

Poet / *ry*
FESTIVAL

TRINITY CHURCH
WALL STREET

POETRY FESTIVAL / 2024



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BEHIND THE SILK CURTAIN

By Frank Romano

Here I am for the 100th time
on the Champs Elysee.
It is the night before Christmas
and I'm sober as hell.
The dreary lights parade on all sides of the streets
spotted with "the tourist set".

I am a Parisian—I live here.

I ignore a McDonald's stand. What
nerve—planting a crud-burger in
the middle of things.
I walk away from the "Arche de Triomphe"
where an American family flashes clashes chocolate-
stained— "Daddy, looky-looky-I want an ice cream. Wow-
hey-let's go to the Latin Quarter."
The horde runs in circles around Mommy and
Daddy, playing hopscotch—turning in circles singin'
twistin' pointing hopping—

To avoid them, I turn down a side
road bypassing the Concorde
where thousands had been beheaded in 1789.
Across the Seine and through the small streets in the 7th
district seeing small well-kept boutiques, art galleries, well-
designed antiques rococo furniture
through streets smelling of an ancient bourgeois society
small cafes' elite nooks
where artists and philosophers
still come to display their intellectual hardware.

Down "rue du Bac" I hear a group of Parisians speaking
in low voices—that juicy French chirping. I arrive home,
close the door
turn on the desk lamp
A shadow slowly bows as
tears form a glistening puddle
among the papers and books—
the street lamp peers through the silk curtains
running a chill through my quivering side.

Paris, 1977

OUT TO SEA

By David Folds

the vessel glides
 out from the shore
ripples flowing
 rhythmically
 out from both sides
patterns on the surface
 of ribbed
 moving water
we move forward
 floating in a
 cushion of change
winds catch the angle
 of our welcoming sail
now soft rocking
 responds
 to the casual waves
we relax with an
 edge still awaiting
half in control
 the reality of vastness
 intrudes
and we catch
 a lungful
 of salty air
in the early morning light

LETTER FROM OSLO

By Anne-Marie Brumm

Dear Ali,

I feel so all alone here. I have never known such cold. Don't mistake me, I am grateful that they let me stay and to the human rights worker in Tel Aviv who hid me when I ran there. He arranged for my asylum here.

But I miss my family in Nablus, even though my father has threatened to kill me when he finds me. They have chosen a bride for me. I long for my beloved. I hope he is safe too and that we can be together again someday, somewhere. I dream of my tortured land, the olive trees, the orchards, my sheep. They are taking away more and more each day.

What else can I do? Where else can I run?

Be well,

Samir



AWAY WITH IT

(or, The Buzzing One) By Evie Ivy

You are like the fly—
there now, then suddenly gone
to reappear, avoiding
slaps in the air—sprays.
You move in your masquerade
where you laugh away, away...

***Sedoka: *A Japanese style poem of 2 stanzas —5/7/7**

DEAR DIARY: A CONFESSION IN MONOLOGUES

by Julia Genoveva

ACT 1 FEBRUARY: A COLD WINTER IN NYC

SCENE 1

(Anna enters wearing pajamas and a robe and sits on a chair. She takes out her diary, a pen and starts to write.)

ANNA

Dear Diary....Oh, this is so stupid. I can't do this. Why did my therapist recommend this? The last time I had a journal I was in the 8th grade....Fuck! okay, okay, I'm doing it....

(Anna attempts to write again.)

Today was the usual shitty day...No, no, that sounds awful. *(Crosses the words out with her pen and tries again.)* I have a college degree in English Literature. I'm so ashamed of myself right now. I'm better than this. I'm better than this. Let me give it another go:

Today was a normal day. I was at work all day and nothing interesting happened. Same faces, same projects, same life. Same, same, same. SAAAAMEEEEE.

Hmm, how many times can I write the word "same"? I'm distracting myself. My therapist said to focus. Focus: That's my pattern: I procrastinate when I want to avoid doing the "tough" stuff. *(Yawns.)* I'm tired, what a day... Okay, back to it:

Sometimes, I wonder if I made different choices would my life be any different. Maybe better? I don't know. When I woke up this morning, I thought: What is life all about? Is there more to it than this? And why do I feel like I got the short end of the stick? I don't know. Random. Such a random thing to think about first thing in the morning. I know that I'm not happy. That feeling has been following me around for awhile. Today I was finally able to put a name to the feeling. Before today, the feeling felt uneasy, uncomfortable and I didn't know what it was. I just don't know what to do about it. Happy. Happiness. People make such a big deal about that. In order to be happy, I would have to make extreme decisions. And I'm getting too old for that. How can I start over at this point in my life? What is my mom going to think? It would be too hard. Today is the first time I have ever thought about this. Why is today different from any other day? Was everything I ever thought about my life wrong? I'm starting to believe it is. And what will I do about it? No idea. Anyway, diary, that's all I got for tonight. I bet tomorrow I will forget all about this. I guess that's the beauty of writing things down. These thoughts don't live in my head anymore.

(Leaves the diary and pen on the table. Anna exits.)

DEAR DIARY: A CONFESSION IN MONOLOGUES

(cont.)

SCENE 2

(Sergio enters. He's wearing a janitor's uniform and he's holding a broom. He puts the broom to the side and sits down. He takes out a protein bar from his pocket.)

SERGIO

Break time! Oh, there it is! I have been looking for this all morning. I don't know where my daughter got the idea that having a journal would be good for my "mental health." My mind is fine. I wake up, go to work, and come home. Next day, do it all over again. What's wrong with that? But I want to make her happy. Let me give it a shot:

(Sergio opens the Diary and starts to write.)

Dear Diary... No, no... what am I twelve years old again?

(Puts the pen down. Stares off into space. Has no idea what to write.)

Well, I guess this journal is the time to be honest. To write my darkest and deepest thoughts that only I know about. No one else.

(Picks up the pen and starts to write.)

There is something that has been on my mind. I have thought about it for years. Something I have always wanted to do. The thought came back to haunt me again today. I was cleaning the Chemistry Lab that's right across the theater, and I heard the kids rehearsing *Romeo and Juliet*. They sounded pretty good. Still holding the script, but they seem like they know their lines. Lines? What do I know about lines? The last time I was on stage I was a kid myself. But life happens, *that* happened. *(Points to the broom.)* You get married, have a kid, and bills need to get paid. I had to put that fantasy away. But when I came out of the room, I stood there and watched them. And my love for being on stage filled my heart again. I felt a rush. So strange. I felt like I was fifteen years old again. It was like a spell. I haven't felt like that in a long time. "Mr. S!" one of the kids called out to me. "Come watch us rehearse." I said "no" because I'm just the cleaning guy. I'm not here to get anyone in trouble. But they insisted. So, I sat in the back and watched. It was magical.

(Puts the pen down. He takes out a paper from his pocket. And reads it:)

"Senior Community Theatre holding auditions for *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*." This Friday at 7pm. Prepare a monologue from the play." Maybe I can borrow it from the library... Should I go?

(His walkie talkie goes off: "Mr. Sergio, a boy just vomited all over the bathroom on the 6th floor. Please report to the boys bathroom right away.")

Break time is over. *(Sergio exits.)*

SQUIRREL

By Frank Romano

Something in the road

I slow Tail
then peaked chin Slow

worried button eyes I brake

Black dots looking into mine forlorn, like the cold hand of fog.

Then I see

Grey squirrel

crouches over

a flattened mass of hair, brown dust

Run over

Crushed

Laid out on the cold asphalt

My car creeps forward

The black dots again, then a tail flitting nervously The flattened remains

Once jumping in the trees, sliding down the trunk Squirrel love hidden in deep
burrows

In the trees, in the dark . . . squirrels chattering to each other warming the dark, humid burrow,

Now cold, stone cold

Still, silenced lover

The black paw, tail twitching

Tiny paw

It can't be!

Pulling, trying to dislodge

the dried-up carcass, now embedded in the road

I stop the car again

As a branch falls next to the grey fury, the desperate lover doesn't move an inch, pawing,
scrapping, pulling, then sniffing more pulling and sniffing

SQUIRREL (cont.)

The tangled lover scraping and pawing

The black dots defiantly looking up, unblinking Lover's anguish

Refuses to retreat,

I yell, "Get out of the road!"

Closer, I'm within a foot

The paws reluctantly stop and

the persistent grey lover withdraws into the shadows But not for long as my car has stopped

a foot away from the downed animal I can no longer see the frantic lover But I distinctly hear Scraping, pulling,

scraping, pulling

Scraping . . . into the night

The grey phantom refuses to move, before the heated radiator

Undisturbed by the hoot of the owl overhead Scraping, pulling

I back up about ten feet,

give them a wide berth and drive by

On the other side of the road

the beloved grey companion gone The black dots, not looking up
Frenzied scraping, pulling, scraping . . .

God, I wish I could love like that!*

Dr. Frank Romano, New York City, 2015

* I feel my own deep love and must not lose you to know how profound it is.

MUSIC IN OUR LIFE

By David Folds

the wind rolls past
 the mundane moments
while I wonder
 where I am today
but listening to a song
 that reaches inside
past the defenses
 of inward restraint
the flow of tempo
 reaches out to grab
while the tune floats pitch
 in hopeful ascension
then lowering to soften
 the reality of our wishes
I'm carried along
 traveling on a
 sonic journey
all too short
 but truly blissful
left with a buzz
 and internal echoes

MUSIC IN OUR LIFE

(cont.)

that filter in with
 the seconds of life
 staring me in the face
the prosaic non-music
 of these tone-deaf
 rhythmless times
misses the beauty
 of created cohesion
misses the fullness
 of complete involvement
while I look to fill
 in the blank
life continues
 inspired or not

MY CITY ARISES

By David Folds

the city is like myself
 externally bombarded
 from all sides
fleeting awareness
 unremembered
 unrecorded
internal energy
 radiating
 more outward
 than in
the city embraces with
 love or disgust
 its massive
 organic totality
heat baked cement
 and steel
 in Summer
create an irritated edge
 even to breath
cold structures in Winter
 reach up towards
 the warmth
not high enough
 to negate
 a chilled existence
rare accidental
 structuring
 allows an echo
 of sounds

MY CITY ARISES (cont.)

but the blaring blasts
 of urban energy
 seek out the quiet
 places
dying like
 old skin cells
 trying to hang on
urban culture
 feeds the creative
from the cacophony
 of stranded moments
to the quiet
 of hidden lives
we rejoice in
 our togetherness
 when it suits us
and focus on
 the differences
 from historic habit
somehow
 the city of myself
pauses in reflection
 sitting in wonderment
trying to figure out
 how we all got here

EMPTY SEAT

By Frank Romano

Empty seat where a Palestinian child should
be but he was killed with live fire.
An Israeli soldier was to return from
war but he didn't come back.
From an Israeli sniper?
Shooting hot metal
at a young Palestinian boy with rock in
hand, way beyond David & Goliath!
Played out daily with martyrs and tears falling
into the hot sands of the West Bank and Gaza.
Empty seat ascending
upwards, upwards
toward the swirling sky and then descending
onto the platform,
but nobody enters
and "La grande roue" shimmers and stirs
as the empty seat rises, slightly swaying
in the wind.

Ramallah, November 2018

FLIGHT FROM DAMASCUS

for refugees everywhere

By Anne-Marie Brumm

Their voices shrunk to whispers,
families panic in their haste to flee,
fear their only compass.

The earth simmers under the soles
of their blistered feet.

Everywhere houses explode like nightmares.

Children coming, crying, crumbling.

Bullets, bottles, bombs fall heavily
as they burst through the air.

Smoke stretches its thin arms
blindly beseeching the dark silent heavens.

A slum of sounds spurts forth
from crowded tents.

Bodies ache, weary, lost
their lives scourged of meaning.

Only bitter memories
soil their belongings.

Prayers shiver through the night.

Nervous laughs, sighs, tremble and die.

Stars smile, watching.

Now, as they wander amid
strange, new streets of life.

Will souls chiseled
in this furnace survive?

Time will fold their journey
into darkness.

Their voyage across sea and sand
will leave no footprints and no clues
for the centuries.

CRONKITE BEACH

By Frank Romano

Gone—
Ocean's arms- spraying rose on pale cheeks

Warm kisses contrast the crashing waves

Distant booming

It can't be so
It's all gone

Don't ever leave

Can't forget

Burns inside

At remembering

Each time

I can't forget

If I do

Then I'm numb

Until death

Frees me

to feel

again

Paris, 2008



AGAIN

(or, The Abstraction) **By Evie Ivy**

How do you fill in the face
of him or her mean and nasty?
You start with the brows,
color them thick, and too dark.
Make the eyes all seeing,
yet, know they see not a thing.
The nose, make it too long,
bring it below the chin.
The mouth, wherever it fits
will be curved up,
with the assurance of—
all is me. Add hair, if
you want to. Then erase it

and start all over again.

STOLEN HEART

By Frank Romano

I don't search for motive-
because I have found it.

Motive is to unify all peoples
to spread warmth and love
to all who follow

Don't fear, my pretty little friend
no life is worth living unless it
can restore happiness, to a heart deflated.

But if you stop for motivation
don't let the crickets catch you stealing.

Santa Rosa, 1968