



Inside Jazz

(inside cover)



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Poetry by

Jim Chandler

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Lost in Ranger

small cracker
box room
neon flooding through
thin curtains
outside the night
lies like
black blood
over the din of
highway noise
the rushing
mass of heathens
headed down
to eternity

nothing here but
a pretty head full
of empty thoughts
an unwise decision
to let the
big dog roll
minus one
the sea bag
gone on somewhere
down the line
bouncing on
bad macadam
toward the
big muddy crossing
Memphis hanging
on the bluff
like an
old warrior
shining with
magic fire

wonder what I'm
doing here
discharge

in my pocket
separation pay
a side trip
to Juarez behind me
coming to
in Van Horn
loaded aboard the
bus like
a side of beef
after falling
over an ashtray
in the El Paso
bus station
out cold

Hung up by
a pretty face in
a roadside diner
an invitation
a girl too sweet
to pass up
a fifth of
I. W. Harper
& good intentions

remembering the break
of waves
on warm beaches
the florescent swish
of a bow
cutting water
a steel-clad
Magellan
finding new worlds
to plunder

ahead the green
land of home
forests
thicker than
the focal length
of eyes

nights like fever
bottled
in bond

lost in Ranger in
that moment
never to be
found again
my picture on
a milk carton
not yet
made

Another Sunday Poem

Once again
I find inspiration
on a rain-soaked
Sunday
down South,
sitting here
cozy and snug
while the
pouring cumulus
streams up like
a white freight train
from down beyond
the stretches of
the Galveston coast.

I seem to have
some connection
to Sundays
beyond the
scope of my imagination,

it is a day
that has fed
my mind in
creative ways
more times
than I can recall;

strange for
a man who
makes no claims
to religious scholarship,
nor whines
that he
knows God on
a personal level.

A small saint
living a quiet life
among rural solitude,

I am,
one no longer driven
by the urge
to stand out
from the masses
like the buttress of
a pirate's schooner,
ripping through
the world
with smoke and thunder
spouting from
every breech and orifice,
the ocean
flowing red in
my wake.

Were I given
a moment
to ponder, I
might envision
the stark nature of
great souls
who settled
this rainy plain
where I find
myself this day,
locked in embrace
with sweet Dame Muse
and her
voluptuous offerings,
her worthy belly
pressing the
spine of my
simple offerings,
her breath
sweet on my cheek.

I might see
the great swamp
rise like
Satan's cesspool
from ground

plowed by
the twin tines
of Time
and Circumstance;
plowed and
packed hard by
desperate ages of
thundering hoof beats
and the
bellies of a
billion foul serpents
woven through
tall grasses.

A glancing back
past the edge of
the grave might show
an advance of
creaky encumbrances
filled with
meager belongings
riding on wheels
of hope,
manned by
fortitude and a lust
to know what's beyond
the next rise
or mountain pass,
what paradise
lies waiting with
sunny arms open wide
and trees
bent to the ground
with fruits sweet
beyond knowledge.

The tide of man
came slowly at first,
like the first bare
tug of the moon
on the ocean,
the first time our

shiny orb slung into
its circuitous route and
carried its
magic around
the world;
no thought that
it came from
the bed of the sea,
this perfect round
sphere pocked like
the faces
of those who
survived demon fevers.

I have come
to believe that
all Sundays are magic,
and more so
as we draw near
the dawn of
a new millennium,
and I have
come to believe that
all days are magic,
and that nights
are magic,
and that life itself
is magic even if
at times it is

wasted on us.

Memories of the Old Man

I remember my grandfather
sitting still as dawn
in the prow of his old boat
a straw hat pulled low
over his eyes
a wad of Garrett's snuff
buried under his lip
clutching his fishing rod
with the kind of patience
a kid like me found
hard to come by

once fishing Kentucky lake
near hog hollow we didn't
heed the coming clouds until
it was almost too late
the whitecaps breaking over
the sides of the small boat
the little engine chugging
we made a run for a small island
sitting green in blowing rain
in the middle of the sprawl
of rolling muddy water
an old man and woman
neither of whom could swim a lick
and a 12 year old boy
who could but not that far

the boat dragged up on the sandy bank
we found partial shelter under
a clump of heavy undergrowth
hunkered down under there drawn up
against the crack of lightning
and the howl of wind and rain
coming across the earth sideways
I remember my grandmother's old
blue eyes and how they twinkled
with excitement because granny
wasn't afraid of the devil armed
with a circle saw

the storm passed as storms do
and soon we were on our way chugging
across tossed water to the pump house
where the dike split the backwater
and big catfish lurked among the rocks
near the edge where the suction pulled through
inside the concrete building a maelstrom of
churning water filled with white bellies
of dead shad and the roar of big engines
moving water unnaturally uphill and
across the tongue of green bank

I think now that I am now older than
my grandfather was that day and I have
not yet come close to drowning one of my
grandchildren and what they have missed
because of that and what I have missed
because of the miles and time between us
my grandchildren will remember me as
a vague stranger they saw on rare occasions
an old man who wrote things and smoked too
much
and sometimes laughed too loud when he drank
too much and sometimes showed them how to
do this or that or the other

I remember my grandfather as the short squat
man with the straw hat in the boat with
his beloved fishing tackle and sometimes if
the melancholy comes I recall his last minutes
lying in a hospital bed his face twisted by
the ravages of a stoke and how he gripped my
hand
just minutes before he died and tried to say
it's all right son with his paralyzed lips
and a few minutes later the doctor came out and
said he's gone

a couple days later in the graveyard I could
almost hear him whisper *don't talk son*
the fish will hear you

Toby James

toby james lived in a
leaning shack down by
the muddy buffalo

he'd sit with his back
against a big oak
his stone jug of shine
at his side

he'd pass it over with
a grin then take it back
always wiped the top
with a circle of dirty palm
before hitting it himself

double run white mule
that would proof 150
at least

mellow corn cooked on a
worm down on cane creek
where the water flowed cool
from springs perking the
mcnairy sands and
the law feared to tread

toby had pulled 18 years
of hard time 6 for cookin corn
& 12 for killing a man with a
double bit axe when he
caught the swamper screwing
his 12 year old girl

killin a man's the easiest
thang in the world
toby said
if you gotta reason
don't take nothin to
take a life
it's easier'n

killin a hog and half
as bloody

they found toby face down
one sunday hung in snags
along the bank drowned dead
figured it was murder cause
his crock was in the shack and

the sheriff knew toby
never wandered that far
from his squeeze

but an old dead drowned
ex-con ain't worth much effort
so they buried him on the county
side at the church yard
and forgot him

or tried to

The Death of Floyd Collins

hung in
the dark bowels
of kentucky earth
floyd collins
lay in his
own waste
while above him
men labored
to set him free
from the grip
of cavern rock
holding his legs

like a
carnival they gathered
under spotlights
vendors sold
sandwiches and people
came from
miles around
to be there when
they pulled
floyd free
or when
they brought
his body up

his brothers
were among those
crawling down
part of
the narrow slot
to take him
words of comfort
a small reporter
from louisville
named skeets
made many a trip
because skeets
was small and

could traverse
the rock tube
like an
earth beetle

once
in desperation
they tied
a rope
to his body to
winch him out
floyd told them
pull me out boys
even if it
rips my legs off
but when
he began screaming
they lost heart
and quit

they worked
for days
as floyd weakened
hung there
with his
head jammed
to one side
one arm above
and one arm
below him
and when
they were
close to cutting
an oblique hole
the tube
caved in
cutting off
access and
burying floyd

many hours later
when they bore

through the last
foot and found floyd
he was dead
locked there
in cold
dirt and rock
among the
few to
spend his time
in pure hell
before the
last breath left
his lips
two weeks
of it

some say the
ghost of
floyd collins still
screams out of
that hillside hole
on nights when
clouds shade
the full moon and
owls screech in
beech trees

some shiver
and remember that
cold hole
figure the
fire of hell
would be
better
much
better

The Dream

i never once
lost the dream
even if it tried
with all its might
to lose me

i still hear
its footsteps
in some dark
corner of
my mind

shuffling now
not spy
not leaping
like youth

old and dusty
but still alive
still breathing
fighting to
survive

still clinging to
that last drop

of hope

No Angst Tonight

spare me from
the place where
angst is a
state of mind

i want to feel it
implode in my soul
make things smaller
than they are

those smiling moments
between shuffles
of the clock hands

the space between
there and here growing
wider all the time

a gulf all
out of proportions
with
reality

nothing is real
and nothing lasts
everything is a
joke to the gods

we deceive ourselves
by believing
a response conditioned
by need

we need only
true eyes in the mirror
the book of self
open to NOW

the page where
we know

all things done
have spun around and
landed on start

the sky still hangs
suspended in disbelief
the moon pukes yellow
across black slick night

we morph like madmen
the changing scheme
devouring landscape
in our minds

we piss magic
over bent rainbows
remember songs warbled
with affection

sweet moves of
classic substance
beating faint patterns
into brain grooves

naught but dark smears
held in bulldog jaws
sweet meat that moved
like prey unused

lost hope that lingers
like spit in lip corner
lured by the flash
of new money

new dreams
to dream
old ones
to never

lay aside

