

## Five Poems by Alan Feldman

Alan Feldman

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## ALAN FELDMAN

### Breakfast

This room comes with breakfast included.  
It's the standard breakfast. The one you eat  
each morning, without care, the way your  
eyes open, and you find out where you are,  
whatever your dreams have been telling you.  
If there are birds chirping, great, or if there are  
bulldozers moving in on the construction site  
next door . . . it's better to eat, to fortify yourself.

Everything can wait till after breakfast.  
Have you had yours? The way our hands  
carry water to the saucepan, the way  
we blindly seek out the coffee, the egg  
to rest in its shallow bath of water,  
the way we spill little zeros into a bowl  
and flood them with the primordial milk  
of the first breakfast after the long fast of gestation,  
the way the oranges give up their pulp and the melons  
split open like the sun--all the days have  
as their birthright such beginnings, such hope,  
such lists of tasks to attempt. This day comes  
with breakfast. Breakfast is included, yes.

## Alan in the City

Before I grew up and lived at home  
I'd walk the streets of my suburb at dawn.  
The police questioned me, just for walking!  
When I left to hitchhike to college  
I vowed a) never to stop practicing  
my French horn, and b) never end up  
in the suburbs. But despite marriage,  
a house, children, and a yard  
with a stream that gurgled each spring,  
I wanted the city! The mysterious runes  
in the concrete. The artful spatter of leaves.  
Here we are, all together, says the noise.  
And always someone is cooking--  
a landscape for the sighted, for the blind.  
And you can ride in the subway tunnels  
with their intimate, steamy smell,  
and be young. And all the little stores!--  
like shabby cubbies of individuality--  
as if entering any of them would take you  
into an unforeseen life, as many  
as there are windows, with shades,  
and Hopper-like figures staring at the street,  
as many as there are barbers clipping hair  
in their gleaming emporiums, or chickens  
on rotisseries like sweating bodies  
in tanning salons, or buses like good-natured  
grandmothers, or nymphs in fountains,  
or fronds in public gardens, or great monuments  
like Greek temples containing dental clinics,  
or views of the river (what city  
can expect to be loved without a river?)  
or music students carrying their instruments  
on their backs, as I once carried mine,  
or birds on the windowsills, or in the parks,  
or flying above the pixilated crowds  
roaring in the brilliantly-lit ballparks,  
or daffodils growing undisturbed  
beside the corner church. They're watered daily  
by an avid gardener, a man who came  
from the leafy suburbs of Connecticut  
when he retired, and who'll greet you  
if you pause to admire his beds  
someday, when you're out walking.

## To Returning

Oh feeling of returning,  
you're not as exciting as adventure  
with landscapes as strange as alien planets  
and startling sounds and waves of dismay and anxiousness.  
No, you are like a mother. "Here I am again!"  
the grateful traveler thinks, "back on these streets."  
And the knife seller has gone out of business  
but the bakery smells as it should! "Here  
I am, Mother," we all say as we step  
into the same stream. And isn't the pond  
the same pond, the same little socket of blue  
in the sandy, shifting hills?

I enter the pond and I am part of you--  
I enter the water that parts  
and admits me with something of the chill of winter still,  
and lift my arm (my right arm  
that glistens with the high June sun) and watch it descend  
and the pond is round, and I go around . . .

You are with me then most strongly,  
the feeling of you, which is often so pleasurable,  
though I suppose it doesn't always have to be.  
Won't autumn return, with weeds  
that choke the pond, and then  
the skimpy sun and eventually freezing rain?  
But just as surely the pond will thaw, returning,  
to become its living self  
and the young will dance  
into the water as if they've been away  
a hundred years. And the old  
having walked about  
while retaining their gills  
may or may not wade in--  
simply thankful to be  
back here with you.

## The High Ground

My son and his girlfriend don't want a child.  
They admit they couldn't afford to raise one.  
But their friend's son is her godson,  
and sometimes when the friend works weekends  
Dan and his girlfriend take him to the beach.

Kids are cute, they think. Meet them a few times  
and you start to enjoy them, whether they're yours or not.  
But they're all yours, if you share that belief.

My son and his girlfriend share it. They met  
attending a school for the learning disabled.  
There the cooks, the janitors, everyone  
formed part of the team to help the students.  
Now both have worked with small children themselves.  
And when it comes to protecting them  
they don't have any special difficulty.

But read the news, if you think others don't.  
Pundits repeating that this or that army  
has successfully "seized the moral high ground."  
It's obvious the planet needs to be helped.  
Alone, spinning in darkness,  
orphaned and bereft, and needing  
some fostering care, perhaps a godparent.

Examples abound, if you look around you.  
In fact here comes one now, cresting a dune,  
my son and the little godson with his swim noodle.  
"What does he call you?" my wife asks my son.  
"Farmer Dan," he shrugs. "Or sometimes Uncle."

And now we watch Dan (who never farmed)  
descending to the shore slowly, slowly  
because the child has entrusted him with his hand.

## Putting Iron

You'd have laughed, Sam,  
at how your putting iron came to  
wander from office to office  
where I work. I'd find it  
like a long-necked fowl  
with a stupid, dense head,  
hiding in the shadow of the Xerox,  
or month's later in the men's room,  
or near the palatial vending machine  
with its rainbow colors so easily  
shattered by the putting iron's  
single-minded sense of purpose.

Remember Carla? She became frightened  
a client might be armed. "Send in  
the blue folder," we were taught to say.  
But would security really come?  
So I brought in your putting iron  
to keep by my desk. The client  
seemed innocent, if violent,  
like a bear. "Take your coat?"  
said I, trying to sound welcoming.  
The client wasn't armed. He wore  
a rumpled white shirt. Peace  
in his heart? Peace and complaining,  
while I prepared the golf stroke  
that could shatter his forearm.

I never took the club home.  
It wandered like a steel emissary  
of wariness, lost in a world  
of ringing telephones and houseplants,  
looking for some battle. A gleaming  
steel spine of self-protective narrowness.  
A tainted club. Lately it's been resting  
beside the mail cubbies that sniffer dogs  
sniff for bombs. And I heard they're retiring  
the A10 tank. These days the germs  
on airplane armrests might be deadly.

Oh, Sam, I didn't make this world,  
and I don't play golf. You,  
a socialist-pacifist, sometimes crossed

that ocean of grass under a temperate  
blue heaven to practice, or maybe  
play nine holes. You never hated  
anyone, except war mongers,  
and to everyone else you extended  
your smile, and friendly hand.