

The Empty Building

By John Grey

The rats don't count of course.
Saw one scurry into a hole in the wall
late last night.
Nor do the homeless
who crawl through the broken window,
spend a chilly night on its splintery floors.
It's too cracked up even for a crack house.
And gentrification gave up
on the neighborhood three blocks away.
Fire's the most likely to move in
but it only ever stays a flaming hour or two.
I've heard the city wants to knock it down,
swing that steel ball through its rotting sides
but they're still scouring records in the dungeon,
looking for an owner.
For now it's the most useless, hollow edifice
on the south side,
and yet I admit to all manner of curiosity
as I stroll by its darkened shape
on a late night in winter.
Who built it and when? Who lived in it?
What joys? What despair?
It's a an old Victorian skeleton
on which I struggle to build a body, a history.
Its shattered glass eyes
glow at me in the moonlight.
Or is that its mouth,
crooked and numb.
Wind picks up, howls through
its creaky frame.
A rattle, a shake, a roar, and then a silence.
Such a pretty speech in its defense.

Accident Time

By John Grey

So this is what it's like to have
steel bent around the forehead,

glass slivers through the cheeks,
police lights in the eyes.

And sirens, for the one and only time,
playing my song.

The ambulance is like an entire orchestra,
and thus the wounds applaud

though my bones refrain from clapping
and the shock is still convinced

I'm on my way home
while my nerves are

out on the sidewalk somewhere hailing taxis. .
Eventually, it's the pain

that tells me where to go,
and I follow each wrack, every twinge,

just so I can stay in the one place
where the rescue workers can find me.

A Comedian OD'S

By John Grey

Applause, acclaim and then what -
wasted in a frozen room,
a magnet drawn by his need's cold metal,
a longing for success, first made real,
then irrevocably coarsened.

A house of winter,
the chuckles hardly worth bearing,
frosty hands wrapped in chains.
Now, even the clapping leaves a bitter taste.
He was proud enough at the time
but it was his habits that came out for the all-night encore.

Now it's snowdrifts, near-death and half-sleep.
Not forgetting the begrudging ghosts
who promise him the hell of their own end times.
Swarming demons choke his nostrils,
swell his throat with fire.
Had he only known what fate
success had in store for him:
the stress of cold,
the even colder insistence.

Too many slippery steps on untamed ice.
Too much blind passion giving eye-less orders.
And then the quirks, this belief
that there only is the one season.
And it's liquid. And it's squeezed from a syringe.

The tracks are listlessly masked by blown drifts.
Blood beats in and out of a timorous heart.
And a gist for getting laughs
thrusts a fool onto a stage,
reverts to a slave when he's finally done

His situation's helpless.
Jokes contain the spore.

Writing Raw

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The warm expectant crowd
thrills and throttles likewise.

John Grey bio: John Grey is an Australian poet, US resident. Recently published in New Plains Review, Perceptions and Sanskrit with work upcoming in South Carolina Review, Gargoyle, Owen Wister Review and Louisiana Literature.