tigerlaff i
by Carmen Lattimore

tigerlaff flashed
his piece
slashing white/
red necks flying
turkey-like cross
black pave
ment tigerlafffinally
laughed best
his teeth
flashed white/
red lips grinning
nigguh-like
cross jet
black rage
meant tigerlafffinally
laughed back

tigerlaff ii

tigerlaff pierced
a hundred
white open
ling frights
wide opening
for a hundred
black seeds
pushing past
a hundred
bald blue eyes
glares off
tigerlaff push
ling offour
hundred y r s
oppression
... you hear?
thissis meeeeee
left
ling push
ling offour
hundred yrs
off pressure
yeaaaaa thissis meeeeee!!

tigerlaff iii

where is dat
luv you promise me
tigerlaff
affah de blood
don crust our irons
togeinah
undah de deck
ocean rollin up
ovah our heads
you gainst muh
breasts sick n
weepin
blood crust dem chains
togehah dat day
'membah tigerlaff?
now
where is dat lub
you promise me

IF THIS LOVE
SHOULD END TONIGHT

by Paul Tony

If this love should end tonight I shall not sleep
I'll walk the windy streets amongst blowing newspapers
Watching sleek cats crossing from under parked cars
I'll walk down to the wharf, squinting at the sea
And in my soul the black departing freighters
Will sing their mournful songs of distant shores
And if I cry the wind will dry my tears
Before the morning light has tinged the sky
I'll see rooted pigeons, ragged street people
I'll hear dogs bark and the distant sigh of night buses
Leaning against a tree, I'll feel the wind in my hair
I'll want to leave suddenly, my city of despair
Cast myself upon the road, a pitiful wanderer
Silent, dressed in jeans and a black wool coat
Whispering in greasy truck stops the breathless pain
Hoping for a placid bay to anchor in at last
Somewhere on a Grate in D.C.

A Few Minutes from the Life of George, a Homeless Man in Washington

by Jason Feer

Dreams is about the only thing I got left, see? Just some dreams and a torn paper bag with an old blanket and some cans in it.

I had to get up early this morning. See, this ambulance went wizzing past me real early with it lights flashing and siren blaring and the whole bit. I guess somebody must’ve got hurt but it would've been okay with me if I could’ve slept a while longer.

Like I was having this dream about me and Ellen see. We was sitting around in the apartment like we used to do, talking and all and she was saying something and this ambulance came by and I was right back on this grate getting steam blown up my pants.

I sat around in the park for a while but the sun was out so it was okay. After a while, I went up to the university to look for cans. See, those kids drink a lot of beer right, and all I gotta do is pick up all of the cans. I can sell for thirty six cents a pound, when they don’t rip me off, I mean. They can afford to throw all that money away and it keeps me from begging, right?

I don’t mind telling you, those kids up there do some stupid things. I saw a bunch of them walking with their clothes all tore up. It kinda made me laugh see, because all those rich kids are just trying to look like they’s poor. What do they know about being poor? Shit.
I found a few cans and a paper that only been read once or twice so I took that too.

On the way back to the park, I saw Cutty hustling change on his corner. See, he just sits on the same corner almost every day and looks pitiful as he can and people throw change like he’s some kinda trained animal getting a reward for looking sorry. Some days he gets twenty, maybe twenty five dollars a day. Of course, I’d never do it because I don’t do no begging.

Later on, me and Cutty are going over to a store to get us some dinner. I guess I’m gonna read some of that paper I found. Cutty’s gonna come on over and get me when he gets through with the commuters. I hope he’s done easy because I been getting kinda hungry.

I went out all day looking for cans. I checked in all of the trash cans so I found a lot. I put them in a bag and hid them under a bush in the park like I usually do.

While I was walking around, I saw Cutty sitting on his corner like usual so I stopped to talk to him because there wasn’t nobody walking past his corner. See, we was just sitting there talking about when it was gonna get real cold and if we was gonna eat dinner and if we was, where we was gonna eat it and some college kids walked by so Cutty held out his cup like he always does. I don’t see why he asks them kids for money because they never give him shit but he always holds out his cup anyway.

See, they went walking past us talking about me and Cutty like we wasn’t even there and I heard one of them bastards say say that me and Cutty should get jobs instead of sitting around begging all day and polluting the streets. They all laughed like it was the funniest thing they’d ever heard and then stared at us like we was just pollution. I didn’t say nothing even though I was mad as hell because me and Cutty can’t do no working.

See, Cutty told me he got his self a wound in Vietnam and if he works too hard he could die because his heart got all shot up over there.

And see, I can’t do work either because I got me a bad back from this accident when I was driving trucks down in Georgia and when I woke up after it in the hospital, the doctor told me my back was all busted up and I couldn’t do no lifting. I looked for jobs before but the only work I can get’s doing lifting. See, since I can’t do no lifting, I don’t do no work.

See, I sure do wish I could get me a job driving trucks again but there ain’t nobody gonna let me drive trucks no more. See, it ain’t my fault I hit that girl because she ran right out into the street. I mean, I tried to miss her and all, and I ran into a phone pole trying to miss her but I couldn’t help it. Then they took away my trucking license and told me I couldn’t never drive trucks again because I was dangerous.

Shit, I know I ain’t dangerous. I been thinking about that for a long time and there ain’t nothing I could’ve done. That judge and those police just didn’t like me at all. They said I was drunk just because I had a few drinks for lunch but I know I wasn’t drunk because I could walk just fine when I left the bar. Besides, if they let me drive now, I wouldn’t never drink, at least not when I was driving. But, they ain’t gonna let me drive none. They just gonna keep me down.

It was real cold last night see, so I had to find me a better heating grate. It wasn’t bad because I found somebody to talk to for once. See, this dude’s name was Reggie and I saw him sitting on one of the grates I used last winter so I went over and asked him and he said I could sleep there too if I didn’t snore.

After a while of nothing, we set to talking and he told me he was from Alabama and he came up here because he heard there was lots of construction work. When he got here see, they told him he had to be in the union to work construction and he didn’t have no money to pay the dues and since he didn’t have no money, he didn’t get no work. He said the whole thing sucked and he was trying to hustle enough money to take the bus back to Alabama because he said Alabama’s warm and people down there give him dollars when he beg instead of change like they give down here.

I work up while it was still dark because it was raining and me and my blanket was soaked and I was cold as hell. I kinda felt sorry for Reggie see, because he didn’t have his self no blanket.

He just been using newspapers and they turned to mush in the rain so Reggie was cold and wet as me and he had wet newspapers stuck all over his body. I asked him if he wanted to go someplace to get warm but he said he was gonna go out and hustle because the papers made him look like he was sick and he said people give you more if you look bad enough.

I spent the rest of the day trying to find someplace to get warm. I bought some coffee at Howard Johnson’s but they only let me stay inside long enough to pay for it and then they kicked me out like I had some kinda disease.

Since there wasn’t no place else to go, I went down to the bus station just to get me a roof over my head for a while. There was some other folks from the street there too so we all sat around and played cards for a while. See, we was just sitting there, not bothering nobody, right, and this guard came in and said if we wasn’t taking a bus, we had to get out. We tried to talk to him some, but he just said that if we wanted to hang around someplace, we should go to the train station and not bother him no more.

I looked around for Cutty some but I guess he went someplace to get out of the rain so I just found me a good grate to sleep on and then watched people’s feet go by.
I guess it's Monday because all of the people was back in town today and they was making all kinds of noise so I had to get up real early. It's getting so I can't get no sleep at all.

I found some more cans so I got the cans I hid yesterday and I took the whole mess of them down to the recycling center. I think they shorted me some because they only gave me twenty one bucks see, and I had a lot of cans. At least, I know I had more than twenty one bucks worth. I guess they figure I ain't gonna say nothing so it's okay to take what I got.

I went over to the store and bought some stuff to eat. See, I don't think the people at the store like me because every time I go in there, they look at me like I'm gonna steal something and they always check my bag before they let me leave. Just because I ain't got no money, it don't mean I steal right?

I sat out in the park for a while and ate some fruit and some of the other stuff I bought while I got me some sun. I got to get me my share of sun while I still can. Pretty soon, it'll be snowing and I'm gonna have to go back to the shelters again. They always too crowded and smelly. Too many people trying to get at not enough food and cots. People pulling all over the place and fighting over who has to sleep on the floor and I never get no sleep anyway because of all the noise. Shit, right now it just don't seem like it's worth all that to sleep on a dirty floor.

Today, I wasn't in the mood to do nothing. I looked for cans for a while but I didn't find none and I didn't feel like looking no more so I bought me a bottle and got drunk.

I sat around the park drinking and watching people stare at me like I was trash they ain't picked up in a long time. You know, they always look at me when they think I'm looking someplace else but I caught some of them staring at me so I just made an ugly face at them and they stopped looking.

I went out walking during lunch time today and I saw one of the restaurants we used to eat at before Ellen died. I was looking at one of the tables that we sat at before and I kept thinking about Ellen and why she died and how she looked lying there in the hospital with all those tubes running in and out of her. Sometimes it just don't seem fair at all that some people got everything and people ain't got nothing. It just don't seem fair at all. I was just standing there not bothering nobody and some waiter came out and said I was scaring off customers and if I didn't go away, he was gonna call the cops.

I walked around for a while after that but I just didn't feel like doing nothing so I went back to the park and went to sleep on a bench. I don't think I'm gonna go by that restaurant ever again.

I spent most of today looking for cans and reading yesterday's news. I went through somma trash can and found a pair of pants and a shirt that was only missing a few buttons so I went to a gas station and changed in the bathroom just so I'd be wearing something different. Clothes make the man I always say.

I saw some man who thought he was important drive by in his limo with the police buzzing all around his car like flies around shit. See, they was making all kinds of noise with their sirens and all but they wasn't doing nothing except making noise. I mean, he was just driving like everybody else does right? Why's he got to make so much noise when he does it?

I walked around later and looked for Cutty but I didn't find him so I guess he's still letting people have a break from feeling sorry for him. There wasn't nothing else to do so I say around for a while and then it started to rain.
Quaver
By Bob Flisser

Pulses of time
pass me by
and scar me for life.
It only happens when
I'm not looking
and now I'm looking
at you.
Your sight teases me,
bereaves me
that another pulse
is on its way.

Half a Dozen of the Other
by Linda White

He proposed
a ride in the country
to divorce me
from my so-called "responsibilities"—
all those loose ends,
tied tighter-than-tight choking
my so-called "assets".
I suggested a divorce:
to give those loose ends
something on which to tighten
so my assets will stick around—
so there'll be no choking.
For soon, with me, there'll
be nothing left except
the responsibility.
We decided, at last,
to sleep on it.

The Ark of the Unconsciousness
by Paul Tony

I have slept on this earth for forty days and forty nights
Time has fallen wet and cold upon my ark of unconsciousness
And my dreams have run skittering like mice
Along the endless passages of my mind
And then like huge, roaring beasts
They have belomed forth in furious nightmares
As I wait for Mount Ararat and the white dove of dawn
Never more shall flesh be cut from me by the flood
That is my covenant to thee.
Fifth Avenue Evening
by Bob Flisser
I've come from 'cross-town
to have a look around
she said so we'
peered into Tiffany's window.
Then off to south Central Park
where it's still safe before dark
to go hand-craft hunting.
And it's twilight in town
as the sun settles down
in Manhattan.
The preacher on the corner
was trying to warn her
about the dangers of free-thought.
Talking about attitudes and
attitudes of platitudes,
oh—when will it all end?
But for us just the beginning
since it's twilight in town
as the sun settles down
in Manhattan.

Obsolete Sin
by Kat Gutwillig
As you drive me to my first day of collegehood
I beg me to deliverance of a coin for the mad toobothman
and I slither past the clasp into your lush purse
and unlock a safety belt to forever paper
inside leather and acetate
I feel the cold surface and warm friction-edged cogs
always on my thumb pad
and even now I calculate how much you wouldn't miss.

Marines—Late October 1983
by Kat Gutwillig
Once I went to an amusement park
with a beau
the mud stuck to my sneakers
like glue
He layed down his money
to show me his skills
and he ducks came up
one after the other
and one after the other
they slammed down kamikaze
until their time ran out
He wanted to win me a prize
but I already had a blond-haired cuple
from the rifle range
and this gallery was all out of prizes
The fat greek man with a curly
hair on his chest let my beau
play for free
and we stand there still
because these ducks are mute.
Floods
Anonymous

My friend Henry is telling me about floods. It’s amazing how much there is to discover about the people you think you know best...

"No really, I’m serious," he’s protesting. Somehow he’s gotten the idea into his head that I doubt him. "Obviously, I’m not talking about... serious floods, you know, national disaster types of floods. The floods I mean, no one has seen them made or heard them made, but every spring at mending time we find them. On a day we meet to talk..." At this point he cracks up, knowing full well I’ve recognized his Frost quote. Then he’s serious again. "I grew up in this beautiful old turn-of-the-century house, in the historic register and all that, that must have had just about the leakiest basement. I never really understood why, because the front lawn was actually a pretty steep hill."

"You’d think the water would run down the hill instead of into the basement," I add helpfully.

"You would. Never worked that way, though. The water always poured right in, like the house had just hit an iceberg. I’ll tell you, the heyday of these floods was when I was a kid, elementary school, you know, nine or ten. After that my folks began taking all these preventive measures, these so-called contingency plans, which over the years have been successful to the point that now floods are..."—he wipes away an imaginary tear—"a thing of the past. But that Golden Age...

"The best ones were always in winter, or early spring when all the snow was melting. It’d be one of those really crappy days, you know, when there’d been a big snowstorm the night before and you’d have your hopes up for a day off from school. I’d be listening to the radio, WOR, I believe it was, and there’d be a weather bulletin with these awful words: ‘snow, changing to...’—Henry pauses to winces—‘sleet and rain.’ And never a school closing. Never, for my town, Oraton, Sweely, Burtons—yes, Gifford and Medrick—it goes without saying. Every town within a fifty-mile radius—no school. But the Grumman schools—the concept of snow day didn’t exist. So I’d head off to school with my galoshes on, trudging through the fresh snow. And head back, staggering through the most god-awful, filthy yellow slush you ever say, usually feeling on my ass a few times for good measure. I’d get home, and there’d be all these horribly woeful expressions, and they wouldn’t even have to say it. ‘Henry, there’s been a flood.’ I’d say to myself. ‘Oh boy, some fun now.’"

"So what would it be like? I mean, chaos floating around the living room, big lake trout going through your drawers?"

"Look, guy, I already told you they weren’t serious, in the cosmic scheme of things. Two or three inches of water, tops, just laying there on the basement floor. We’d get all suited up like we were going into combat—galoshes flapping all over, you know—and start bailing for all we were worth. I’d always scoop with this one beat old white plastic waste basket, and my sisters and mom would use big coffee cans, or something, and Dad would oversee the bucket brigade. See, we would bail from our little containers into a big garbage can, which someone would then have to hoist up the stairs and dump down the driveway. When I got big enough I inherited the dumping job, which was acutely sort of plum—watching all that water slosh over the driveway and thinking: ‘Damn! We’ve been at this picnic for over an hour and it’s as wet as it ever was!’"
"Well, four inches, spread out over a basement floor, is a lot of water, Henry. Did a lot of stuff get damaged, or what?" Henry has this funny way, I've noticed, of letting his eyes drift gradually off to the side as he talks, until after a while he's not even facing in your direction. Occasionally I have to speak up, just to bring his eyes back.

"Are you kidding? I'll be damned if the basement wasn't rigged up like some village in Thailand, everything up on poles and upside-down coffee cans. We was ready! Oh, a lot of old newspapers got damaged, if you want to worry about something like that. But no, we learned to take precautionary measures with the valuable stuff, like the, the... National Geographics! Be damned if I don't remember one time when I was real young, maybe second or third grade, could have been fourth, and we actually had a pipe burst."

"Usually your floods were from groundwater, though, right?"

"Snow, rain... Yeah, groundwater. But this time a pipe near the furnace burst and did we have a flood! There'd been some big deal that afternoon at school, what passed for a big deal in those days, an assembly or something. It was some American Indian, Chief Half-Ass or Flying Dog or something, but it was... special. Sort of an ethnic awareness presentation, I suppose. I remember he had on a regular business suit, but he wore it with a string tie with an enormous turquoise and silver clasp, and he had long braids. Anyway, I came busting out of school that day, beside myself about having seen this Indian chief, and I get home and find Mr. Hammond's truck in the driveway—Mr. Hammond was our plumber, and he took quite a shine to me in those early days. So I went inside, and run smack into Mother and my sisters, all with that sackeyed Appalachian look about them: 'Henry, there's been a flood.' I couldn't believe it, because it wasn't that wet outside, maybe just raining a little. But I had a look, and sure enough, it's a flood. There was water just gushing all over the place. It sounded like hell, because Hammond's down there fumbling away with his wrenches and shooting off his acetylene torch like a Roman candle. Dad came home early from work, and everyone was sweating. One of my sisters, Denise, slipped and fell on her butt in the water, and nearly broke her tailbone. My other sister, Andrea, I was splashing water on whenever I got the chance, just to raise the tension level. It was like hell, and we had dinner late that night."

"So, I take it these floods are a thing of the past now." I'd just as soon we talk about something else, besides floods, but I want to wrap things up smoothly.

"Oh yeah, they're over. They're gone. We laid down all this blacktop around the house, the flat areas where the rain used to soak in. It just runs off now, nearly all of it. As if that wasn't enough, we went out and got ourselves one of them 'Sump pumps' installed, just for the sake of overkill. No, it's been dry as a desert, for years, now.

"You don't sound too happy about it, somehow." I try to pronounce a benediction on flood-sak.

"No, I'm not. And it shouldn't really bother me one way or another, since I'm not around to help clean up even if it did flood, which it doesn't. Christ, it was a royal pain. Hey, did I tell you about the time my high school band marched in the Rose Bowl parade?"
These Days
by Robert Attanasio

Sitting in New York's West End Cafe
this summer
drinking beer and whiskey to the
tunes we punches out on the jukebox
    songs of years past
    worn out on my stereo
    and in other dank bars
    little vinyl parts of me

Peter and I discussed the "new philosophy,"
a pretentious title for the summer's
positivism: a half-baked Buddhism sprinkled with
Mr. Rogers glee
I saw it, Pete felt it,
he had that advantage

In the bathroom I hoped to find
Kerouac's initials scraped on the wall
Did he contemplate these things here too,
head full of wild saxophone?

Now in Washington still
searching: maybe all you can do is
lotsa bahn krishnas, ...
"Back to Godhead" magazine on my desk,
lotsa bahn krishnas,
at least someone's happy

at the krishna festival
two weeks ago they
gave out free pamphlets
and banged drums
and chanted
ignoring insults from
drunken shirtless teenagers,
sober we watched and wondered,
recovering from the

Empty half gallon Scotch
on my window sill,
happy birthday party
even a cathartic explosion:
spitting open my chin
wrestling burst the well
of my mind, unleashing
endless obscenities at
a resident assistant (poor little girl
and receptionist (fat boy

Joyous release? This is good?
I think more on the talks in New York,
"The End of Depression"
which is all made up and in your mind
(according to the "philosophy"
Buddha under the bo tree would have
smiled, Christ on the Mount too

So life is a dynamic
phenomenon; moving parts,
oily rotting inhabiting organs,
sporadic kicks, quests for joy
and sliding ponds into sorrow,
an endless search for meaning
which becomes meaningless
in its failure
And so my garbage piles high
with tissues and bottles and cheese wrappers,
and another disadvent in a Central American country
gets his ear cut off
and fired ear titter
idea to idea one
problem to the next, if it's
not avoiding the authorities its
emptying the garbage, or writing
a projective poem or
getting the air conditioner fixed
2

Nihilism is out, gone, unship, or so my fiction writing prof said
which leaves positivism, the impossible, or idealistic
and so on we dangle, hanging uncertain
scratching our heads smiling
like infant baboons, smiling for fear of an alternative morsion
the psychologists stay up late drinking coffee
watching Bogart reading Jung eyeballs popping
wondering if smiling is an inherent or learned trait

Coffee makes them smile, makes me smile,
makes everyone smile till it wears off and makes everyone frown,
irritable,
jittery: can’t sit and do one thing
go on to something else,
there’s always something else
’cause life is like that (like I said
so there’s always something to do
boredom becomes a non-sequitur
just doesn’t fit
shouldn’t exist
people must enjoy boredom they must have invented it
I wonder if the psychologists think boredom is a learned trait

When people get bored they drink
it makes everything matter less,
also helps them sleep,
sleep kills boredom
with so much to do why do people sleep
(Maybe there’s too much to do
so they get tired, or bored
thinking or talking or writing about boredom
too much gets boring

3

People like to hurt each other
like cutting off ears
or breaking off relationships
like to hurt themselves too
poor little boys losing sleep
smoking litterless Camels
sitting on phone books typing

Psychologists make money
writing books on it
Evangelists like Hal Lindsey
do too, can’t close
his mouth or pockets
about the Plan,
(Fall, Boo, God
the hurt goes on
to the last neutron.
Subways

Anonymous

What with slick floor and funny smell, no toilet paper but
sudden towels clogging the sink, the John was no garden of
delight. But the bar proper wasn’t bad, considering, and the man
returned to find a woman sitting on what had been his stool. Lucki-
ly, the one right next to it was vacant and he promptly seated
himself. The new woman on his right was someone neither to
smell at or snap at. She showed a few signs and creases, and her
makeup appeared to have been applied immoderately and without
benefit of a mirror, as if from an aerosol can. The murky interior
light was on her side, though, softening the sand-blasted cast a
fluorescent light would bestow on her face.

Deciding he needed a change from the drafts that had
motivated his trip to the John, the man called for a peppermint
champnappes. It came quickly, as the bar was virtually deserted.
Meanwhile he became intrigued by the milky green solution in
the glass of the woman next to him. He asked her what it was. The
woman, who had been staring straight ahead, flashed him a three-
quarter profile, then resumed her forward stare. Just as he was
about to repeat his question, she turned back toward him. “Excuse
me?”

“I asked, what are you having to drink?”

“To drink? Creme de menthe and cream, with a dash of
Contreau.”

“Wow. Sounds very French.”

“Could be.” Her voice implied that she thought it unlikely.
It was a clear, high voice, with a hint of a Yankee accent. They
continued their sipping.

“Say, you haven’t ever been to France, have you?” the
man asked.

“Actually, I have.” The bar was unnaturally quiet, except
for a noise that emanated from the kitchen and sounded like a sob-
bing woman playing a throbbing tom-tom, off in the distance.
“Parlez-vous Francés?” the man pursued.

“No, I never learned, unfortunately.”

“That’s a shame. Say, did you make it to Paris, by any
chance?”

“As a matter of fact, I did. I spent close to a week there.”

“I wasn’t fabulous,” he said, with conviction. “God, what a
wonderful city! I had the luck to spend a few months there, pro-
ably the happiest time of my life.” The woman turned another
three-quarter profile.

“Oh really? What were you doing?”

“Different things. I was working then for a company that
manufactured stuffed animals, and we were investigating
marketing possibilities in France.”

“Stuffed animals, you mean, like teddy bears?”

“Well, sure, some of them, but lots of different animals,
too—walruses, owls, elephants, penguins, um... you name it. But I
seemed to spend most of my time riding the Metro.” The woman
nodded politely. “Hey, would you mind if we just moved over to
one of those booths? I asked. “I don’t like this bar much, for
some reason.” The woman looked at her watch. “Okay.” They
finished their drinks, then got up and chose one of the seven
available booths (only the farthest one, near the kitchen, was oc-
cupied). While the woman seated herself, the man signaled the
bartender for two more of the same. Sitting down across from
each other, they made eye contact for the first time.
"By the way, my name's Eustace," he said, grinning. "Eustace. I'm not sure I've met anyone by that name before. I'm Ethel."

"Nice to meet you, Ethel. Say, about those French subways." He interrupted himself to backtrack. "You know, it's great to talk to someone who's been to Paris. I don't know why, but you don't run into so many these days, least I don't. But as I was saying, did you ever get to ride the Paris subway at all, the Metro?"

She considered, then looked up at arriving drinks. "I think so. Yes, I must have."

The woman smiled a little. "I know it's considered one of the world's best."

"Oh, and it is. It is. Just to compare it with the filthy rattletrap in this city... well, it's become a little too close to put down our subways, we won't add to it. But Paris—go on, and it's so dinned extensive! It's not just a matter of picking the best available stop to get off at for wherever you want to get to, whether it's a museum or a restaurant or a zoo or, you know—whatever." He paused for emphasis. "If you know the Paris system, you can get right there—I mean, right there." Emphasizing the last two words, his right elbow knocked over his schnappps, and he lurched left to avoid the run off. "Aw hell, how stupid. They watched the liquid cascade off the table, without even looking for a napkin. "Feel like switching beers? I'm afraid this cushion here is going to give me a soak. Let's just move on down. Ethel picked up her drink and followed Eustace into the next booth.

"Maybe that's a sign that we've talked enough about Paris," Eustace said. Ethel widened her eyes and nodded in agreement. "No matter what they try to tell you, there's more to Europe than Paris. Although, I should point out that, as far as I know, it's the only city where you can use the same tickets for both buses and subways—in Europe, that is," he added hastily. "This town is good enough to let you use a token for both, as I'm sure you know. Hey waitress! Hi. Could you please bring me a schnappps—no, make it a brandy, got some nice brandy? Courvoisier? Great. Thanks. Care for a smoke?" he asked Ethel, pulling out a pack of Benson and Hedges. "Whey, I feel like I've been talking a blue streak. I hope I'm not boring you. Hey, even if I am—he circled his open palm horizontally over the table—you could do a lot worse in this dive, Christ, you'd think this place could at least provide canned music, being as they don't have a jukebox. Thank you, miss, you're very kind," he said to the waitress. "Eustie, why don't you tell me a little about yourself. Are you happy? Gay? Married? Not Working? Playing? Please let me shut up," he said, finally.

She paused for a moment, stirring her drink. Ethel wasn't in the habit of tolerating strangers who rambled, but this time she wasn't put off. He did have a singingly compelling voice, not unlike a well-played baritone saxophone, whose resonance she would have felt in her bones had she and Eustace been leaning back against the same bench. She sighed. "It's hard to know where to begin. I only came in here for a quick drink—and—"

"I don't want to hold you against your will, of course."

"Oh, you're not, don't worry. Well, maybe this isn't too interesting, but here's what's on my mind. My younger brother just had a baby girl."

"Say, that's marvelous... Aunt Ethel! I assume it's your younger brother's wife who had the baby?" She nodded, with a hint of a smile. "You just can't be too sure these days. Your first niece, or nephew? She went on nodding. "Nephew? Fantastic. Nothing like a nice nephew. I've got a few myself, grown up now, though, too much for my taste. While we're on the subject, you know what just popped into my mind? This little detail they put on all the doors of the Madrid subway cars to warn people about getting their hands stuck in the doors when they slide. It shows this little boy with his mom—cartoon people, you know—with one of his hands getting stuck in the door as it slides open, and his arm from the elbow down is swollen up big as Popeye's, bright red, and his mouth is wide open. And the most incredible thing of all, his hair is standing straight up! I tell you, I was so terrified by those damn little decals, I deliberately chose a seat in the middle of the car, as far from the doors as possible, and I still kept my hands in my pockets. Madrid's got good subways, though—"he thought for a moment—except not enough seats. I guess during rush hours they just jam them in, really jam, and they can fit more without the seats. Like Tokyo, I guess, although I've never been there.

"You now a lot about subways, Eustace."

He twitched his left shoulder in an attempt at modesty. "It's not that, really. I don't know. Somehow I remember these things. Say, you need another drink?"

Ethel looked at her watch. "Now, I'm okay. I should probably be heading home pretty soon."

"Please, Ethel, it's on me." He motioned to the waitress. Ethel began to protest—"thanks, Eustace, but I really shouldn't!"—so he took her hand earnestly. "I'm sorry for dominating this conversation with all this subway chatter. I've just come up from Washington and for some reason it's on my mind. That Metro down there—I don't know why, but it bothers me. You've ridden it, haven't you? No? Have you been to Washington?

"Yes, I've been to Washington, but at the time I didn't think there was a subway. I haven't been there since—oh, over ten years. I used to go down for those big demonstrations against the Vietnam war—the one at the Pentagon in '67, and the huge one in the spring of... was it '70 or '71? It must have been '70. Those were some exciting times."

"I'll bet," he agreed. "A lot different than things today. But you really should experience the new subway, just once. The thought made him laugh. "Oh boy, should you. The way it works is, is that you buy a fare card from one of these big machines—sort of like the ones in Paris, but simpler—because in D.C., all you do is put in as much money as you want—the normal is 75 cents, except during rush hour—and the machine slides you back this, sort of, credit card, which you slide in a slot which opens the turnstile for you. Like the Tube in London, if you've ever been there. But you have to slide it in another slot when you get out at your destination, or you can't get out. But the great thing is, at least they think it's great, is that you can reuse this card as many times as the money you put on it allows—two bucks, five, ten buck, whatever. Does that make sense?"
And they've got this other machine called Addfare, in case you didn't put enough money on your card to get out, but that's a whole 'nother story. Now, don't get me wrong, I can appreciate the advantages of this card system. It's great if you ride a lot. The trains are also extremely clear, very prompt, safer than heaven. But all those cards floating around—hell, they must chop down forests to keep the system running. And you do pay for it. But hell, you pay 75 cents for the stinking rattles-traps in this town, so why should I complain about D.C.? Say, the damnedest thing happened to me the other night. I was coming up from the Village quite late, it must have been well after one o'clock. I was standing on the platform, almost the only one in the whole station, and I notice this guy, a workman wearing a bright orange vest, walking right up the track out of the darkness. He's carrying this big metal pipe. When he comes to me, I ask him, you know, what he's doing. He says he's making sure the tracks are clear, no trash or anything. I ask him, What's the pipe for? He says to me, he says: 'Rat's man! You should see some of them big mothers down here, big as cats. And they come at you like they mean business.' How's that for a job, eh? Walking down the subway tracks all night, fighting off the big rats. Only in New York! Christ, there I go again on New York. Cut me off when I start to ramble like this. Where are you from, Ethel?"

Oh I—I was born in Michigan and moved to Boston when I was five. I grew up there. I only moved down here a couple of years ago."

"A Boston Brahmin, hey? Boston," he repeated dreamily," now there's a system! The MTA. Hell, isn't there even a song about it? "Oh he never got out, no he never got out, da da da da da da da! To ride forever, through the streets of Boston. he's the man who never got out." He laughed loudly at his own rendition. "Have they jacked up the prices yet, or is it still a quarter?" He didn't wait for an answer. "Now that city knows how to get you around in style, without busting hell out of your pocketbook. Boy, did I used to look forward to doing business up there! Would I ever ride those subways! You know, once I met this bum on the subway, a well-dressed bum at that, who looked as though he'd spent the last couple of nights riding the train. But you know, that bum had some pride—and charm. He apologized for his appearance. Said he was a Harvard man and not to get the wrong idea, that he was ashamed to be seen that way. I didn't know whether to believe him or not, the poor old coot." He chuckled fondly. Ethel had opened her purse and was fishing out a five dollar bill. "Eustace, I've really enjoyed talking with you, but I've got to be going now. Here's some money for my drinks."

"Ethel, I won't hear of it. Absolutely not. I told you these drinks were on me and I meant it. It's my pleasure and—"

"Okay, Eustace, okay," she soothed, putting on her coat. If you don't want to take it, we'll call it a big tip. God night, Eustoe. Have a safe trip home."

"A big tip, I'll say! Say, you didn't let me help you with your coat." By this time she was nearly out the door. He let out a resounding bellow. "Good night, Ethel!" After a moment he got up and went to the bathroom, not forgetting to wash his hands afterwards. The stench of the cake deodorant in the urinal was very strong. He paid his bill at the bar, threw on his coat, and strode out into the midnight wind. He had a number of options. He could have searched out a doorstep down the street and slept until morning or until a policeman evicted him, whichever came first. He could have walked over to the zoo and tried to climb in with the polar bear, an incident that had actually happened and made a great impression on Eustace. Or he could have gone into the subway and thrown himself in front of an oncoming train. But instead he returned to his apartment, brushed his teeth, set his alarm for 6:30, and went out for a nice little run—through Central Park.
by Thomas Strind

alone
i pour
my rain
pour
amongst the drizzling black drops
that are a thousand bullets
they pierce my skin
of heart
alone
i pour

i pour
and the ever flowing salt drops
that are a thousand tears of an angel
who cries a dirge
float my soul
away

i pour
across the beige impermeable
and down to saint michel's blue asphalt
to plunge finally into the dark and unseen
some mixing

with countless others i pour
my rain
alone alone
i pour

my rain

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