

Baseball Cards

My nephew shows me his baseball card collection. He brings out binders.
The mythic sporting images are not perspiring in their plastic prophylactics
no card edge is bent or chipped, no gum powder stains are showing
They are like bugs on pins or encased in amber
perfectly preserved and perfectly dead.

As he proudly points out the value of his latest page
my mind flashes back to the two battered shoeboxes
now stashed in my closet,
carrying the dust from many of my lives,
My Cards!

Once complete sets '67 and '68
all tattered and scratched, taped, marked in pen
charting the trades and transformations

Me and Danny
we played out a 180 games season with our teams, keeping statistics
we'd take over my TV room, his den
masking tape bases, our trombone cases making
the walls of The House that Ruth Built
or The Home of The Braves
with a button ball we'd slide the pitch, roll the dice
and wear out the knees of many pants sliding our cards after them

Now, two and a half decades later
I can still see the muscular arms of Aaron,
bat on shoulders, a regular for my guys
top right side torn from bouncing off the walls
back side stats worn smooth for speed and swiftness
a sure threat to steal a base with the right wrist action.

My last card in '67 was Mantle,
I'd amassed doubles and triples by the score,
cutting the rookie cards and taping them on to expand the roster
then I got him, a head shot
Mickey Mantle, a face looking stupid
I had him before Danny did, kept him for reputation
then dove into the treasure Danny's uncle bestowed.
Gil Hodges, Ted Williams, Whitey Ford. I got the doubles.
Then going to top that I hit the library
tearing the pictures from the history books
wrapping my doubles with Ty Cobb, Josh Gibson, Satchel Paige.
We expanded to the minors, The Mudhens and Bees
Pioneer League specials Boise, Spokane
The Negro Leagues. Kansas City Monarchs, Homestead Grays
We had a card for the commissioner Ford Frick, even umpires
and later, when we were older cheerleaders
taken from Playboy
If we were going to explore the off field dimensions of the game
money was beside the point
it was a way of life we were after
and when we saw our baseball cards
They were alive.

Dolphin

My world surrounds me
A symphony of buoyancy
Surviving here is always a dance
Sliding, spinning, agile
Nuanced songs
Shrill and rich
Enfold us all
With us in each of the seven directions
We travel continuously
North, South, East, West,
Above, Below
And Inward
Where we always live
Up and inward
Out and inward
We always travel two directions at once
Usually we move in three
It is in this way we find our food
And in this way we find our reason for living
Sensing our place in the one song of the sea
We find our notes and feed
Our song grows
This is the way of things
Here below
And above

Though we fear for our family
That opted for legs and air
Substance is thin there
Directions harder to follow
When we break the ceiling
For oxygen and sky
We grow more and more distressed
The song sounds pain
The song sounds hungry
It resonates pride, greed, dominance
Disharmony
We breathe once
Because it is necessary
Then dive deeper
Because it is essential
Anger is not in our nature
Truth for more than its moment
is not celebrated
Justice the province of the divine
We dive inward deeper
To find rectification, atonement, redemption
We sing from our soul with all our strength
We sing to reach you in the rhythms of nature
We sing to reach you in the stirring of dreams
We sing to reach you
Join with us your very being
Sing the song of your soul
Uniting the voices
Above and below
Sing!

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Central Square

Its been called a psychic vortex
but Central Square is really just a little slice of Worcester
dropped smack in the middle of politically correct Cambridge

Seems more a neighborhood when I walk it with my daughter
three years old, not knowing about fear of dogs
or anything else when she's on Daddy's shoulders
talks to everyone she meets, offering bouquets of dandelions
she gathers smiles from all but those who have banished joy
ask why everybody says she's cute

We take the T to Harvard Square, hang with the streetplayers
already knowing what open guitar cases are about
she takes pride in doing it Her Self
dropping pennies, nickels, dimes
whatever change I've given her into the felt lined cases

That song was very pretty she informs me
after some consideration
later she tells me that people are really animals,
that gorillas and monkeys are the same thing
and that isn't a star its a satellite silly.

Our nights end on the porch
she tells me not to smoke ever again
reminds me to hear her words
I nod and hold her close, warm from the inside out

Those are the nights I treasure
they keep me safe on the other nights
when alone I walk beneath the streetlights and moon
knowing that she is safe with her mom
I feel free to follow my feelings
seeing, imagining, knowing
that there are stars above this city's glow

I smell the ocean,
piss where I please
and affirm that there is nature here at sealevel
that is as vital as the moonshadows that now give the Arches their glow
that heal the deserts sunburn, returning the coolness to sunbaked stone
that whisper the myth of dew to cactus needles and Mormon tea

Its high desert nights, wild blood flows in me
Its Texas nights, my heart knows it to be
Its Boston nights, insist that I see

Would that my body be
where my memories are
I would put a note in the mailbox of Thunder Guru
dance on the hoodoos, fornicate beneath the stars
pay the band, hold my daughter
and call it a day
in Central Square

MLK Day 2008

The dreamer etched
"Peace"
Into the granite steps
Of a monument
In the pantheon to warriors
We call a National Mall
His words accented
By the ink of his blood
Split in Memphis
For the dignity of
Garbagemen

On those steps
I kneel with my daughter
Using pencil and paper
We trace that piece
Of the dream,
Carry it north
To a new generation
Facing the lies
Of the assassins
In times as dangerous
As they have always been

Lost, confused, intimidated
The hype drives us
To oppose ourselves
To obscure the dream
Or risk spilling Our blood
On the back pages
Of the daily newsprint
Gone in tomorrows recycling
The way it has always been

Yet a dreamer etched
"Tolerance"
Into the granite steps
Of a monument
In a pantheon to warriors

It will not be erased.

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