

Tobi Alfier – Five Poems



Feature Poet

Gone to Seed

The borders of this college town were just a rumor.
Dry for two miles on three sides, and wet
with the river on the fourth. At two point one miles,
a liquor store and the Double XX drive-in.

Used to be you could shut off the headlights,
drive to the back row and listen—
sloe gin mixed with soda and a short fall from grace,
another everyone's Friday night.

Now its river sounds, bourbon neat
and you're alone. Still in the same town,
still dry, the drive-in closed, liquor store too.
Post Office hangs by a thread.

You're one of the remaining few,
with one foot down the road, one
in the house you've lived in forever,
parked on that fourth side, listening

to the solace of late-night radio
from somewhere miles and decades away.
Look in the rearview, you're better than this,
a yard full of flowers, all gone to seed.

Clean-up Break at the Double A

Josh edged his midnight blue Freightliner into a space in the lot at the Double A, went in to sign up for a shower, throw some clothes in the wash and get some food in him. Real food, not the kind he ripped open with teeth and ate while driving, a bag in his lap, eyes on the road.

He loved the Double A. Two-thirds to home on his longest route, the kindest waitresses and best sleep shirts—he always bought a new one when he stopped, brought it home for Katie along with a few wilting hand-picked wildflowers and a menu or two for her collection.

Doris was working the diner tonight. That meant extra gravy for his fries, never-ending coffee for staying awake, and a pat on his shoulder each time she walked by. She was so graceful it took a blind man not to notice, but she never overstepped and took it too far. She had family too.

Josh was halfway through his steak when he heard his name. *Come get your shower or you're back to the end of the line.* He knew Doris would keep it warm for when he came back—clean hair all shiny and clean clothes too. Almost home to his woman and he wanted to keep her glad when he tiptoed in.

The days of pinched noses and *where've you been's* all gone, Josh and Katie were going on three years now. Bought a house from her daddy in everyone's same town and making a life together. Josh was thankful to the Lord every single darned day—he'd be home as the night shadows climbed from the sky, as the warblers began their morning song.

Taking a Walk on Heidelberg Street

A woman with blue hair and harlequin glasses
pushes a baby carriage along the street. In the carriage,
two cats, a bottle of Jack Daniels and some polaroid cameras
stolen from the pharmacy along with a bag of cat treats
and red licorice twists.

She hopscotches on the dots, jostling the cats
and making waves in the whiskey. *She needs a better bra,*
one neighbor says to the other as they follow her weird
progress to the stop sign at the corner. They can't stop
watching this train wreck from the 1950's.

She turns the corner, lifts one cat for a cuddle and view
of a car covered in pennies, lifts the Jack for a swig,
politely dabs at her lips with a tissue tucked up her sweater—
it's a cool day—and continues on. A hole filled with used
baby toys catches her eye. She speaks softly to herself,

makes a few notes as she sobers a bit, takes a couple polaroids.
She stops again at a tree—hollowed out at eye level
for a shelf which contains a family of miniatures. *How cute,*
she thinks as the other cat comes out for a look and a cuddle,
of course the Jack visits too. She stops at an old Chevy

the color of primer and dead flowers, loads everything
into the back. Off she goes, like an old woman descending
a staircase, past the houses she'll visit next trip. The B-52's
scream on the radio, cats scramble in the back, red licorice
waves from her lips like a lost card on Valentine's Day.

The Tree of Broken Promises

Brush away the leaves, it's Sunday,
the day she visits the tree in the town square
by the bandstand. She gingerly steps
over roots twined and lumpy, growing
since years before their time and still growing.

She circles around to the initials carved
with all the promise of young couples,
still visible in bark a little over waist high now,
and places her palm to them, reads them like

a prayer. As she's done every week
since he went away, swore he'd come back
for her, and instead married a cocktail waitress
named Beth in Las Vegas over a lost weekend.

Make no mistake, hers is a full, vibrant life.
She wears her beauty flawlessly, an untread
field of snow. She's the voice of a songbird
in low morning light, and at night—she dances.

Sunday's are a gratitude sojourn,
not a graveyard visit. The last she'd heard,
Beth had taken off with a tall man in a flash car
while he trawled the Vegas alleys like a mangy cat,

scrounging dollars for bottom-shelf drinks
at fourth-rate clubs. Forgiveness
is a tough inclination to grant—startled by the leading edge
of a shadow, he may have strayed too far alone.

Remove Before Flight

Beliefs, inclinations,
childish wants,
hiding places.
Take the high road,
blame all your regrets
on one monster.
Call the woman
with the apricot
nail polish "*friend*",
divorce your computer.

Hug like you mean it:
the gardener,
the butcher,
the man who cuts
your croissants uneven
on Saturday mornings.
Touch base with God,
water the radishes,
unhook your hunger,
dream yourself home.

Tobi Alfier is a multiple Pushcart nominee and multiple Best of the Net nominee. *Slices of Alice & Other Character Studies* was published by Cholla Needles Press. *Symmetry: earth and sky* was published by Main Street Rag. She is co-editor of San Pedro River Review (www.bluehorsepress.com).