

Cities of Mind

Chase Twichell

From up here on the parapets
I can see skeletons of meaning strewn
among stones, all the way east
to childhood's shaded rooms.
To the west lie the cities
I've not yet imagined,
and those I never will.

Let's admit it's an addiction,
this scribbling-turned-typing.
How else might we speak of it?
As an anxiety? In any case,
I seem to like its fangs in my heart.

On Dad's 80th birthday
we had a little party
in the Living Room,
the whole herd of wheelchairs
drawn like magnets to the smell of cake,
the snuffed-out candles.

I'm sorry my father keeps barging in here.
He usually doesn't stay very long.
He's an old man who was once a man.
And one of Mom's shadows falls
from time to time, just so you know.

Jim Richardson says "all work
is the avoidance of harder work"—
true in my case. When the carpenters
started on the porch, I moved
the computer to the guest room
where I had to crawl under the bed
with an extension cord to get juice.
Then I had to fight hedges
of cast-offs, wrapping papers and ribbons,
a plastic serpents' nest of
strapping tape unwilling
to stay in the wastebasket,
the snake's name something like
anaconda, boa constrictor, python,
rattler. . . . Oh, I know: time consumer.

Confetti, glitter, glamour,
the frosting flowers and the hopeless
little figurines glued to the cake—
what happens to those?
Do people save them?
Pass them down the generations?

When Nan got into coyote bait,
we drove through the wee hours
to the fancy animal hospital far away,
thinking *let her live, let her not suffer,*
then *let her die quickly,*
thus killing the snake of my fear
along with the dog.

See what happens if you leave
the blossoms on the tree?
They go on blooming,
obscuring the thorns,
and before you know it
a scarf of identity has distracted you,
a jewel of history glinted in your eye. . . .

Raised on the classic myths,
I see the drift nets of latitude
and longitude on the night sky
inhabited by beasts and gods.
On Pegasus I fled the Hunter,
the Centaur, the Satyr,
riding the star-horse out to free
the Great and Lesser bears,
the Major and Minor dogs,
caged in their constellations.

Vestibule

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What etiquette holds us back
from more intimate speech,
especially now, at the end of the world?
Can't we begin a conversation
here in the vestibule,
then gradually move it inside?
What holds us back
from saying things outright?
We've killed the earth.
Yet we speak of other things.
Our words should cauterize
all wounds to the truth.