



**MIDNIGHT
AT THE
MOUNDS**

Poems by Mike Finley

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MIDNIGHT AT THE MOUNDS

On the bluff overlooking the city is a meadow
Of picnic tables arranged in no order
And burdened with a thick shelf of snow
So all you see is snow on snow
Except for the hints of rhomboidal shadows
The park designer had no pattern
For their placement, he just said here,
And here, and here, and here, and here
Then tipped each table at a different slant
So at any given moment only one picnicker
Faces into the sun when she reaches for a Frisbee
And has to look away.

It is a village effect, a Breughel or Moses
In which the townspeople have all been led away to bed,
And all that remains is the landscape
That says No picnics today in the waist deep snow
No barbecue, no boombox thud.
But the sun will return and the snow melt away
Weekends families of the East Side set their brakes
And the derricks and slag heaps
Are obscured by fresh growth,
It says nothing is the same as anything in the world
It is our franchise as citizens
To enjoy the pollution and the polkas
And even when it is not overcast
The stars are still there
And they see.

JERRY SPRINGER

Every day the TV is more real
Real blood, real punches, that's a real big brassiere
On the woman from Klamath Falls,
But the effect is like some circus
Where the sweat and pee of the ponies
Is bled into a plastic cup.
Instead of feeling connected you feel
A million years removed,
Detached from the people
Bellywhumping their loved ones,
Remote from your neighbors down the street,
From the people you are supposed to love.
The cord connecting set to wall
Unplugs you from your soul,
And so it rumbles like insipid lightning—
Could we be more ignorant?
Pale fire bruited in the dark.

DIME

One day I learned I was wrong all my life
Offended by lightness and wary of cheer
And the only music my soul respected
The groan of the soon to be dead.
Then did I see how far down-mountain
I was and what hard climb was ahead.
But does one undertake such journey
With high purpose and fanfare
Or better, plant foot as if nothing
Much matters, as if birds migrating
Have nowhere to get to, and matters
Of life and excruciating death
Are resolved by the flip of a coin.

POND

Trees on the far shore reflected in a pool
And below the trees a panel of cloud.
Below the cloud the reeds bow heads.
Behind, the shadows mutter.

The surface shimmers with breeze
Like puffs of breath on a cup of tea.
Now cloud, now static electricity
Water beetle steadfastly rows
The flashing, shifting shape of trout.

It is like thinking about thinking
And then thinking about that
It is wood and water and heron arching
It is shining and lovely
Impossibly intelligent.

HOT SPRINGS PARKING LOT

They move in slow, small steps across the blacktop,
Three sisters in their sixties of indeterminate accent,
Perhaps Czech-Canadian, advancing toward their car.
Their heads tilt as if vital news is being imparted
That may relate to a loved one, a daughter or niece
Whose future hangs in the balance of what each
Has felt for years but only now is disclosing.
They have been soaking in sulfur springs the past hour,
At the foot of a treeless mountain,
Aqua playing on their smooth pink faces,
The wisdom began to occur between them
And now they are moving toward separate cars
But not before completing their conversation.
Their feet are small but their legs and arms are plump,
Made tender by the springs. I want to greet them
Because they are radiant in their calm
And they are solving the problems of the world
It is on the tip of every tongue like a drop of fire
But out of respect for their purpose, I pass.

CAFE BULLETIN BOARD

Valentines Day Puppies, \$300 for female, \$200 for males

Laz-E Boy Chair, royal blue leather, 1 week old, \$350

Their here -- the 2004 Polaris snowmobiles!

Hi, I'm Eric, and I plow snow -- call for free estimate

Truck for sale, low miles

God's Simple Plan for Salvation, take one

Guitar lessons by Steve

Explosive home based business -- \$99 in = \$1000 out --
we team build and every one gets paid

2 single Craftmatic beds with built-in massage and
heated mattress cover, one never used

Dog houses for sale, single insulated \$95, double
insulated \$135

Will haul for peace and justice

BOTTLE

Pick up the end up and tilt
Let the liquid drizzle down your chin
Feel the acid in your belly
And the shiver up your spine
Feel the essence hit your bloodstream
Feel the numbness in your extremities
You are taken out of your body
And given a set of instructions
Like an astronaut on a tether
Larger and grander and greater than yourself
The feeling of your heart trying at all costs
To get out of its cage
That you can almost take it in your hands and hold it
against yourself like a bunny
Don't try to talk like you used to talk.
It is all aswirl and aslur.
Lie on the bed and see the world spin
Like a sky that is all possibility.

USELESS

See the man and woman
At the nursing station
Awaiting word from the doctor:
Would their daughter, the child
They had stayed together for,
For sixteen years, pull through?
And getting their answer,
They drive home in silence,
Brush the dirt from their soles
And climb into separate beds.

LIVING WITHOUT FRIENDS

You told yourself you could do this without them
If you had their help it would undo the purpose
Recused yourself from the argument at hand
And folded into quietness there

You proceeded to suffer for a time
At your hunger and your loneliness
At the nothing there that swallowed you like a bug
And weeping nights from leaving them behind

You shut up like a foreclosed house
So never told a lie to those you loved
And never craved attention like a clown
So never disappointed or betrayed

So performed worthy work and set it
As an offering on the shelf of the world
So it was what it wanted to be
Clean and honest as a plank

Now when you think of them
It is no longer as temptation
Or the music of their laughter
Or the grasp of their embrace

But of the goodwill they bore you
Like a promise you would never meet again
Yet carry one another by the heart
Like a lantern that never goes out



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