



# Lucky You

Poems by Mike Finley

1976

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# THIS POEM IS A PUBLIC SERVICE

---

Listen when I talk you little nothings  
Little zinc-heads in the cupboards  
By the rattling plates  
And the nutpicks and the mallets  
And the napkins and the forks --  
When it comes it will come  
As a surprise.

Inconspicuously they are laying tracks  
Up every porch of every home in this city.  
Into each room and every squeamish store.  
Through the backdoors of slaughterhouses  
Where sides of nothings, rubber carpets  
Hang on hooks  
Circling the sour and bloodstained floors  
Like pedestrians.

Stop doing what you're doing.  
Stop tapping your feet.  
Stop asking can you be excused.  
And what are you going to do about it,  
For your lusterless bodies?  
And your partners? And the children?

By now you have noticed no one signs on

For the detail of love anymore.  
They say get yourself another stooge.  
Let this one have the dirty job. Am I  
Your slave?  
It was called cooperation.

At the depot boxes and boxes of kits of lives  
Pile up on the loading dock  
Squealing for hands.  
You can't count on the help  
To lift a single finger.  
We expect a little something  
A special extra some kind of bonus  
For his type operation.  
You're better off dead  
The rich get richer.

At night freight trains cross state lines  
So no one can see the lines of giant zeroes  
On their backs, three to a flat.  
Each one weighs tons and enemy agents  
Are snapping them up,  
They think they're our replacements.

The other tracks they let decay  
Like rows of teeth a thousand miles long.  
The enamel starts to chip, the sugar  
Does its work.  
Between the lean and rotting ties  
Grown dogs howl  
Like flapping cloth.

You blind little ninnies cry for sweets.  
You ten ton babies kick at your baskets.  
You've outgrown your usefulness,  
Why don't you go home?  
Who can take care of you in times like these?  
Who can put up with the things that you do?  
If you knew a trade --  
If you worked with your hands --  
There must be someplace else?

Monday they stuffed my secretary in the outgoing file.  
Followed by a cut in pay.  
Thursday my office turned up missing.  
I miss my memoranda.  
Now they're asking for my shoes back.  
It has just been announced, we have  
Run out of weekends.

I am lifted on a stretcher and carried  
Out of court.  
A paper airplane where my eye should be.  
I had taken my complain to the top of the top.  
For a judge he struck me as immature.

Plain and simply we caught up too far too fast.  
Now no one is safe in his own suit of clothes.  
No one is secure for a second.  
The machines have started to nag  
They say  
Well  
We bitches are hard to satisfy.

What we have in mind is a generation  
Of animals.

Desperate losers mechanical slapstick  
You dumb seamsters you have snipped  
Your antennae.  
What happened to your sense of humor?  
You've been trapped for days  
Between floors on an escalator.  
Think. Everything  
You see you make gauze.

Businessmen walk the streets  
Wet with expressions of loss.  
They stop and speak with everyone they see.  
Where are all the buildings,  
They want to know.  
There used to be buildings.  
Hold my hand, I couldn't bear  
To jump from a tree.  
Good sir can you direct me  
To the nearest revolution?

Listen you dumb nothings brown nettles  
Red gristle dumb people.  
The housewives in our city are  
Grinding their arms into sausage.  
All our shops are boarded up.  
Newspapers lick our streets and broken glass  
Makes pretty sparkles.  
The president has taken to wearing his shirts backwards,

He's taken to giggling.  
You can beat this thing, he says,  
And explodes.

What nonsense, this town  
Is crawling with reptiles and pimps  
And you know it.  
Each one of them busies himself through the night  
Plotting your underground surprise.  
Your luggage was sent on ahead.  
A list of patrons is circulating,  
People you spoke with only this morning  
Have signed up for double  
Triple hitches.

At night mechanics rub burnt cork on their cheeks  
And drum till dawn on the hoods of junked autos  
With hammers and socket wrenches.  
Children all around the world have  
Stopped falling down. Their nails are clean.  
They've stopped hurting themselves  
And stopped needing you.  
In your company they have started  
Crossing their legs.

If you hadn't realized  
If this comes as a shock  
If you didn't know by now  
Things are coming to a head.  
The lonely beast you keep in the cellar  
That wails and wails

Only last night pulled all the red pins from his map.  
All your lovers have written your name  
A dozen times and torn it up again.  
Every stone in every field takes careful aim  
And flies. Things are getting  
Sticky everywhere.

What can you do, you want to know,  
To help yourself through this difficult transition.  
How to defend yourself or explain yourself  
When what has been heading your way all your life  
Arrives with its vengeance.  
Are you prepared, the trains are pulling out  
Everywhere, bound for unknown destinations.  
Fuses are lighting in every bedroom.  
There has not been a successful suicide  
In weeks, and you sit  
Playing with your hands in your lap.

What is it oh what is it, oh,  
The name of the song, our song  
That's been stuck in your head like a rusty needle  
For what seems like years.  
Are you coming? Are you going?  
You pitiful people you  
Tiny nothings your fractured lives  
You can't rise up from, can't speak out of,  
Can't pierce the membrane that you  
Call home, can't break  
The quiet that's killing all that you love.

This poem is a public service.  
When it speaks to you  
Listen.

# IN THE BARRACKS

---

If God made men to march to the sound of bugles,  
then who are we to stick nails in our ears?  
The reason we're here is because we were hungry,  
and we loved our country -- there's  
a lot of pacing in nuthouses, too.  
If I don't wind up hating  
the bourgeoisie it'll be  
a miracle. At this point  
could please me better  
than squeezing a trigger, and every civilian  
a target. We right now  
are strong as hell -- two years  
from now we'll be famous.

# ELEPHANTS

---

they shoulder their way like elephants  
through the town & erect a blockade  
of mahogany and teak

businessmen evacuate by ladders in the air  
from a satiny box the mayor produces a key

this is a city that keeps its promises  
the dark good smell of manure

# MINNEAPOLIS

---

The white sails of noontime flapped and flapped.  
This year we intended to travel, this year  
it is always July in.  
There are sidewalks now without any cracks  
and the cars are much smaller and old people  
want to relax in the sun.  
A dog and a stick race along the beach.  
The sand dries up and falls off your chest.  
I mention again the garden in Spain  
with the kings and the fountains and marble steps.  
The lighter you are the harder walking is  
and there are guitarists and men with recorders  
like a procession of lamas.  
Twelve Julys have come and gone this year alone  
in Minneapolis and everyone is humming  
a familiar tune, I feel the earth move  
under my skin, I feel the sky tumbling down,  
tumbling down, but not the kids who never get tired.  
This was to have been the summer of Austria,  
now the sand dries up and falls off your chest.  
The leaves on your houseplants are burned on the tips,  
it's the tapwater you say, the water burns.  
The sails on the sailboats flap and flap.  
The wheels squeak and the sirens sing  
and the dogs chase sticks alongside curbs  
on the streets of modern Egypt.  
White shoes and white furniture and the smell

of white lotions and the trees they grow indoors  
shimmer and shake in the radio breeze.  
The grinding of skates and the sundial squints  
on the first day in July.  
Minneapolis wears her blue skirts high  
and the poor sweat and the air conditioners perspire  
and the sun stands still on the beautiful shore.

# IN MY APARTMENT

---

the slightest movement electrifies  
a flick of the wrist  
the lights go out  
the bulbs grow cool and swing  
a mathematical arc  
furniture huddles  
it whispers your name

inside the refrigerator  
the pounding has stopped  
the onions have chiseled through the back  
and entered chrome passageways

i must leave this place  
if the car stops at this floor  
i am getting off  
and never coming back

# LETTER FROM COMO

---

Taking course to ospreys and antlions and the mauve noodle  
stacked like rosaries in the outer office  
Tonight it is quiet it is too quiet tonight  
Taking course from the trail of rags and broken webbing  
and the natives trembling under the giant banah leaves  
And taking course dead reckoning from the moon  
directly chuckling like the Old Bombardier  
Take my course to the sailor awash and aflat  
on the tarot deck  
Take it to Queens and Pawtuxet and the all-nite laundromat  
It steams like desire in the sleeping pile of woolens  
And the natives pressed themselves thin as knives  
pressed against the quivering chandelier  
take it to Mom and Pop and the aging cheerleader  
who ten years later still presses the torn photograph  
against her ribs  
It is too quiet it is sinister  
It is number than any number  
And what do I do oh what please say  
is a pawpaw and a bobtail nag all the doodah day  
Take it to America America in the springtime springtime in  
America  
because this is the garden of animal delight  
the clean scrape of the dish on cement  
Taking course to red jackals and jaydaws and the red noodle  
Nailed to the waiting room like old  
magazines

It is better than that it is steadier than that  
How do you do and welcome to Fabricburg  
You can't tell the fours from the threes  
You can't tell the flowers from the screams  
No wonder they say we were made out  
of mud  
Come out of your trees and your rivers and  
Come to America come to Minnesota  
Come to the click of cleats and the children  
straddling the giant tortoise they have come  
They have come for miles around  
Come to the land of long letters of love the land of love  
his is the land of the crackling barn  
and the land of the infernal flower  
and the land of big shovels  
This is the home town this the sublime  
This is the black underside of a million raw tabletops  
Love scarred like burnt pleasure and bubblegum  
These are its children and those are its  
heights  
These are the fingers meshed and twined like cotton candy  
Peanut shucks and gosh the divine crimentlies  
Come to the straw and the cane and urine flowing like soda  
Come to the land of poultry and the love of the condom  
Come to the rinsed kidneys of the lost tribes  
And the land of small children and dogs  
They teem in the refuse like ambassadors for change  
Come to the Como when the hibiscus are in bloom  
and the drunks are in bloom and the tree sloths  
Parasites bloom green in the skin

Come to the green swarming pond this year  
we dredge there our memories  
of kindness and jewels and breadloaves  
and cannonshot rakes and quicksilver  
Come when the tuna are jumping  
and the children are jumping at cornbread and promises and  
time  
and the secrets of time This spring  
the tiger is muttering remonstrances of love  
And the banker noodle sits like a patient in the vestibule  
Come to the 24-hour urgent care centers cursing  
the revolving doors and the No Parking Zones  
and the decisive victory in the field  
Come to the spreading joy of a thousand elm trees  
Two years from blight and the skinny roots of love  
And the thousand children jumping in the night  
Taken in dreams to a place beyond mountains  
and the thousand mattresses no one turns over any more  
Come to Como Brother John and Alphaea  
Take to the hard streets and the harder walls  
And take course to the parklights bathing the lost kids  
And take course down the trillion rows of lilies and rot  
take course to Como at a certain time of year  
now here now gone forever now at the tip  
of every tongue take course  
by hunted animals strung by ropes  
their bodies opened to the wind and to love  
Flies singing seafaring stories in the breeze  
Open and battered to the slim  
curve of love



# SOMETHING NOT HEARD UNTIL SPOKEN

---

the world is being worn away by wheels  
speeding past tomcats  
bitter as usual about the poor  
choice of scraps

the street is gone, the road is gone  
every little path is gone  
as its lines are reconciled'

leave this place with unmeasurable step  
and shooshingly  
great understanding is the uncle  
of silence

that syllable lives forever in your ear

# MISE EN SCENE

---

Up on the roof you hear the pitter patter  
of tiny sandwiches.

In the basement the friends you keep have broken out,  
they are heading for the salt.

Outside your window a policeman is caressing his gun.  
Before things go too far he will arrest himself.

You lie in bed.

You can't feel a thing below your waist.

Your legs who know you for what you are  
have chucked you  
and raced down the street  
to the auditions.

Your arms packed a lunch.

Your genitalia wish them good luck.

Your ears waved goodbye, wraithlike, when they left.

Deep in the shaft in your head  
there is an abandoned vein.

You follow it on foot for a hundred yards or so.

At the end of the final corridor

you see a wire stretched taut  
from wall to wall,

with a unicycle in the crow's nest.

You remember a line:

"Love leaves you and you must go on."  
Behind, the curtain rises.

# THE FIRE LANDS

---

for my sister Kathleen 1945-1961

more than before i am aware of my body  
each one of me a lifetime of explosions  
shrapnel painted to luggage and lovers  
calendars marked for a short life

i stutter and wish would die or turn blue  
these dreams won't quit they come and come  
the covers on fire my dear sister trapped  
in a house of her flames

he is so sick poor angel  
he props himself against a stone

for a moment i am noninflammable  
my sister says we are safe in this place  
even on fire it is different here

she takes off her dress  
on one patch of her scapular is her own face  
she holds a blue sphere in hand  
on the other she has crayoned my name

i was wrong about flames  
it is october in the woods and the red leaves  
of the fire lands lick at the falling air  
i suck at my fingers and cry

the night skips away like a sister i can't catch  
one by one the curious rabbits of stars go out  
night takes its stick to the shadows  
and drives them into morning

i was losing and losing the days of my life  
it sprang from me and dribbled from me  
like gas from a punctured can  
i lost you at home and on the road home

then in the special room where candles burned  
sumped in the furniture i held your hand  
the room that faded into darkness outside  
the ragged edges of a ragged room

i still see you stepping backwards from the room  
backwards from the stairs to the dark corridor  
i see you frozen in the dark in the amber like a wasp  
soaking into the earth like blood red wine

make up my mind not to lose you again  
planning to track you down again  
and find the death that wears your body like a name  
and find my death that was your death  
find the death that beats on my life  
and hunt it down

sick of losing and having to lose  
and hating this life so i take yours

and place it on your tongue  
like a dirty host

please stay out of the woods kathleen  
please do not come into the woods  
where i am proprietor of the soil  
and i am where my sister was  
the days we spent in the flickering leaves  
a tumult of blood falling like feathers

turn from the faces that are backing away  
faces creased with tearful stories  
faces turned away from the light  
faces that slept in shoes  
faces that danced for rain

a pair of faces passing through silk  
a pair of faces dreaming of life  
closed-eye faces backing into the trees  
a face that was only a face  
and the one face turning  
with the quarters of the moon

we are fooled into heaven  
pick fruit from the air  
we bleach the mountains  
polish stones  
we comb the grass with ancient hands

