

From the *Ashes* of Puppets

**some more words by
*Andre Monserrat***

This chapbook is dedicated to me.

Thanks to Lesley for inspiring the title.

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by Andre Monserrat

Quitting Poetry

Cancer doesn't know it is killing you.
Cancer loves you.
It loves your lungs and your bowels and your heart.
Just a community of like-minded cells eking out an existence.

I picked up a pen just like I did a cigarette.
The jury is out on the cigarette,
But the pen certainly chewed up my heart.

I Want the Poetry Back

I was happier with the madness.
I watched the bridge burn from the highest window of my forehead
and pulled the shade on my third eye.
Did a freefall backslide into the anesthetic blanket of an over the
counter prefab life.
Now I'm shotgunning smoke from the lips of poets. Blowing
rings around the moon. Making Saturn from a hubcap, until the
orderlies graft the remote control to my palm.
Now my heart is plowed by Hallmark card commercials in the
methadone clinic of Must See TV.
I begin to reminisce about spending days with my mouth stopped
shut by a wasp nest until I burned it out with cigarettes.
Shaking the Magic 8 Ball and having it tell me "Fuck No!" one
day and "Hell Yes!" the next.
I was happier when I took the pain from a hip flask
Spilling rainbow oil slick snailbelly juice on my forehead
Like an anointing
Like a warning
My day planner choked with blood and shit and the cryptic
symbols from the Babylonian curse she tattooed around my heart.
Out the window I see a new bridge, a crystal cat's cradle of voices
inter-cut with heartbeats.
So I overpower the warden and finally break free
It's easy to do because the warden is me
I want it all back
The spinning carousel face
Russian roulette with a scorpion jukebox
Tequila tango of tongues in the back alley of my mind
Always a step away from the mad shit
The breakthrough an ever falling star
Happiness a train I keep missing in a dream
Every day dying in a Maserati car wreck of ecstasy
But I want it, even if it eats my heart,
I want it.
I want the poetry back.

My Voice

I will not apologize for the train wreck:
You brought all that baggage,
Now you sort through it.
Because now I'm hunting for my voice, see.
I got tired of all the parallels,
So I uprooted tracks to grow ladders out from stairwells.
My voice might be up here in these mountains,
Echoing between griffons' nests
Or nestling between a goddess' breasts.
Goddess?
No, I'm getting confused again;
Just two soft hills I passed when I used to take the train.
I will not apologize for stealing the bed sheets.
You taught me to make a parachute just in case,
When what I needed were sails to visit space in my starship.
My voice twists tongues with the sun, hon,
It don't *parlez vous* you and your moon talk,
So bright and quiet, but visited by shadow -
You know, the dark train that could.
But I should not concern myself with lunacy
While my voice still calls to me
From the lip of God's coffee cup.
Take a sip and stay up to see the griffons landing on the
street with me
As I come flying home.

On the Moon

Somewhere on the moon is a picnic basket.
You leaned against the black monolith
and I leaned against the crashed capsule.
We ate a meal of heart-shaped sandwiches.
It is so bright on the moon that your pupils turn to pinpricks
and the stars vanish.
So you can understand why it was hard to see you
against the monolith,
against the infinity draped along the lambent lunar curve.
We put on our star goggles to see clearer.
I showed you the fire the wise men followed.
You pointed out the comet that would boil away the oceans.
We watched the earth appear.
When I tried to put it in my pocket,
you stopped me,
saying it would only end up on my shoulders.
You gave me the mountains of Tibet, instead.
"Start small," you said.
The line where the light side meets the dark is so distinct
it looks as though it were painted there
with the ashes of every hopeful campfire.
We danced back and forth through light and shadow
like a car weaving at high speed down a forgotten highway
where laws were too lazy to get up off the porch.
After a while I grew to love being dizzy with you.
On the moon, even the most serious things
weigh less than a golf ball.
In our hurry to catch the train back to Earth
we forgot the picnic basket
and several other heart-shaped things.
I still see them now and again, as though through a telescope.
The secret of the moon is that there is air there,
but only for a time.

Rockstar Fantasy

All the sweaty leatherclads have laid it all down
To light the pyre of you:
Flickering fire of sunset sweat
Ground zero in the mosh pit
Burning the hands of man children
Who will run back to their caves to warn of the sun tiger stalking the city
You ripple across the dance floor with an eel in your spine
Make no mistake: you have been noticed.
And these chords pulled across these frets by these fingers are
the reward for your fine self.
Are you prepared for the courtship of the bass?
It's a different view from this ashtray throne
Cuz when I stroke a string you toss your hips
So who is the puppet now?

Valhalla don't got shit on us
The gods up here on this stage:
Angst on vocals
Sweet Misery on bass
Hard Luck on drums
And you on my dick
You want love?
You better check the morgue.
They're busy downtown with this band on the scene.
Commitment? Fuuuuuuuuck.
Hum a few bars and I might remember.
Want me to remember your name?
Another anonymous cunt hair stuck in my teeth.
That's your name!
In the morning the show's over.
You don't have to go home, but you can't stay here.

Because I'm a rockstar and the cities all burn for me.
Okay, I've never smashed a guitar much less played one.
But I'm a rockstar and the women scream my name.
Missed the train again, not sure I want to leave just yet
But I'm a rockstar and the women scream my name.
Could we just be fucking crazy instead of fucking with each other?
But I'm a rockstar and the women scream my name.
The light is fading and could you just pretend it's love?
But I'm a rockstar and the women...the women are so damn bright

First Time Flowing

The airplane is the epitome of safety, order and restraint.
Everything designed to induce calm and minimize contact.
Other passengers apologize for touching me, ashamed of the slightest
nudge that briefly bridges a gap.
But I *want* to be jostled; I *want* their fingerprints on me.
I look out the window and all the clouds are fucking.
Couples glomming together,
Threesomes tumbling through the atmosphere,
Some of them on dragons.
And I want out of the capsule.
I want to go where it is wet and uncertain.
Inside the window, we are rows of silent worlds, arranged like eggs.
We acknowledge each other like the blurred faces in the periphery of
dreams.
We are in transition.
We are being taken.
No one mentions our mutual fate, as though words would cause the
worlds to crack and burst, blending together like the clouds outside.
We have nothing to hold but our breath.

I am gripped by a spiritual shuddering, caught inside my own wake.
If I would resist less, make my soul an aetheric arrow, flow upstream,
I would find Me.
A Me surfing the crest of Time.
A Me moving so fast it strips the paint off stars.
A Me that is already There because it itself is the destination.
A Me with liquid, hungry boundaries.
I would embrace that Me, pull its lips to my ear and finally hear what
I've been trying to say all this time.
But right now I am a pail of water in a steel box:
Passenger 10C on a carefully prescribed arc,
Moving faster than I ever have while sitting completely still.
Three buttons give me the power to summon
A tiny sun, a tiny wind, or a tiny repose.
To see, to feel and to dream with the seatbelt securely fastened, small
and safe.

Hidden somewhere ahead of me is a
Flickering matrix of dials, maintaining my fate.
They taught me that complex machines were required to yoke destiny.
Without buttons and dials the plane could land in Xanadu, missiles
could land on the Civil War, and I could become anyone.
The gauges were necessary to measure progress.

So I bought into the buttons and the dials.
And I bought them with my blood.
An umbilical snapped, memory faded and I unlearned that ultimate
potential, life in all directions, chaos, is easy.
Anywhere and Anywhen slide loose behind a thin amniotic membrane
where my body used to breathe water and my soul used to breathe...
used to breathe...
Where my soul just used to Breathe.

Outside the window, the clouds form the angular logos of their new
corporate sponsors.
The people flying the plane weren't just taking us,
They were taking everything.
Frantically, I reach out and press a fourth button I hadn't noticed before
and I summon a tiny point of contact.
A woman arrives and asks "Can I help you?"
I say "You can do more than that: You can get your hands dirty with me.
Get me under your fingernails. You can stop lying and expecting me to
lie back. You can drink my tongue and every other part of me and I will
do the same for you. We can walk naked and give everything we see a
new name. And don't apologize if you end up killing me; I was made to
explode and make a mess and stick to everything.

"Barring that, you can show me where they've hidden my sun, my
wind and my dreams. I've checked way too much baggage onto this
flight, so I know they can't be here. While you're at it, you can take back
all the dials because I'm not measuring up, I'm going Up.

"Barring that I'll proceed to one of the four exits (the nearest of which
may be behind me) and get off the fucking plane."
MAYDAY EJECT EJECT MAYDAY EJECT EJECT

...
She sits down next to me.
Her hair is not red - Somehow that's okay.
She pulls out a dog-eared copy of *The Little Prince*.
I know what pages she has marked.
"First time flowing?" she asks.
"Yes, yes it is."

She holds my hand and my heart although they both stain her.
"We're going to slide up and through the plane now," she says.
I nod.
There is a splash.
I stop holding on to my breath.

Sisters of the Storm

I have met the love of my life, the girl of my dreams, and my soulmate.
They are three different women.

My love burned out my eyes as I watched her fall.

I wandered, hands outstretched, in search of her in the country of jagged glass.

Our greetings no longer Amiable, our stares strange,

I still remember the sweet blood on my cut hands, some of it was mine.

Another I met in an afternoon vision, folded note slipped sideways past my ribs,
Warning me of a red fire boiling in from the east.

My men barely had time to lash me to the mast,

The last knot snug just as the golden voice rained aching over my heart.

I remained ever an island to her, she a sunset strangely settling in the east again.

A span of time and circumstances cut between us and I fear I cannot Bridge it.

My soulmate stirred beside me in sleep when our names were the alternating
beats on a drumskin stretched between the teeth of gods hunkered in secret
parley until one sneezed and one laughed and the skin snapped, a canvas
whipping in the wind, paint crying over the map of all the child-smudged
continents from where they would send for our varied parts only to scatter them
over and over from the cliffs of the moon down to clay-slick river valleys where
red monkeys sift the water for the syllables of the incantation that will make us
whole.

Her voice is the sea foam call Beckoning Again from the cave where fire children
raise pinky fingers to write messages in mercury.

For her I will always answer, will always fly and fall, shudder and be still.

The three will never weave me a skein of promises,
a blanket under which I can sleep untroubled.

The three will never confer and trade secrets.

The three will never compare their familiar bruises.

But when they cry out from each horizon they are a chorus
and their song finds a common center.

They are the Sisters of the Storm and my oceans boil when they draw near.

Gumdrops

About two years ago I lost the ability to fly. Not like Superman, nothing so impressive. Just a loose kind of upright hovering, as though my heart were suspended from a cloud passing high overhead. The onsets came unannounced: Electricity warmed my spine and I simply inhaled, drifting upward, dangling until I could push off a nearby wall or streetlight.

It unnerved passersby. Spontaneously flying people were unsafe or at least untrustworthy.

It happens a lot in movie theaters. At Wenders' "Far Away, So Close!" I spent half the film with my ankles hooked under the seat in front of me. This annoyed some of the patrons and they told me so. But others approached me afterwards and said the movie made them feel something ... different. Maybe they felt a touch of what I felt; they were just more grounded.

I was happy and strange and quietly puzzled.

For a time.

I met her at a park on one of those rare spring days when I least expect the most ordinary things. Her white wisp of a dog bravely challenged all comers while she sat nearby, transported away by *The Little Prince*. I don't recall our first words, but at one point she asked, "Are you safe?" and I replied, "Probably not."

She smiled, "Do you know you're standing a few inches off the ground?"

"It happens sometimes," I said.

We saw each other almost every day after that. We both loved movies, although sometimes I cried at the things she laughed at. And vis versa. She had an impressive collection of sunglasses to "see things in different lights." She had a collection of moods like the weather systems of a tropical island.

Sometimes, when we made love, I'd end up pressed against the bedroom ceiling with the covers draping down around her like a tent. She said she was happy I could fly, but sometimes ... sometimes her eyes shifted or she would tug on my dangling legs a little too hard.

One day she wasn't there when I came back down. She spelled out her goodbye with refrigerator poetry: "we don't like the same gum drop s any more."

My heart immediately crushed my body to the ground. How could I have ignored the impossible mass of my own feet all these years? I slogged through days, weeks, and months as an athlete weight training on the deepest ocean floor. I forgot what the air was like up there. Sunlight faded by seaweed and murk became good enough for me. People included me in more conversations about football now that I wasn't so different.

All movies became the same movie.

Last week I began receiving small boxes full of gumdrops, each containing a different flavor. I found at the bottom of each box a single word of refrigerator poetry. They eventually spelled out: "forgive me meet in aus tin ?"

So I'm leaving for Austin, following a trail of gumdrops.

Did I mention she loves movies?

Emergency Condom Hidden in Wallet, a Haiku

bought new snow shovel
i look out window every day
not a flake in sight

Playing with Fire

A friend of mine (let's call him Jake) recently set up a parking lot for Matchbox cars inside the painted yellow confines of a no-parking zone right in front of the Magnesium Squeezebox, the most happening joint in town. This parking area was better than any crip' spot because it was even closer to the front door.

The owner of the 'Box, Malcolm McVeigh, came out as Jake was numbering all the tiny parking spots with a spraycan and one of those stencil sets kids used to have for school projects before they got inkjet printers. McVeigh was none too pleased about this new development and he said so to Jake. "Whaddafuckisdis?"

Jake was smooth. "It's gonna be so cool when the tiny Matchbox people drive up in their tiny Matchbox cars. Everybody's gonna be jiggling and jiving. They'll set this place on fire, you'll see!" Upon further reflection, this didn't sound half bad to McVeigh. After all, it wasn't really a parking spot, not technically anyway.

That night, at precisely 11:11, the Matchbox lot filled with Jaguars, Rolls Royces, Trans Ams, Army Jeeps, Dune Buggies, VW Beetles, Cop Cars, Hummers, the General Lee and the Batmobile. The Matchbox crew, only an inch high, strutted into the Magnesium Squeezebox and turned things up a notch.

The crowd went stupid over all the little match people and they all wanted one to light their designer cigarettes. The Matchbox crew was happy to oblige, and their tiny heads exploded with blue flame. Blue flame that never went out, it was too crazy.

On the dance floor, the kinetic crush of bodies throbbed to Angus Ledbetter and the Punchdrunk Wallabies, the psychotic Australian brass band with glass packs on all their instruments. Everyone wanted a piece of the sweaty tile now that the Matchbox crew was on the scene.

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Their little cardboard bodies danced the ancient Matchbokkian fertility dance around the lip of a pitcher of Fat Tire. The crowd was transfixed. The Matchbox man who drove the Batmobile said that in Matchbox land, even the most superfly cars were only about \$3.99. The crowd shrieked and pulled their hair. The driver of the Free Inside Every Box of Kellogg's Corn Flakes race car told the slackjawed crowd about the Light That Burns Twice As Bright But Half As Long, the only true path to salvation. "Cast aside your Bics and Zippos, these false gods will not save you!" Nothing was like what they'd read in matchbooks and the crowd despaired over their wasted lives.

In unison, as though activated by a hypnotically planted code word, the crowd began to devour the Matchbokkians, down the hatch with a shot of Jaegermeister. Those that partook of the fiery communion saw the light and their heads were set ablaze and they spoke in tongues of fire. There weren't enough matches to go around and those left out cringed before their former dance floor companions, eyes watering from their steamy breath.

The anointed filed out of the Magnesium Squeezebox, orderly as the heads on a gas range. They got into their cars, now transmuted into Rolls Royces and Dune Buggies and the General Lee, and they drove into the night, a warble of Dixieland trailing after.

The remnant watched them go, hollow eyes and empty hands. My friend Jake gathered up the Matchbox cars, which were now bits of coal, and parceled them out to the crowd. The lumps looked like asphalt phlegm in their pale hands.

Fingers closed hard around the rough gifts, the only memory of a night they played with fire.

Goodbye, Kitty

At the mall I restrain the urge to buy the entire Sanrio store
And lay it at her feet.
Too little, too late.

"42"

"We're all out there, somewhere, waiting to happen." - Jeff Noon, Vurt

Today a friend of mine suggested that I examine the symbols in my Waking Life, as they can be more profound than the ones I encounter in dreams. It didn't occur to me to do so until just now, on the crest of some desperate epiphany.

How many days until I see so and so again? When will my t-shirts arrive? How long until these downloads finish? How long before the money runs out? How many days until Episode 2? How many hours does a friend have to meet us there in front of the theater? How long until "Buffy" is on? How many episodes of "Buffy" are there left? On "24," the clock is always running.

When I had this conversation with my friend on the phone, I realized that my cell phone battery was dying and it couldn't recharge while I was on it.

My battery is dying, I have maybe five seconds left. What will I say?

Indeed.

I was sitting at my computer, reading some inane internet site and then suddenly I wasn't. Suddenly I was pushing out of a gel vat and tugging at the cable stuck in the back of my head.

"What am I doing?" I wondered. "What is all this for?"

Has anyone figured out what they are doing? What did you actually DO today? I have no idea what I did. Is the Life thing working out for anyone out there? Is anyone Awake anymore?

In college one of my professors carried around a stopwatch to keep track of how much time they spent thinking about baseball during a given day. He started and stopped it several times during class.

What if I had a stopwatch that kept track of the time I spent being alive. Alive in a way that I remembered, that mattered, that counted for something?

A friend's mother died the other day. I put my arm around him...

Making love...

Just REMEMBERING how She made me feel...

Accelerating and the wind and sun are just right for five seconds...

Feeling I was actually going to kill him...

Behind a microphone and they are all watching me...

She forgave me... They ALL forgave me...

Moments. Some of them seconds long. What have I done to my life to make these moments into rare pearls pried from thousands of dull grey minutes?

You know the useless CompUSA salesman trying to get you to buy the flat panel monitor you can't afford? I am his eyes when you ask, "But why is it better than the other one?"

"I'm not perfect, but I believe I was meant to be." – Buddy Wakefield

Somehow, despite my copious free time, I still haven't figured out what I'm meant to be doing. It's the cliché sci-fi device where the crew has their memories erased and they have to figure out their purpose. "What did you do before you worked in the mines?" "I... I don't know. It's all fuzzy."

"What did you do today?" Or "How was your day?" have become fearsome monsters that drag me before this wicked ClockWatcher. I find myself scrabbling for details, a right and true account of the past 8 hours. Why is that? Why did the day only matter if I got the laundry done? How pathetic is that?

I want to say "I connected with another man's grief without using any words. That's what I did today." Or "I changed my mind about the death penalty." Or "I made a difficult choice and it turned out to be right." Or "I lived and I remember it."

If we all wore huge hourglasses around our necks, do you still think we'd be as interested about each other's plans for dinner? Do we really have that kind of luxury? My life is filled with vapid moments; do I really need to seek out even more? Why do I demand an account of your day when I already know we're all choking on it? Why not demand a connection with you, even if it is rude, goes against the Program, and it will hurt us both?

My life isn't just short. It is hungry, needs new shoes, and didn't get to go to the prom with the little red-haired girl.

Tetelestai

Surveying 31 days of scars,
An infirmary for words.
Just shoot them as they sleep -
I cannot bear their needy countenances
for another day.
I gilded my tongue with water from the black flask,
Now everything I say is the absolute truth.
Even my dream self points a finger,
Muttering sideways to its brothers
At how changed I am.
The stain of words prints my bedsheets
with a map of meanings
I am too weary to decipher.
I must break all my fingers
Before they scoop out my eyes.
So tired of seeing everything
in the light of my own heart.