and head out into the dryness
of the desert
with the possibility of a hundred
cloudless future days.

Grandfather in Machine Shop (1947)

in the picture
black iron drive shafts
turn overhead.
the belts strap from the ceiling
to the lathes, grinders,
drills, and saws.

bound barrels
swallow finished parts
and scrap.

face turned down to his work,
concentration split by
coy smile
(he aware of being photographed)
a big man among big machines,
unhardened by thirty years
of forcing form unto recalcitrant
metal.

empty space

thinking of a bell, with its great hollow -
the emptiness is where the tone happens,

tongue swinging from side to side
as a boy pulls a rope far below.

the difference between a hammering
of metal on metal
and a call to reflection and community

is but the shape of the empty space
and the tongue that occupies it.

Search

I Google you to see if you are still there
after seven years.
Is there eternal life among the electrons?
It seems there are fewer hits now,
but I could be wrong.

There are more oddities intermixed:
a list of runners from a race -
two of whom, when combined together,
share your first and last name.
Apparently you are also a camera brand,
and you must have a distant relation
who runs a knitting group in Iowa.

These all appear
like random thoughts
that intrude when I try to hold your face,
your voice
in my mind.

I bring up MapQuest
and click for directions.
In "Starting Location"
I type "Wishing You Were Here"
and in ending location,
I enter, "Heaven."
I click on "Get Directions"
and wait.

Piano

You've had a day like this,
and so you know what I mean
when I say that

I wish I had a piano.

I wish I could pull the little stool out
and settle in, savor
that moment as my hands hang
over the keys - just before notes arise
to do my bidding
like 88 genies unleashed from ivory bottles.

I wouldn't wish for anything more
than well-made scales and
disciplined arpeggios.

Okay - I'm lying -

I'd love something baroque
to lift me - and my piano -
up like a magic carpet
high above the suburban sprawl,
traffic,
alarm clocks,
and daytime talk show hosts.

Somewhere up there among the stars
I'd play to the accompaniment
of Holst's planets,
and dispute Copernicus's findings
about the revolution of the sun.

Soon the entire cosmos
would align itself around
our song,
correcting the error

of its previously incomprehensible ways.

The Second Time Around

The weight of being Hindu,
and a snail,
is so much heavier
the second time around.

The subtleties of enlightened snailness
are much deeper
than those of humanness.

The choices are so few,
one must constantly be attuned
to the earth and sky,
the temperature and the humidity.

There is no room for error,
no one wants to spend another life
exploring grassness,
even if for a summer.

we came down

we came down from the mountain
where the meager pockets of earth
crimp the juniper roots
and nature forms its own bonsai -
where the sun burns off uncertainty

we could see far -
could see promises fulfilled
with no interference

here where the foothills begin
the pines do not know the agony
of stingy clouds
and the biting wind -
they grow like ships' masts
in a sheltered port

ahead yet another curve

where either bank of the road
comes together in a vanishing point,
where we must enter shadow -

I wonder if you still know the way

This Isn't Another Poem about Writing Poetry

If it was another poem about writing poetry,
I'd set it on your dining room table
next to your glass of orange juice and the salt shaker.
Right about now you would be realizing
how you'd been tricked.
Right at this moment
you would find yourself dashing through the kitchen
and out the side door, comprehending that the screaming
you were hearing was coming from your own throat.
Seeing a wind fallen stick next to your carport,
you would snatch it up, snap it over your knee
and jam the jagged point directly into your right eye.

With the stick still lodged in your skull,
you would return to your breakfast, now able to finish
in peace. Shaving would be a little complicated.

Waiting at the train station, people would give you
an occasional glance. You would nod, the stick
exaggerating your motion, and keep reading the free
newspaper with your one good eye.

Some guy might sally over and say understandingly,
"Catch a little Dr. Phil this morning?"
You'd say, "No, someone slipped me
a poem about writing poetry."
"Dude" the dude would respond,
"Someone slipped my brother-in-law one of those -
he ran right through the sliding glass door,
jumped off the deck into the hydrangeas
and hasn't been seen since."
He would clap his hands together as if landing
in hydrangeas would have made a smacking sound.
Or perhaps it would be to emphasize the speed
with which his lost brother-in-law
had made his escape.
You would be indifferent to this physical metaphor,
but grateful to have survived your own scrape.
"Sorry for your loss," you'd feel compelled to say
as the cars rattled to a stop.

You'd find yourself turning to the right a bit more

as you entered to scan for wayward pieces of paper
with courier font in choppy lines
before you sat down again.

Those Small Bones

seventeen years old -
dancing barefoot on the concrete
in spite of all those small bones.

your hand in mine -
all those small bones.

Coin of the Realm

There is a city below a hill
that was once my home.

"Look kids, it's the Lights of the City!"
my mother would cry, capital letters in her voice
as we crested the heights
coming back home late,
windows rolled down and late summer
air blowing across our faces -
my sister and I.

We would be bleary and sprawled out
on the folded down seats of the beach wagon -
but we would pull ourselves up
and shed blankets,
grasping the back of her seat
peering around the head rests.

And then
framed through the windshield
the trove of red and yellow,
white and green and blue dancing:
all moving or not moving -
the magic burst out before us -
we gasped at her powers.

I knew then that I was of royal birth -
my mother an exiled fairy queen
able to summon mystery from the ordinary.

Too young to know the free lunches
each day at school were not tithes
I was entitled to as a prince,

it wasn't until I was a teen that I learned
the coin of our realm bought nothing
in the cold kingdom we were banished to.

There were days when she would stare out the window
and I could see her strength fading.
I would try, as children do, to assure her.

Secret, secret I learned I must be -
in this world of willfully mortal men.

I speak to the rain
and the wind between the leaves -
the icicles hanging from the gutters
in the winter dawn, fire in their hearts.
Sometimes I draw out fireflies in the summer
long after my daughters should have gone to bed -
my princesses,
eyes filled with sleep, reaching to be held.

"Look!" I tell them,
"You only need to look and you will see!"

and quietly, I whisper, I pray:
"Choose to see. Choose to See!"

wholly white

not content to be pasted to your fingers
the flour gets on your shirt
 in your hair
 behind the canisters
 in your ears

you go to wipe it from your lobes
and it says
by what right do you remove me from my home
where I have been since before time began

you shake your head in disbelief
but the flour makes its case:
you seem to think that you exist only for yourself
but you are part of a greater recipe
 part of the great loaf
 the great cake
 the great pasta
(what was it you were making?)

we are all baked at the holy temperature
(375 degrees, mid oven)
and come together as one dish

we should respect each other -
even if you lack a sufficiently powdery essence
to understand the sift of the finer Truth.

Globalization and the Labor Plight of Elves

You think I'm joking again
when I return from late night shopping,
so I shrug and we drop it.

But the elves do come out after eleven
at the grocery store.

They work the late shift, stocking shelves
in their curly toed shoes and floppy hats.
I stared the first time I saw a pair of them
stiff arming the mysterious double hinged deli doors,
going on about the Red Sox chances this year.
Now I just nod and keep pushing my carriage.
I think they appreciate that.

No, they don't make shoes anymore -
the Chinese do that.
These are German, or maybe Austrian elves -
they haven't worked the trades in centuries.

I don't joke about the labor plight of elves.
Bill, the one with the long black beard and the green beanie
says he'd like to get back to shoe making one day -
maybe when he retires -
but what, with the way his 401K is,
he doesn't have time to worry about beautiful things.

native sounds

the shush of a passing car is just one
of the native sounds of the suburban night.
listen now to the chick-chick-chuck
of a wayward sprinkler kicking off,
and
don't call the HOA about that damn dog barking -
you can't fight Nature.

instead,
sit on your deck and contemplate
the flare of the streetlight shining
over your six-foot privacy fence -
it's like a personal star
the gods of public works,
circling the earth in their white pickup trucks,
have hung

just for you.

The Last Time I Slept Alone

The last time I slept alone
you were in the hospital
hooked to IVs --
a wild and random infection
marching up your arm
red lines in its trail.
I wondered in the dark
if you would come home.

Tonight you're only
a few thousand miles away,
sleeping on a friend's
pull-out couch,
a return flight in a few days.

I remember last week
when I came in late --
you were already asleep
lying on your side as you do.

I stroked your hair,
feeling the individual strands
between my fingers
then touched your bare thigh,
only briefly.

"Someday," I thought
"these moments will end,
and I will not fall into dreams
to the music of your breath."
Or perhaps it was something
more basic,
not given to words,
but instinctive, sad,
and ultimately mortal.

Prairie Prayer

when I died
Samuel buried me
in the breast of our land:

cross made of wood
carted in from somewhere back East,

a cairn of stones
each pulled one at a time
by his hands.

then he remarried
and continued to draw corn from the dirt.

all things
come from the dirt,
all things return.

the cross dried in the prairie sun
its splinter bones blowing.

the rocks settled
and forgot their purpose.

by then Samuel, too, was gone.
as were his wife
and their children.

my thoughts come closer
to the wind each season
so that sometimes I cannot tell
who is speaking of

carrying grasshoppers
and bees
and pollen

and who of

forgotten husbands
and unfinished wombs.

Reading

Pat O'Brien's is closed
and it's late
even in the Big Easy -
the one we all knew once,
or imagined.

We're down by Jackson Square,
finally away from the beads
and beer stands -
the kids with coffee can lids
nailed to their sneakers
shuffling a few tap-ti-taps,
shucking each other,
then at it again,
too young to have talent.

We all want to be the Fool
stepping out lightly from the cards,
she says,
leaving behind the Devil
and the Hierophant.
And the Eight of Wands too,
she adds, after a while.

The other tarot readers
folded their decks
and chairs hours ago.
The guy with the mythically
golden boa wrapped around his neck
and his girlfriend with the pointy pink hair -
are nowhere to be seen.

She smokes a clove cigarette,
resting one loose arm
on the wrought iron fence.
I sit on the curb, spent.
Neither one of us is sure
why we're still here
as the street sweeper whirs
and clatters by,
yellow lights flashing
"caution".

of unearned gold

you must cross the river twice
to return home I am told
if you wish to gamble everything.

the first crossing is always easier
and is merely
 (as if this were in fact some small thing)
a matter of assertion.

when you return
the river is always drowning swift,
black deep,
and sky wide.
you cannot swim and must pay to cross.
I am afraid I will have no coin for the bargeman.

will you lend me enough for my fare?
he does not take coin of this realm
and I have made bad investments,
lived beyond my means,
and spent all my gifts.

press it beneath my tongue
so I don't forget it
when I set out on the journey, and
so I am quiet and thoughtful
with the taste of unearned gold in my mouth.

into the light

The diesel engine rattles to life
despite the cold.

Watch cap, work boots, chamois shirt.
Coffee in a thermos. Sandwich in the lunch pail.
I light the first cigarette and stand
in the gravel drive.

The flare of the match
blinds me for a moment -
everything has been done in darkness -
by the feel - by rote
until the crackling flash
I bring up close to my face,
feeling the heat
first in my finger tips, then on my cheek,
then in my lungs.

There is no need to go back in the house,
no need,
so I do not.

four in the morning

at four in the morning
it's just me and the truckers on the road

and the psycho killers in their minivans.

no one else is up and dressed,
pants on one leg at a time,
coffee sloshed.

there seem so many trucks but
it's really the same number as always -
just the lack of other cars
makes them look like Stonehenge
has decided to relocate.

there's the truck from Sysco
with its cargo of
Bloomin' Onions/Awesome Blossoms/Texas Roses.
there's the truck from Wal-Mart
with its cargo of
Chinese plastic wrapped electronics.
There's the BP truck
with its tanks full of black
paid for in blood.
there's the psycho killer's minivan
with its grim sacrifice
carefully wrapped -
a Chinese baker, perhaps
who had stopped to get gas
too late at night?

citizens with day jobs
and for-profit criminals
are all snoring -
it's still yesterday's night for them.

us,
we're all driving into the morning of their tomorrow
(except for the Chinese baker,
who will have no more tomorrows
or even today).

morning stories

the fall sun just over the trees
leans shadows that are long stories
from the fence posts
lining the road I am running on.

my own shadow stretches out to the west
broken by the rough of grass,
then granular with the asphalt -
this is suddenly the measure
of what is left, I realize.

the light has a metallic truth to it,
unavoidable hard realism,
not like the fairy twilight
that blends the worlds of waking and dream.

but the sweeping reach of the shadows
do not put me into the present
the way the noon sun will,
hanging overhead like an inquisitor's bulb -
undeniable and demanding of truth,
but only the truth of now.

instead this early morning light
forces reflection over what is yet to come.
one must wait until the evening
when the shadows trail into the past
to ponder what has been done.

cutting

along the bank of the river
the water eddies
and minnows sparkle,
but this is not where the river
is about its secret business.

I want to go down to the cutting bottom
where the same water that plays along the shore
cleared away the bones of the dead,
pushed aside settled sand and silt
millennia before Christ was conceived

where the same water that laps tentatively
by my shoes
has been chiseling at rock
with jackhammer inevitability,
making its deep way.

with the time I have
I will leave my mark on the world
until my waters run dry
and the fire consumes us all.

which of us said that? I wonder
turning away from the fish
and back up the worn trail

driving to work

on the street where the grass grows tall

next to the wooden fences that have drank
the sun's whiskey heat too many days

I see an old man walking

as scarecrows walk in dreams:
his body rail tall and rail thin,
he leans on a drug store cane -
an adjustable aluminum tube with a grey handle
like a dusty Christmas decoration.

this is a sound bite of a life
out of context.

just as I pass him, he pauses in the path
using the stopper foot of the cane
to sweep up and aside
a curled page of newspaper.
it does not belong on the path
of the sidewalk-less shoulder.
this is a statement he wishes to make

Tonight, again

I keep the rum
in the back of the cabinet
because it tastes like pain.

The beer tastes like poker
or dominoes;
the wine like the children
have gone to bed early,
and the dishes are done.

The rum pours into any glass
when I shove aside the amaretto
(which tastes like romance)
and the sambuca
(which tastes like history),
clinking the bottles
to draw the rum
from where it has been banished
since last time.

beware the loose reality of pop-up toasters

reality is carelessly knit together
in the pre-dawn twilight -
words and the things they mean
are pulled and stretched
like an old sweater -
the moonlight shines through the gaps.

reason rules the day,
but its grip on the pommel of knowing loosens
once the sun unhitches his chariot
and stables his horses
and sits down at his great marble table
to dine on wine and figs.

in the night there is no one god
from whom truth radiates -
there is a cacophony of order,
a cornucopia of law.

take your pick, if you can -
find that you can leap comets and
exchange research notes with dolphins.

however, I hope that pop-up toasters
and other household appliances
do not pursue you
in a house without doors - but if they do,
just keep running until you hear
the snort of horses
and the clop of hooves
against the sky.

Dream Lovers

1.

I bowl on Thursday nights
with my wife's scorned lover
whom she left me for -
a cruel laugh and,
"Life's too short
to keep having sex with just you."

He found out life was too short
to have sex with just him, too.

We bowl with all the other
broken hearts,
new ones always arriving, stunned
in her wake.
They have made me
team captain
because I was the first.

I have a blue satin shirt
with, "Captain" embroidered on the back.

I am proud of how it shimmers
when they shine the lights on the disco ball.

2.

Then there is the secret
dream lover I had before
I was married.

It was just a one night fling,
but she returns now and then
to fill me in on her progress.

She doesn't threaten
to reveal our secret -
it's become something
of a sacred bond between us.

"You were mine, first,"

she reminds me.

But she is also married now.

To a dwarf.

She met him at her
disabled persons activist group
after she lost the use of her
legs in an agricultural accident
in Manhattan.

We sit in a dream cafe
drinking over-priced coffee
and show each other pictures
of our dream children.

"It's a life," she says
before she becomes a crow
and flap-flops away -
no need for legs.

Every Night it's Just the Same

Tom Waits and I
sit across the aisle from each other.
The train is moving again and
there is Rod Stewart
at the front of the car;
beautiful men and women surround him.
Light flashes on the walls
from an unseen disco ball,
He is singing Tom's song
as the steel wheels chatter
over seams and joints in the tracks.

Is it like this every night?
I want to ask
when I see Tom watching,
face smoothed of emotion.

But I know we all ask this question -
will I see you tonight?
Equal shares of hope and fear
as the "you" is filled in
with approaching faces and names
like stops on the downtown train.

quantum logic

sitting on the back stoop
in the post-storm morning air
I find that all possible futures are open
and laid before me, so long as I sip my coffee
and do not rush into any of them.

the longest ones are perhaps the most frightening
as the odds of loneliness pile up
like diapers and jars of applesauce.

some end with friends and family
in a warm place,
but one cannot hope for too much simplicity,
too much easy happiness, because
these are roads that end in dull eulogies
and flowers
and indifference.

I recognize by quantum logic
(which I do not understand)
that all of these things will come to pass,
and they will all belong to me,
if only "me" were a singular being.

a walk to the end of the universe

if you walk to the end of the universe
come barefoot
out of respect, but also
because there's this great beach there.

you'll find me wearing a broad brimmed hat,
making sand castles from stars

the Titans run around nude
so don't be shocked
(and don't stare -
they'll know you're American
if you do)

when you come,
barefoot of course,
we'll walk down to where the river of time
pours over the edge of the abyss

but before we do
happy hour is from 3-6,
and the special is always
green appletinis
at Milton's Pub and Grille.

a raven sits at the bar
on a perch of olive
telling everyone who comes by
that he's never going back

Looking for the Old Woman Who Plays Rummy

Then I am standing in the office of the nursing home volunteer Coordinator that only exists in previous dreams. I mean to ask about the Old Woman that I used to visit to play cards with to keep her company, to fill something missing, pretending it's about her.

She's not in the lobby where we had dealt and folded so many other nights.

"The poet returns," the Coordinator laughs happily. "We haven't seen you for while."

I try to give a rational explanation: my job moved me far away; I'm working longer hours; I've been gone for two years – just back here – where ever here is – for a visit. And the poetry hasn't been flowing like it once did – not since I left. But rationality is no better in the dream world than in reality.

I don't get a chance to ask where my card partner has gone – has she passed away? Found another partner? My heart is pounding when I notice the macaw on the Coordinator's shoulder like a pirate joke, it's one eye cocked and pressing me.

Now she is telling me about a project she had in mind just for me, something to do with envelopes and addresses and stamps and forms – or maybe this was all surmised by me or transmitted by the macaw – it's difficult know.

I'm looking for the Old Woman who plays rummy by the door I want to say. The one whose presence is brittle and fertile and fleeting.

Convertible

At first the driver seems to be jerking her head
as if shaking off a bee
but then I see the rhythm in her movements
and catch a corner of her smile
as she bounces her head in the direction
of her passenger.

She infects him
and his head begins to bob
in time with hers.

I can't help it -
I switch off the news and
roll down my window
to try to catch a bit
of what they are listening to.
It's then that the light changes
and we all begin to pull away.

From a lane over, I follow
the little red car.
At the next light, I am alongside them.
I hear a song from my youth
that makes me want to dance.

I throw open my door
and like Daisy Duke,
I jump into the front seat
of the convertible,
landing with TV precision
between the man and the woman.
They are, of course,
unsurprised.

I put my arms around them both
and as the light changes,
we pull away together,
heads bobbing,
friends for so long.

We roll down this length of road
collecting more passengers at each stop light

like a clown car.

Each of us hears the song of our youth,
each of us has been friends for so long.

It is never crowded

as long as the music keeps playing
and the wind keeps blowing.

About the author:

Mark Bonica is a professor of economics and finance, a career soldier, photographer (<http://www.bonicaphoto.com>), husband, and a father of three. In his teaching he tries to show his students the unity of knowledge, explaining, when he can, how true knowledge is poetry, and poetry is true knowledge.

Mark has a Ph.D. in Economics from George Mason University, an MBA from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, a MS in Finance from the University of Colorado at Denver, and a BA in Philosophy and English from the University of Massachusetts.

This is his second collection of poetry. His first collection of short stories, *Extremophilia*, will be coming out shortly. A photo essay, *A Gathering of Angels: A Journey to the Albuquerque Balloon Fiesta*, will also be available shortly.