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Steven Hill

Snowfall

I remember the snow
falling so slow
glinting under the street lamp
flakes of winter

breath held in the moment
soft as your mittened hand
steaming among the fractal
shapes of frozen sculpture

released our hidden joy
in halos of fragile contemplation
moonlit silhouettes

branches like bony fingers

stretched across the ice lake
frozen with expectations
future worried the present
each footstep in the new-fall

punching holes in the snow crust
we meandered past the village
windows framed the dark
inside the boxes of stuttered lives

our heads tilted back
red tongues at the ready
catching white flakes
awaiting the hopeful morrow

that we assume will come
piling on the future
days and weeks counting
breath steaming fragile

I hold your hand and
we lean heads together and
look up into the greyness,
and while the future falls like
and we breathed like...
we breathed...
and we breathed...
and it falls.

Cluttered Tabletop

A melting candle
sliced bread
licked butter knife
crumbs discarded
This is where human hands have been
This is where human paths have led

The spoiling meat
ground corn
light bulb
newspaper torn
This is where human hands have been

This is where human paths have led

The harvested grain
melted ore
mined mountain
written law

This is where human hands have been
This is where human paths have led
Something in some ways violated
Some things in some ways sacred

Painted face
bound breast

felled tree
fancy guest

yoked oxen
burned hydrocarbon

burning log

fattened hog

shattered molecule
drained bog

Infusion of effort defines the shape
How fine the line between reap and rape
What was violated, what held sacred?

The dammed river
insistent scripture
noosed neck
signed check

a signature
blank page
bombed building
monkey cage

Infusion of effort defines the shape
How blind, the line between reap and rape
What has been violated, what held sacred.
Not choosing is a choice.

We are painters of shadows
Light and dark
We must destroy to create
We must kill to live
Not choosing is a choice

This is where human hands have been
This is where human paths have led
How blind the line between violated and sacred
Not choosing is a choice.

The Final Betrayal

We have lain together all these long years
like the petals of a rose entwined,
growing wise before old amidst the gasps of the world,
each the other's shadow
 weaving along the timeline.

Now you have betrayed me,
abandoned me in my time of need,
dearest, oldest friend, grievous exemption from our mutual breath,
 tears cannot comfort the loss of this seed,
my body, my heart, my brain, my soul,
without you I am nothing.

Without your spark my hair's fallen out,
teeth gone black, legs fail like wobbling on ice.
The skin sags, body fat slides,
arm strength wanes,
I stare into the abyss approaching.
Whose hands are these, trembling in the fading light?
Whose lungs, falling short of breath?
Whose penis, lying limp like a thirsty corn stalk?
Whose clay feet, gimping in circles,
whose kidney, whose pancreas
 melting from their vital spaces,
leaving an emptiness in the carapace,
my hollow eyes staring into that emptiness
 can no longer keep up the pace.
Pain is not abstract, it commands with relentless authority,
Betrayed by my home, my beloved body corpus
 that I have known these 60 too-short years,
compact negotiated
 that had kept us in the front of the line,
now falling behind by the sin of faithlessness.
Walking away from the marriage of our lives,
merged for the duration but now you tell me...
 ...it's time.

Time? Even memory can be the most treacherous of friends,

conspiring in our own oblivion,
buzzing like a fly restlessly looking for an escape toward the living light.

Father of my father, mother of my mother,
 why did you even bring me into this world
knowing that the inevitable would end in such pain and darkness?
Better to have left me in the primordial sea,
merged to where I will now return,
 without love, without sun
 without the landscape of a lifetime;
this bargain is a cruel definition,
we were not there when it began,
 yet it is still the only choice offered,
so we grab for it greedily while we can.

-- And I would grab for it one more day, if I could.

Steven Hill is a *Caveat Lector* principal and contributing writer. He is a journalist and the author of seven books of political nonfiction. His essays, articles and media interviews have appeared in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *The Atlantic*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Wired*, *Guardian*, *Le Monde*, *Die Zeit*, NPR, PBS, BBC, C-SPAN, Democracy Now, and many others. He is the chief editor and contributor to the online publication DemocracySOS. He has published short fiction and poems in a number of publications, including *Columbia Journal*, *Minnesota Review*, *San Fernando Poetry Journal*, *Struggle*, *Prophetic Voices*, and the anthologies *Sparkle and Blink*, *Grasp the Rainbow*, and *Poets for a Livable Planet*. His plays have been produced in NY City (Off-Off Broadway), Washington, D.C., and San Francisco. His website can be found at www.Steven-Hill.com.