



[Home](#)

[Winter-Fall 2012-2013](#)

[Summer-Fall 2012](#)

[Spring-Summer 2012](#)

[Autumn-Winter 2011-12](#)

[Summer 2011](#)

[Winter/Spring 2011](#)

[Autumn/Winter 2011](#)

[Summer 2010](#)

[Spring 2010](#)

[Winter 2010](#)

[Autumn 2009](#)

[Summer 2009](#)

[Spring 2009](#)

[Autumn 2008](#)

[Summer 2008](#)

[Spring/Summer 2008](#)

[Winter/Spring 2008](#)

[Editor's Note](#)

[Guidelines](#)

[Contact](#)

Three Poems

By Pete Reilly

Flying

He was propped against
the chain link fence
in the corner of the playground;
wrapped in stained rags,
his legs splayed
on the asphalt
before him.

“Hey you!”

I stepped closer.
The grey wind blew
a few lost leaves
in wild circles.

“I only done it once
when I was a kid;
but you do it once;
you don't forget.”

A nicotine stained finger
emerged from under
his blanket
and pointed at me.

“You want to fly,
got to put your arms out
shoulder height, palms down,
and run like Hell.
Run so fast
your eyes water.

Don't matter if you look silly,
or your friends laugh,
or fall behind;
you got to keep runnin'.
It's the only way
you'll ever get off the ground.”

He spoke above the barking dogs,
the sleepy commuter traffic,
the chaotic dance
of the dead leaves;
his voice a sledge.

“You ain't gonna fly to the moon,
orbit the earth or nothin',
probably get a foot or two
off the ground
if you're lucky;

because even if you can't see it,
there's a thread tying us down
to this good earth
so we don't up and blow away
like some lost balloon,
and end up God knows where.

When your feet leave the ground,
keep your eyes up,
or close 'em, if you'd like.
It ain't gonna last long;
so feel it;
remember it."

He pulled the blanket
close around his neck
and dropped his voice
to a whisper.

"Like I said,
I only done it once,
and it was a long time ago."

That night
a blast of cold air
blew him away,
with the leaves,
the sky,
and the barking dogs.

Duty

I lay on the bed, ready.
She stood in the doorway, indifferent.

Neither of our bodies
were what they once were,
perhaps never were,
having kept mostly to the dark and quiet
for so many years,
our bodies hidden.
There was no other way
with kids sleeping above or below.

I kept an insistent gaze on her,
not willing to be denied,
and she knew
there would be no way
to put this off,
and began to think of ways
to get it over with quickly,
without having to fully engage
her own body;
and if she could keep her clothes on,
that would even be better,
so she could get on to the housework;
and Oprah's guest was a woman
who had left her abusive husband
and written a book;
and she was famished

because she had eaten
only salad and yogurt for lunch;
and wouldn't it be nice
if I could take care of this urge myself,
for we both knew
it had little to do with her.

6:00AM Commute

Maria thought back
to her village
as she sat quietly
on the sleepy
6:00am bus
from the Bronx
to her job
waitressing
at the corner diner
in White Plains.

She leaned her head
against the window
and remembered
her mother,
an angel,
and the townswomen;
stones
settled in a silver stream,
grounded;
the flow of life
sweeping over them,
and around them;
washing away
the unnecessary,
until what remained
was solid and clean;
their rough edges
worn through the years,
perfectly sculptured
to the lives they led
without complaint.

As a young girl,
dressed in rags all week,
she emerged from her
adobe shack
on Sunday mornings
sporting a proud
and beautiful smile;
wearing a clean,
colorful dress,
adorned with bows
in her freshly brushed hair.

Even the shabbiest of homes,
was swept diligently
each day;
flowers,
fastidiously cultivated,
decorated entranceways
and windowsills;

and the women talked
about their husbands
and children
at the fountain
fetching water
in painted jars
of baked clay.

From day to day,
year to year,
she
and the others
had lived
this meager existence,
extracting joy and happiness
from little things;
and like the cactus,
they drew life
from the red dust
of the desert
and bloomed.

The bus
lurched to a stop,
the doors
swung open,
the ground was covered
with fresh snow;
nothing grew
in the Bronx.

Pete Reilly spends his days training in Aikido, writing, and cooking dinner for his wife Liz. He's had poetry published in many literary magazines, has written two novels, and is presently working on a non-fiction work, "Zen and the Art of Teaching".

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