

# MIDNIGHT



at the mounds



**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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