





Afraid

Jack Cariad Leon

You'd think
after my little sister died
that everything would be bitterly ugly.
But it's not.
It's all green, it's kind of closing in,
like the whole world wants to hug me.
Everything has seemed
to detect my misery
and perk up.

It's all so beautiful
that it frustrates me.
The sky, little pink flowers,
the almost glittery shine
of passing headlights
in the city at night.

It's beautiful, it's magnificent, it's great.
Except that it's not.
I am looking out from beneath a veil
of her absence today.
And it feels like that veil is here to stay.
Everything is tinged grey.
And I want to be brave
but the world has opened up
in a claustrophobic kind of way.

I'm afraid,
of what else might hurt this bad.
I'm afraid
I might sabotage the ones I crave.
I'm afraid.
I'm just afraid.
That's all that I wanted to say.



the Future

Allen Seward

we are what waa
once referred to as the Future

now I'm steadily becoming the past

the lights have dimmed
and the worms have curled up
under
their
rocks;

one day I'll go, too

downward
and
away

as other young chumps grow
into the past

the Future no longer our concern

can
you
imagine??



The Ghost of Regret

Jason Stack

Regret looms over me like the clouds on an overcast day. I know logically that this is a useless emotion but I cannot seem to escape.

Why do I demand such excellence from my deceased former self? The past has gone, but the feelings remain.

It seems that I expected to conduct myself in the manner of an oracle. An oracle I am not.

I must put an end to this. My experiences have forged my character and birthed a new me. For that I should be grateful.



an ode to a dove

rest in paradise, jasmine

M.S. Blues

i woke up
in a cold sweat.
yet, i still had the vigorous hope
that this day would be a good one.

i wrote. i cooked. i started the day doing things i normally do.

but then mother called and said a u-haul truck hit her, the dove
i felt my heart drop as i looked above
(she can't be up there)
i began biting my lip until i tasted blood.

i tried to be sanguine—
(she'll survive)

so when mom walked in,
i had that smile of hope
across my vulnerable lips.

but her distinctive face said the words she couldn't.

and i cried.

to think an impetuous wind aided
an irresponsible driver...

we had so much to say but spoke so little.

now, i just talk to the sky.



The Katz' Covered Mirrors

Pixie Bruner

To the dead, all apartments look alike. It broke our hearts when Mr. Katz passed away. We took banana pudding and a tray over for the family sitting shivah. They were such wonderful welcoming neighbors when we first moved in, the interfaith couple next door. Matt being a Non-Jew was slightly confused by the lack of pies, casseroles and such at a shiva call so I briefed him on the landing.

The Katzes reminded me so much of my Bubbe Jean and Zayde Izzy, so we spent a lot of time talking in the laundry room and I would sometimes run errands for her and Morris. They were also Ashkenazi like me, so we had a lot in common. We might have been related somehow in the Pale of Settlement we had shared in our families.

They were the cutest elderly couple ever. They adored each other! He'd bring over a plate of homemade Rugelach sometimes. He taught Matt the blessing for the mezuzah for our door frame and then borrowed our hammer to hang his granddaughters graduation portrait. 57 years married. Serious relationship goals. Morris was always sharp as a tack, a whip smart retiree, his wit and intellect razor-sharp, up until he died. Then he got confused. Their daughter covered their mirrors in accordance with Jewish tradition. She even covered the guest bathroom

mirror. Yes it was practical to do so, because when grieving you do not need to be reminded how grief affects your body, your appearance is not important, but also because the angel of death can get confused. Alas, so could Morris Leonard Katz.

When he showed up in our mirror looking for his wife, we had to explain he was dead and had got himself turned around. He couldn't get in his apartment and accidentally mistook our apartment for his. He tried repeatedly to get in his apartment but the mirrors were covered on his side, and our mirror the closest and unfortunately- exactly back to back with the covered reflective surface on his side of the common wall locking him in.

So why do we Jews cover the mirrors? We don't want to look at those dark figures lurking behind us in the mirror. They will uncover the mirrors after a week and not see anything but their pale faces and



Samsonite luggage under their tear-swollen eyes. It must wait until there are no ghosts lurking in the background, after burial and reality resumes.

At DruidOaks, the souls sometimes get lost and confused in the three stories of paired opposing mirrors, reflective paint back to back with only that slender space between drywall and framing in the walls in the bathroom. If you see the ambulance or mortician come, you might want to cover your mirrors too.

The apartments were mass produced in the Atlanta apartment boom of the mid- 1980s so the walls weren't as thick as they should've been. The liminal space was so thin you could hear through the walls. I would hear them arguing over sports games and complaining about the pharmacy sometimes. Kibbitzing and kvetching adorably.

I don't want to think about what they heard coming from our apartment, really. Hopefully mostly laughter, talking to ourselves, and the triumphant squeak of bedsprings. It would make sense Morris would show up here not having the ability to get into his own apartment. He could hear Rivka brushing her teeth every night for 57 years! And so could we, every night from our side of the bathroom.

When a soul leaves this world, it leaves a void, an emptiness that is prone to be filled by things. This is a vacuum that must be filled. Sometimes it's a bad thing. Other times it's a good thing to have a blessed memory around. He said he would never leave her behind, so he's waiting. In the house of mourning, that empty space is a lodestone for dark entities, but he was such a nice good old man, we'd go so far as to call him a mensch. And Morris is fantastic. He is about as dark as a fully lit menorah, he's light and hope. I just never thought I'd be a roommate.

These nice ghosts, Ibburs, like Morris Katz cannot always be seen by the naked eye. But when looking in a mirror, you may see more than your reflection, you might catch a glimpse of the incorporeal visitors reflection in the background.

The normal ghosts that visit a mourner are regret, guilt and anger. When people who are grieving take a hard look at themselves in the mirror, they see only their what-ifs, could've, should've, and would've. Obscuring the mirror ensures we don't see them in their true forms. It starves them of your soul, your grief, your life- the things they lack are hunger for. Ours isn't normal. He was a bookie. The spirit in our apartment and the apartment next-door wants jelly donuts, latkes and to sing "Oseh Shalom" and the crazy song about the goat we sing every Passover.

Where a man has lived, there does his spirit continue to dwell. There's a gap between worlds in these apartments. These thoughts feed the evil spirits that haunt the grieving, permitting them no rest. I lit the candles in your bathroom to relax and he mistook them for sabbath candles. I honestly felt guilty for not being observant. You can hear him singing every Hanukkah from the bathroom mirror. Now she comes and celebrates Hanukkah with us every year for the last three years. So Rivka comes over and spends several hours a week in our bathroom talking to her late husband. What can you do? To the dead, all apartments look alike, but their stories, and her stuffed cabbages and pierogis are truly to die for.



The Koan

Kushal Poddar

You say - you feel nothingness,
and I see in your eyes -
you realise because you felt
it ceases to be that,
and you hold a possessed heart.



Brotherhood

Amit Parmessur

Marble hit marble,
flying from the triangle
into your pocket.

Our love has now vanished in
lines drawn by time, and mother.



The Conception Concept

Isaac Richards

2024 A veritable cliché, these conception poems.

2024 An entire genre trying to claim creation.

1998 By Lance Larsen, “February 1922: My Father’s Conception.”

2024 By Darlene Young, “The Baby That Became Me.”

2018 Natasha Trethewey, “Early Evening, Frankfort, Kentucky.”

2020 ... you get the idea.

1996 After they were married, my father and mother

1997 lived first in his aunt’s basement apartment

1998 2591 Apache Lane. I was born on February 1, 1998—

1998 the day someone you’ve never heard of became

1998 the first African American woman to be promoted

1998 to rear admiral in the U.S. Navy. Place her name

1998 on paper: Lillian E. Fishburne. The same day,

1998 Petr Korda of Czechoslovakia won his first

1998 and only Grand Slam: the Australian Open. “Together

1998 Again” by Janet Jackson, the #1 hit song.

1902 What else happened on February 1? Langston Hughes'
1884 birthday. The Oxford English Dictionary was published.

1908 King Carlos I of Portugal and his heir, assassinated in Lisbon.
1951 An atomic bomb on TV for the first time.

2005 Same-sex marriage legalized in Canada.
2021 Myanmar leader ousted by military coup d'état.

2021 Twenty-three years later, my wife and I moved in
1998 to the exact same basement apartment. Aunt Cindy,

2021 nearly 90. My mother said nothing
1998 about the apartment had changed.

1998 I walked in, saw a wooden bed frame carved with roses.
1998 A maroon mattress, sagging, faded. Stained in places.

2021 I stared at that mattress. Stared and stared and stared.
2021 I slept. I awoke. My wife beside me. The sound of a clock.



genderlist

Diane Grey

lives on a fourth-floor apartment in
starch and baratheia and
pink lipped Eton crop
and that cut, popular in the 20s,
full waist, fullest at the knee,
in white, black, a few browns,
a questionable dashplaid

frequents the studio at 0300,
in frail shirt over growths and pants an inch below and
inching further below
the navel,
and waits on a happy trail

like denying traffic lights,
maroon blots on the floaty
kurta that reminds of older, male-fitting kurtas
with waist fabric inpushed creating hips

sees the sun twice a year:
appearance in cinched purple dupioni
and eyeshadow a shade to the pupil's black tint,
encore in still generous black drape,
eyes through the hair
is the collar-bone fold,
sunward index finger and four pointing
at razed day-haunts

new-half in tow with
orange hair neckspirit whispers
metamorphosing polyrhythms foregrounding spoken word
at uncomprehending night-cop

shirt cuff rolled up over rolled in jacket cuff,
hair like Shirley Kwan on the
'EX' All Time Favourites cover,
stare wound leagues tighter
round ring-round-the-banker-collar

special K on divan in
gold-and-lilac Noël-gown in
voluptuous brocade,
sprouting chest and
smooth, tapering forearm falling out of sleeve
purrs and beckons
and your steps and mine
into the sporadically lit room behind
vermillion curtains





supple

airport

are we beautiful because we waste our lives

supple, bouncy lives that gradually lose their firmness
their whimsy, more and more a saggy balloon,
you slap my ass and it jiggles, not in a bad way
but not in a young way, either.

i'm more and more deflated, more nervous,
i take a deep breath in, hold until i settle,
become myself, whoever i am, breath out and wait

for the boiler room dj to set fire to my macbook.
it's a new set, it's the same as the last set,
come kick and carry me away—still
supple, still bouncy—again. with technology
and the resilience of the dark asian body
we can waste away together into our 40s, and
carry on—only a bit pathetically—into our 50s,
and who really wants to live to see 70?

Theme Park Life

Stephen Ground

life's a slowly winding
theme park line on a

warm, overcast day, but
just as you reach the front

the Earth implodes

and you don't even
get a chance to scream





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