

After Death's Silence



a chapbook by **Joseph Lisowski**

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Desert Wind

I am reckless in this wind.
Heat whistles through my limbs.
Another day empty of promise
envelopes another night.
A film covers my eyes—
dark negative of the hour,
the minute my daughter died.

I wake to the moment every day.
In darkness there is nothing.
Then roosters and dogs,
sometimes voices cursing,
an occasional shotgun blast.

Dawn at last tints my window.
I rise by habit, believing there is no choice.



Dream

A man dreams of being a new man,
neither young nor old. He stands
against a gray background—
maybe clouds, or an ordinary room.
He is whole, seamless. Others drift by,
fade into gray, only a few notice him.
Though his hands are sparkling triangles
of fine-beaten gold, close to each other,
whirling, creating a sun.

Later, he looks into a cave
and sees himself in a dark pond,
wedged in a corner, exposed to his chest.
An old hairdryer lies nearby, electric.
Maybe the owner will throw it in the water.

He nonetheless turns back to his hands.
More come and leave in the light.

Still Life

Grief is an amputated hand,
blood fast running out.

Each cell aches for connection,
finding air, then a numbing.

Edges curl back, first blue,
then grey, finally black.

It becomes a lifeless thing—
hard, in slow measure, ash.

Patience

A river of sorrow holds no fish.
Bait drifts listlessly on the surface.
Monofilament sways in the current.

What if a man standing on the bank
casts again and again?
How long can he endure?



Knocking at the Door

What is it that
batters, knocks,
and pushes me?

I am alive in sensible things.
My mass breaks space,
my breath streaks the air.

But my daughter's spirit
is more real than her
cracked bones and spilled blood.

A Moment's Reprieve

Without clouds to cover the sun's faults,
the heat will level layers of thought,
skin will redden, blister, then crack—
tongues become delirious, eyes lose sight.

Clouds, dark, heavy with rain, bring hope
of cooling, cleansing. They bring the touch
of people who know God's like that.

Death opens grief to emptiness,
the hot light of day beats it raw.

Stage of Healing

Healing is a lingering kiss
that lifts you from flesh.
In that instant, all is full.
A heartbeat's enough,
entire without hint of lapse.

But God's kiss is never
held long enough.
You inevitably take a breath.
And hope becomes a beggar
who wears your discarded clothes.



Turning to the Natural World

A restless thrushie chirps in dusk
outside my window. The same one,
I suspect, that comes before dawn.
Its happy, intrusive sound mocks
my loss. In spite of myself I listen.

The late rhythm is not light breaking.
Its programmed song is delusion.
Yet, for a moment I convince myself
and get drunk on its lies.

Weather Report

Rain spits on the cracked land,
enough to tease shallow roots.
It encourages manic thrust.

An hour later, the sun returns
to punish impetuous growth.
Its rays stir ashes,
mixing grass with sooty earth.

The rest of the day is lost to desert winds.

Fighting the Prescription

Words slam against the roof of my mouth
before my tongue can move.
I try harder but feel nothing
except a steel lid no words can lift.
A desperate moaning below—
then a slide down a ravenous cliff
where there is keening.

I fall in darkness thick as sludge.
I strain to reach the lead cap of my heart.
I put my palm on it and feel a faint beat

now recorded.



Keeping Time

Calendars are slow reminders
of love missed.

Sorrow is a day
that never ends.

What We Choose Is What We Get

Preference matters little, service counts.
We're given a gold ring before birth
and quickly lose it. This marriage is broken
before we know the pain. Divorce,
not annulment. Weakness laments the cure.

Even so, the world shines. Exuberant flowers
and rotting bark alike proclaim rapture:
life, death, life—deeply inhaled, exhaled.

I live within the ring, knowing what I lost,
sensing it just now within my touch.

This Caribbean Desert

I am weak, superfluous,
like an oleander leaf too long in drought.
I am beaten by longing, limp by neglect,
yet still hang on.

This Caribbean desert endures.
Occasional roaming bands of cold wind
maraud and shake its stem.
Rain comes quick, at times heavy,
swelling the soil, stiffening the branch.
There's promise for a while.

What delusion that time lasts forever!
What lies we spread when it doesn't!



Therapy

This morning my psychiatrist seemed distracted, unfocused. He drifted in and out of my revelations.

The drugs he prescribed for me, I suspect, are ones he's long been taking.

Treatment

With medication
thoughts become bent nails.
Nothing drives through,
makes a bind.
Hammer only glances,
bends them more.
The mind nods.
It's like wax dripping
on a finger. First
a warm caress, then a cooling—
stiff, immobile, set to crack.

Keeping Faith

We limp along at best.
Wounds will heal
if our hearts hold hope.
Scars don't matter
unless we keep examining them,
stop bending toward the light.

One halting step is as good
as a spry one. We move
in spite of echoes, phantoms
along the way.



Paradox

We are connected
by the thinnest lines
often unseen and unfelt,
but they are of tungsten steel
so many and strong.
Our stupidity insists we ignore them all.

What demon in us
demands only lies,
demands we are alone?

Desire

My daughter is dead
again in my arms.
I touch the cold
that's not her. She
dies in my eyes.
Nothing comes
from her closed lids.

She visits my emptiness
and layers it with strands
of her golden hair.
They are the ladder
that I climb.
I reach toward her,
not knowing what I'll find.

Reversals

My daughter blesses my regret.
Her touch is a breeze,
a balm to my ache.
Then she is gone.

I look in the wind,
the nothing that's left.
I have felt her love
and need to again.



Death Watch

Morning breaks through dreamless skies.
Night surrenders easily.
Summer rises once again
in folds of zinnia, daisy, marigold.

All of that is outside.
Inside, funeral roses still bloom.
They infest the air
my daughter no longer breathes.

Her scent is no longer everywhere.
Not in her tee shirts which I wear.
Not in her make-up, clothes,
and shoes her mother keeps.

My brother-in-law sits now
by his father's hospital bed.
The man feels death coming fast
and orders his son to buy a funeral suit.

My brother-in-law sits among goodbyes,
his mother and sisters, and his father
whom the priest has already blessed,
while my sister cries in my wife's arms.

Visitation

My daughter enters our new house
on waves of music we listened to together
in our difficult island life.
The sun is crisp, Canadian air sweeps in.
I ask her what she thinks.
She only shakes her head.

I feel she's about to speak
but words are lost in transit—
somewhere between impact
and that last breath.

I strain to hear her voice,
my own ears dammed with grief.

A Lesson

My daughter does not care
that I speak of her as dead.
But her admonishments are gentle.
We speak to each other in new ways,
though I still lumber along
on halting steps and brood
like an ancient earth-worn man.
She is a light just beyond touch.
She caresses my head
with an imperceptible pale yellow
refraction of the sun.

I speak to her often.
She replies in a language
without sound. I listen
and begin to learn of love
and its silence.



End Matter

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About the Art: *City Scapes* is a series of works by Joe Pizzat. Each scape is a three-and-a-half inch square, media vinyl tape on mosaic tile.

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