

Sidney Goldfarb

TO MAKE THEM MONUMENTAL

There are only
so many people
that you
can talk to,
and they aren't
here.

It took you years
to uncover them
and then they disappear.
And then you disappear.

Then you're in a certain place
with people all around you,
interested, friendly people
in the way that a tribe of natives
might be interested and friendly
but you're completely alone:
out the window
isn't the building
he works in, she
doesn't do her
laundry down the street.

You know where they are:
They're there
in a marble
remembrance of the gods

that once returned eternally
but never comes back any more.

Winter is a condition,
spring is spring,
and women are beautiful,
momentarily.
No season holds them
and promises them
in a particular
movement of the earth.
No hand comes
to make them
monumental out of stone.
And you forget
the outline of their faces,
and you can't taste
their breasts in your mouth,
and their smell is an incense
that always escapes you,
and you don't remember exactly
their eyes of eternity
in that attic, in that desert,
in that bar that no one
ever went into again.

Only the form of them
can find you, straddling
a crack on any abandoned stretch
to drag an accident of words
out of your mouth
so someone will tow you
into town, so something
will bring them back.

THE MAN YOU JUST PASSED

No clear origin.
 No obvious direction.
 Thick-thighed, big-bellied,
 Heavy-buttocked, hairy,
 Squat, a working man,
 A man who hasn't worked,
 Head set directly into chest,
 Upright. Upright looking
 Skyward, looking earthward,
 Averting eyes, burning to look
 Deeply, to reach out to you
 In the pride of his youth.

Upright, arms uncomfortable
 At his sides, gesturing,
 Grunting out of a cave,
 Ice-driven into shelter,
 Planting the alluvial basins,
 Words in his mouth, desirous
 Of love.

Desirous
 Of knowledge, knowing
 Nothing of himself, or next
 To nothing, some damned
 To wander in search, damned
 To knowledge of his wandering,
 No clear origin, no obvious
 Direction, a book
 Of myths and laws, a flood,
 A kingdom, a flood,
 Bound up and freed

And bound again, walking,
Feet planted in fear, planting
Nothing, facing murder.

Then out of the dead continent,
And the gods dead, and his own kind
Taking new gods, he taking none,
Foreseeing destruction,
Talking, eating, eating well,
Eating with his eyes
Over his shoulder, taking
Shelter in cities,
Walking the streets
Of accidental cities, no
Clear origin, no obvious
Direction, lover
Of women, lover
Of children, deserter
Of both, bound up
And freed and bound again,
Walking, arms uncomfortable
At his sides, feet
Planted in fear, planting
Nothing, facing murder,
In a country of murderers,
I reach out to you,
I'm the man you just passed,
There were words in my mouth.

SPEECH, FOR INSTANCE

or the wind in the imported, invisible paradise trees.
 Something roasting in the oven.
 The suffocation of an isolate Cape Cod House.
 A plunge into the Atlantic at the end of a bitter March.
 Everything
 has its
 effect:
 Sleep.
 Breakfast.
 Conversation.
 The revolution
 which will come
 in one form,
 the revolution
 which will come
 in another, we
 recognize, I
 recognize the wind and
 food and shelter most after
 a plunge into the icy ocean. The sun
 warm, the dune
 warm, the beach chill
 and damp under my feet, the ocean
 bitter cold so that the body
 loses consciousness
 for a moment, breath
 is hard to find, you
 emerge, screaming, in pain, out of
 the water, out of
 the coldest water, a girl
 is coming out of the water

behind me, also screaming, you don't
have to know who Aphrodite is any more,
you can see her, she's
a girl coming out
of the sea, her mouth
is open, her breasts
shake and glisten, in one form
or another things happen, and you know
that the world is only to be enjoyed, and what gives
access to one must give access to all, and only then
will isolation
become joyous to us,
a matter of our own choosing.
All this
is written
in one form
or another.
Everything
has its effect:
speech, for
instance, or
a girl
coming out
of the sea.

FROM THESE BITTER WORDS

I am only
myself
and I come
from nowhere.

Of course
you don't
know me.
I was born
in a town
of little
importance
near a city
that was once
a major city
but is now
of little
importance.

And my name?

My name
was stolen
from a dead man
in a country
I have never seen.

It follows
my first name
like a ghost,
a lost ghost,
going nowhere
to be born.

My parents
were like
all parents:
loving,
ridiculous,
and destructive.

Even so
I have certain
memories.
I remember
the men
without fingers
the men
without eyes
the men
without tongues
who came out
of the factories
at five o'clock
to buy
the newspaper
from me
or a pack
of cigarettes.
You don't
know them.
You will never
know them.
I am only
Myself
and I no longer
know them.

But I
remember them.
Even in the centers
of the major cities
of the world
where the discussions
go on day and night
and the bright-eyed
young men
make emphatic
decisive gestures
with delicately
manicured hands,
I remember them.
I remember them.
The follow me
like my name.
When I see them
I know my life
is stolen from them,
the living
and the dead
as your life
is stolen
from these
bitter words.

DON'T BE AFRAID

Don't be afraid of me
Don't be afraid of what I say
Neither of us has been here for long
We shall both go away soon and leave little behind us
No one leaves more than a little
So listen while you have me before you
And I will listen to you
Don't be afraid of me
I'm coming from nowhere in particular
I'm not going anywhere in particular
I like to lower myself into a cool pond on a hot day
 in Maine perhaps as you do or Colorado
I've been in both places and don't elevate one over the other
If it's summer that's the season I like best
Don't be afraid
I like hard work if I'm building something I believe in
 an engine or a house or a fence against the wind
Other times I'm content to loaf
I'm loafing right now in New York it's springtime
I like the angles of the buildings and the odors
 that assault my nose
I haven't seen anything you couldn't see
Are you looking at me or at my body or is there any difference
While you're deciding remember not to be afraid of me
Remember that they are arranged so that certain things
 are visible
You go down the main street and see the stores and a few
 of the fine houses
This is what towns look like from the highway
But cut to the right or left by the railroad station maybe
And you will find the inevitable tin shacks

And sometimes an entire family living under a bridge
And you are afraid because you are not of these people
Not in your lifetime
Don't be afraid of me
I was born in Peabody, Massachusetts
If you went through it on the highway it would be like
 passing me on the street
You would see a certain deception
Inside there would be Greeks and Portuguese and endless
 tanneries
You would see a shopping center motels and a horizon of ranch
 homes
Away from it under a sagging stairway that leads to the porch
 of a three-story wooden frame house someone would be
 beating someone else to death
Don't be afraid of me
I'm inside my body
You're inside your body
We're animals standing upright on the surface of the earth
I was a roofer once and I liked the work
Before that I was a plumber and I liked that too
I liked the way molten lead flowed from one form into another
These things were as pleasant as swimming naked on a hot
 day in Maine
The future is invisible but it's coming up soon
Don't be afraid
Don't be afraid of me
Don't be afraid of what I say
It's your turn now

