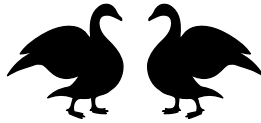


AMERICAN HERO



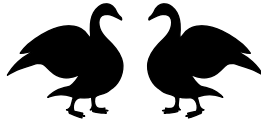
Coffee blurred highway baking down,
the all-news radio on, its streaming ads and
here I am another day of work breakfast in my hand
an egg and sausage trying to keep going a cup too hot
I'm watching the traffic, avoiding, breaking, stopping,
not able to catch the hot grease staining my shirt,
well that's what they get a grease ball for the day
that's what they get and how I am to greet customers
this day like so many others with a shrinking check. I
want to find another woman with a good job who likes me
or will put her purse down where I can get it...
arousal or anger, I'm not sure, but it fills my mind in traffic.

Why are the cars such bright colors, why the clothes,
why the flowers planted outside wind worn homes. Why
do the keys jingle like Coney Island jewelry in our pockets
and the clocks make chunking noises when they count our names...
You want an identity, I've got one pre-shredded, bagged, and
it takes a lot to go through this every day the rest of your life.
I'm talking American Hero, lifelong soldier in a body bag
proud to keep on fighting for babies and wives and god.
An anthropologist would say there's violence building here.

What do we need, some kind of ombudsman to spread the word,
some kind of church built of human horrors, or maybe just walk out
in the middle of the day and take whatever we want from our offices
or drive school busses off across the farthest country roads. Maybe
there's still time to wake up in the evening and not take a drink
on the way home except with my buddies' home brew, and take
the wheels off this damned scrap of sun-burned metal coinage,
stop driving in the same circles we grew up in and go out
to the dark alleys that are not lit by economists' ideas
and where food doesn't come in sculpted metal carts on rubber wheels.

JARED SMITH

KNOWING WHAT GROWS



Not the obliterations,
not the light leading into shadow,
nor the eviscerated bellies bleeding into mud,
nor the jagged holes in a skull which held
all that man loves and needs and fears...
these come soon enough to any of us
in the name of old age, disease, accidents.

It is the forced tearing of the fabric of those living,
the emptiness and building of bomb-proof souls
that is most terrible of all war's seeds,
seeds that cut across generations, deserts, oceans
and plant themselves sandpaper dry in immutable rock.
Why do we hasten the passing of those who pass
about us when there is not passage from this time?