

Sample Poems

by

Robert Peake

www.robertpeake.com

robert@peakepro.com

Road Sign On Interstate 5
San Diego, California

They are holding hands, or rather, their silhouettes
are joined at the arms like a chain link fence.

Their bodies lean forward, italicized.
They are running: the man is pulling the woman,

the woman is pulling what must be her child,
and the child is lifted, by the speed, off her feet.

It is the same type of sign that might contain
the antlered shape of a generic black buck,

or tell drivers that the road could be slippery when wet.
It is a warning sign, it says: watch out for this.

Every time I pass, I scan both sides of the freeway,
expecting to see a family of three, gathering

up loose belongings, timing the cars, preparing
to run across eight lanes of high-speed traffic.

I have never seen them, this desperate family.
I only know their shadows, how they tilt toward

the bright yellow space in front of them, scrambling
to reach the outlined edge of the thin metal sign.

I have never wanted anything this much, for myself,
let alone to pull those closest to me into flight.

There is so much I could say about growing up
on the border of Mexico. It is not the corrugated

fence, or even the river of sewage, that defines
the scar that joins one world to the next,

but a one-hundred-foot width of sun-soft asphalt,
streaming with commuter traffic, day and night.

The man is pulling the woman, the woman is pulling
her airborne child, whose pigtailed flail back.

[cont'd.]

On the other side is the ocean, salt marsh and a beach
that stretches north, into the source of the wind.

They are holding hands, and smelling the salt in the air.
At night, their pupils contract as the headlights expand.

What begins like distant starlight grows to a spotlight,
a floodlight, a wash of whiteness, and engines made of wind.

Then reddened, like coals, like dying suns, the lights
recede, a river of cherry redness, a syrup of taillights.

The man is pulling the woman is pulling the child,
who rises as though winged in a blaze of light.

First published in *Rattle* #30, Winter 2008
Rattle Poetry Prize Honorable Mention

Yellow

The weed has no mind,
except what I lend it, there
between two concrete slabs,
growing flowers so yellow
they burn in my sight, remain
long after I close my eyes,
as if I might see them in death,
smoking torches, sulphurous
beacons, guiding me on their
tough green stalks, lighting
the damp walls of the cave,
itself a borrowed mind, thinking
what stones must think when wet—
thinking sparks from flint,
thoughts about sharpening metal,
thinking what concrete thinks
when tree roots whisper deep down,
conspiring against its underside,
first a crack, then a gap,
a birthing ground for seed dust
to take hold, and rain to fill,
and then a stalk emerges, popping
buds, which become the living
thoughts of yellow beyond yellow.

First published in *Iota* 85

Radish

She has let herself go:
the stringy gray-green mop,
stubble sprouting from her curlicue tail,
soil stains on a faded red leotard
bulging with crisp, white flesh.

Smoldering root, once
she drew fire from the soil,
hope, sulphur, and sex.
Plucked into air, now
she trembles in hand,
a scalded heart
still pulsing.

First published in *North American Review* March/April 2007
Finalist, James Hearst Poetry Prize

Meteorology

And then, it is over—
a break in the clouds,
which were never evil,
and the sun, which is not good,
streams into the wet yard,
glistening, not as a symbol,
but the simple refraction
of light. The rain and I
leave messages for each other
in this way, in the language
of facts: seven drops
on a mulberry leaf, a streak
of mud in the gutter, twigs
for divination, scattered
overlapping and apart. I give
the rain a few stacked stones,
offer up an old chair, one
I never liked much, let it
work away at the varnish.
And my mind, which is also
neither good nor evil,
I offer up now, to the sky's
window cleaner, the one
who summons the worms,
and scatters the trash,
that I might contain, someplace
in my own clay body, the gentle
indifference of rain.

First published on "A Change in the Wind"
10 October 2009 <www.achangeinthewind.com>

Mr. Ergosum Speaks
(after Zbigniew Herbert)

None of it matters. Let me say
that again: once, it mattered, and now,
when I snap my fingers, only dust.

That absurd cake! Justice. How it tilts
in layers on its pedestal, while party-goers
observe, “how remarkably straight.”

My hat is a chimney, chugging with promise.
What I think becomes soft smoke in the dampened air.
My coattails wave a continual flurry of goodbyes.

The nineteenth century was my favorite. Yes,
I have seen them all, through my monocle—
the one present I kept from the deposed Czar.

All of it matters, of course, actually, to the ants
on the sidewalk, hustling their minuscule lives.
Who can tell if they are small or just far away?

I wipe a tear from the corner of my eye.
The air, full of soot, encourages such weeping.
I wear a monogrammed kerchief in place of a heart.

First published in *San Pedro River Review* Issue 2

Small Gestures

Forgive me, rose petals, my fingers
could not resist the habit of plucking.

Some would call it childish, and those
who waggle a shaming finger know best.

I do not own my hands, but slip into them
each morning like a pair of work gloves.

I flex to break up the stiffness, and they crackle
like damp embers stirring back to life.

They are all I have, these slender tongs,
to do what my mind instructs in the tactile world.

Sometimes when they mis-type a word,
I wonder what they are trying to tell me.

Maybe they want to ask about the wartime practice
of soldiers shooting off their trigger fingers—

were they more afraid of dying? Or of killing
someone with a gesture as slight and easy

as curling an index finger into a teacup?
Oh, look what we have done to you now,

little flower. Let us sweep the petals quickly,
from one full-fingered hand into the other.

First published in *Sugar Mule* #32
<www.sugarmule.com>