

from *A Handful of Dust* by Marc Beaudin

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“Of all that is written, I love only
what man has written with his blood.”

–Nietzsche

There are many dances and there are dancers for them all. But the music? That is something different. *Tat Tvam asi*. There is only one song: universal and particular, elusive and pervasive, peaceful and violent, sublime and vulgar, mysterious and familiar; and ever calling with sacred, inconceivable beauty.

It is the music heard in the silences and distances of wind, thunder, moonlight.

It is the music that casts its rhythm in the spiraled patterns of the changing seasons and impregnate tides.

It is the music of life, and death . . . of their unity.

It is here now, comforting and challenging a tired dancer, and it was there then, waiting without expectation. To be heard. By him:

Nagashana eased back into the clawfoot tub, momentarily lost in the swirling clouds of vapor formed as the stove-heated water met the early-April, late-evening, mist-tinted, mid-Michigan air. Long thinning strands of dark hair meandered past bony shoulders and out across the surface of the water like separate snakes looking to turn somebody to stone. *That water snake eating a sunfish – a vision of the coming darkness, terror, yet it is in darkness that the sacred stories are unfolded, only emberslight to see far-away eyes.*

The opening kitchen door scattered the obscuring steam and the image of Nagashana became clear: celebrating his going away party with this bath on the flat roof of the dilapidated, deleriumscape apartment. Matt Kuwapi, bear-like in name and heart, stepped from the simmer of the party inside calling, “Last beer, we’ll share it.”

Thinking there’s no such thing as the last beer, Nagashana took the bottle and drank deep, heeding Pope’s advice. “Thanks, brother,” he said between drinks. They were not related by blood; much closer. Matt was one of the handful of people who Nagashana knew he would truly miss when he left.

“Tomorrow it is then,” said Matt, taking back the offered bottle.

“Yeah, a 9:00 a.m. bus to Chicago. Ever been there?”

Matt shook his head, lowering the bottle and passing it.

“Me either,” said Nagashana, “I hear its windy.”

Quiet laughter, quickly swallowed by the night sky.

“And where to after?”

“A train, somewhere . . . South Dakota or maybe Colorado. I feel like I should be nervous, or at least excited, but it just seems so natural that I would be leaving school, quitting my job, taking what little money I’ve managed to scrounge – you know, I had thirty seven dollars in pennies molding away in wine jugs – and setting out on the road to unknown locations, meeting unknown people, seeing unknown sights.”

“I envy you, my brother,” said Matt, “for being able to go like this.”

“And I envy you . . . for not needing to.”

The bottle emptied, the words spoken, Matt went back inside to the waning party.

Nagashana nestled his head into the porcelain’s shoulder and drank in the fullness of the night: the mist becoming a playful rain on his face and neck; scraps of grey cloud erasing stars, one by one, from the sky; the haunting melody of his going away party echoing through the night sounding lonely and sad – and once again, he found himself within the Poem.

Stepping free of the mad spinning: shadows are cast off and the true Form is brought into focus. Yes and again yes: it fills me.

What?

Not This/Not That.

Yes.

Let me at this moment declare and swear on this bottle that there is no greater state or realm or world than that of the Poem. It is Moksha, it is Nirvana, it is ecstasy: (exhistanai), and as always, it is fleeting. The recognition of THE Poem as it is occurring as A poem, is a glimpse of the eternal Tao. It is Joyce’s epiphany and William’s “Now the music volleys through as in a lonely moment I hear it.”

Nagashana closed his eyes, trying to hold this sensation in his chest, the pit of his stomach – anywhere but his head. He knew that once his damned brain sunk its teeth into it, that would be the end of it. But it was hopeless; like trying to hold the wind.

The words always came: A new poem! Mine for the writing – mine to destroy; like touching the wings of the newly-emerged butterfly and rendering it flightless. This then was his struggle: when faced with the Poem, with the overpowering presence of the Music, his obsession to record it stopped it short. He stepped outside of Self and Moment and viewed reality, which *the* Poem had brought into direct clarity, through the mirror of *a* poem. As if sensing that the birth of the Buddha means the death of the poet, the poet kills him at the point of conception.

For some time now, he felt more and more torn by this division. He longed for a life of the spiritual yet constantly wallowed in the mire of the physical. These two conflicting powers would manifest themselves daily: The seeker understood the sacredness of tobacco, knew its proper use. The writer smoked cheap cigarettes while pecking away at the typewriter. The seeker was patient and silent; knew that words were fruitless. The writer thrived on them – impulsively and loudly worshiped their dissonance, reveled in their misery, savored their seduction. He knew he couldn’t live with this split. Neither aspect, partially followed, would be worth a damn. It was an all or nothing scenario.

Morning. The shining Greyhound creaked and lumbered from the downtown terminal bound for Chicago, rolling past the tombstone houses of the first ward. Nagashana pulled a worn journal from his canvas satchel and wrote:

From my dust-shaded window, I study the boarded windows and sagging roofs, Junkyards and sinister looking bars. This is a dying city, but there is a certain beauty and wisdom in its decay. The years that I have spent dancing around its deathbed have given me a quiet ache that I carry in my chest. It warms me and saturates my being like a nostalgic rain. Goodbye Saginaw.