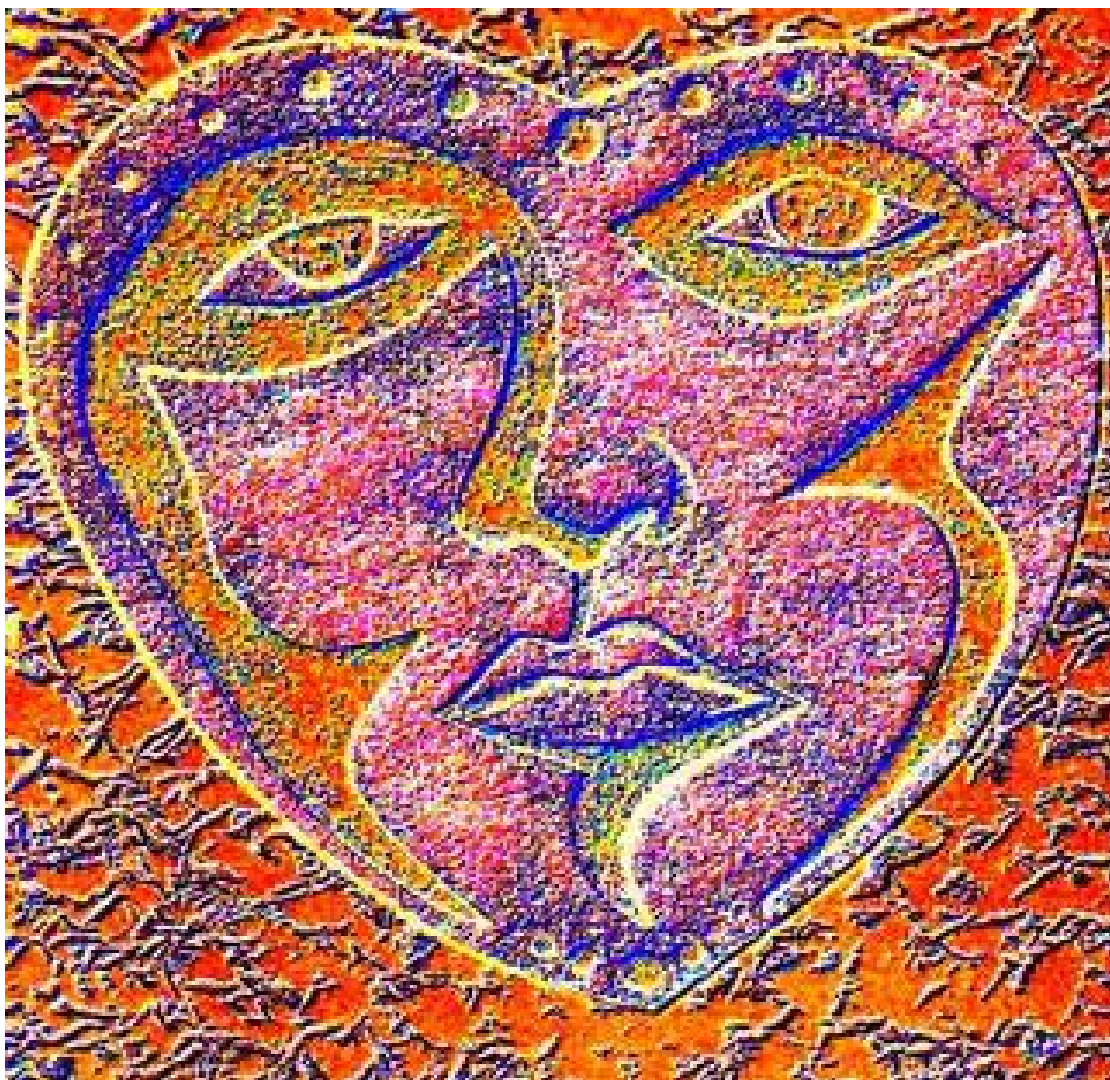


by
M. D.
Friedman

FROM HERE TO HERE!

From Here to Here



by
M. D. Friedman
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Section I: The Unwinding



As the Stars Go Out

I empty myself
and float darkly
over what the wind has left
from other places
and the things
I leave behind.

I know
my motion
by the way
everything
slips
away.

Like a star
that collapses
into itself,
I live alone
a black flower
thriving off the night.

The Unwinding

Flying is unsettling at first.
There is a certain uncertainty.
Nothing under the feet makes us uneasy as we climb.
We simply rise as we let go.

There is this enduring weightlessness,
this nervous tension from within
that holds the drops together
when dark water tumbles over the edge of light.

Silently sliding through
layers of doubt and detail,
we take a deliberate care in falling
whether it be up or down.

Our journey is a planned forgetting,
a ritual of creating form from nothing.
We become whole as we divorce ourselves
from division and direction.

We accept the altered balance
of where we are,
where we were,
and where we will never be.

The unwinding
is easy in the end
because we are slowly floating
back to where we came from.

When the Blackbirds Return to the House of Sunsets

Part 1

The view, draining toward the Indian Peaks
ragged and aloft,
made us know as we first walked up
that it was to be the home of our dreams.

Often, as it was being finished,
we sat on the bare back stoop
floating on a calliope of shrill and screech,
guests at the raucous circus of song
unique to blackbirds.

We knew at first sight this house was it,
that this would be our last move together.
Here, we could retire. Here, we would die.
In the slow yawn that opened to the white
teeth of the Continental Divide,
we could lose our cares in the quiet clamor of bird and sky.
We could find repose in the quick streaks of black on blue,
In the back and forth of day and night
that shuttles the weave of life.

Part 2

The move was so draining
day in
day out
we worked to build our dream
from mud and dust
and emptiness:

the red oak we planted,
the lilacs that died,
the yielding cottonwood,
the catalpa that barely survived
a sudden, brutal wind storm,
the red crab that bloomed in bliss.

As long as they were,
each day ended with us together
watching the colors
spread and run
down the wide
throat of night.

Part 3

When summer became stifling
and the waves of heat drove
the birds away, we stayed in.

I knew the world was changing then.
Everyday, I saw new fires
on the hills behind us.

Something
in the fabric of the world
was unraveling.

When I mentioned
this feeling,
you agreed.

Soon there after
the Twin Towers fell
in a storm

of smoke,
and dust,
and human debris.

Our little world, too,
was soon to shudder
and heave.

I knew the blackbirds
would come again
some day.

I also knew

they would return to
a very different world.

Part 4

When you told me after more
than twenty years together
that you were leaving,
I had never felt such pain.

I sit here now
in this empty room
on this bare floor
with nothing.

No heat. No furniture.
No son, magic child of my heart.
No friends of my own.
No pets. No love.

I recall that night four weeks ago.
It was three days
after you had told me
you were leaving.

I told you I thought you were right,
that I could never be as close as you needed me,
that our love could shatter like twin towers of glass and steel,
that the tremble in our embrace had turned from excitement to fear.

Later, in the middle of that night, when I picked your naked body
off the floor and put you back in bed, I never really understood
the depth of pain that drove you to swallow even more pills in the morning,
that morning you don't remember.

But I do. When I called, you answered with a grunt, and the phone fell.
I rushed home to find you lying across our bed in a pile of your own shit.
You were gray and bloated like a drowning victim who had floated to the surface.
Your eyes were swollen shut.

Was it true I heard the blackbirds squeak and wail then?
Or was it the breaks and siren of the ambulance?
The paramedics swarmed around you.
They rushed you back to their hive.

I am not sure when
the blackbirds did return
to the House of Sunsets,
but our days of warm color and joy were gone.

Part 5

It was a full day before you could talk and make sense,
two days before you could walk with a walker,
another five days before they released you from the psych hospital
with you still wondering why I did not let you die.

You told me you only said what you said to shock me.
And it did.
But anger and hurt held me at arms length away.
And a week and a half later you were in the emergency room again.

This time the pills made you thrash and twitch
as if a thousand volts of pain
were sputtering through you.
They had to put you in restraint to keep the I.V. in you.

You told the nurse
to get that fucker
out of here.
They let me wait outside.

When you came home this time
our love was so toxic
you told me to leave,
And I did.

And I have nothing.
I float on a sea of emptiness like a body swollen with decay.
And I have nothing. I have nothing left to live for.
My tears fall as dry and useless as sand on sand.

There is no comfort in the finding of these words,
no hope in the hand that holds this pen,
no where outside that is loud enough not hear myself crying,

no place inside that is deep enough for quiet.

Part 6

In harsh memory I return
to the broken song of blackbirds.
Has it always been like this?

It was this compulsion to write,
to create and to perform that has filled you
with a rage so intense you saw stars,

with a jealousy so vicious,
it has wrung the color from your world,
leaving just black and white.

For you it has become a choice for me:
my music or you, my poetry or you,
myself or you?

For me, it has never been a choice. My poetry is me.
This hand writes whether the pen is empty or full,
and my life always shrinks to fill the pen again.

Epitaph

I fear not the loud waves rippled with light,
but the slow death of this bloated moon
slipping noiselessly under the horizon
just to rise again redder than ever,
this is killing me.

I feel like a flame
caught at the edge of my wick
flickering like a candle
before the last wrinkle of waning wax
is consumed.

Here in the shadow of who I once was
is a man alone and in silence,
fumbling through the dark splinters of a heart
broken again with each breath.

I remember how, while pensively stirring
the embers of a forgotten fire,
a final flare from nowhere
would jet out of the glowing heap
before a last gasp of ash sucked it in.

Again, / Begin Again

G' mornin', Blues, have a cup of coffee with me.
G' mornin', Blues, have a cup of coffee with me.
I'm feelin' kind of lonesome, I need your company. – Mad Dog

There are no colors in this dark room.
What we know we sense, if at all,
the different shades of emotions,
the stacking of shadow on shadow
like dark petals around a shaft of light.

Someone left this candle burning,
a door ajar,
the latch undone:
there is a way out.
Someone must have been here.

(I am not alone).
I go now knowing this
neither forward nor back
moving only in small circles
ever wider each time around.

There is this memory of a path.
I have chosen
to stay off of it,
yet it follows me
where ever I go.

I destroy myself step by step.
I create myself step by step.
I enter the room
with the candle.

I am not alone after all.

Whose handiwork is this:
this ring of dust worn round the fire,
this place littered with the noise of the poet,
this flame fed on looking inward,
this hovering of myself over myself?

It is true. I would be
alone if I were not here.
And what must I do
to get here again?
Outside lies the cold endless night.

Soon I will need to go:
die between the life and the living,
fall through the hole in the middle,
relive the slow death of the unreal
over and over again.

My hands cup the candle.
Between the cracks of my fingers
leak the illusions of color,
I seem to be tumbling
down through the lie of myself,

falling from dark now to darker,
swirling out of control
like storm-gray clouds
on the lee side
of a horseshoe ridge.

I love this place of white and gray
on the side of the ragged mountain.
Oh, that I could stay here until I was gone,
but there is no place to stand,
and there is no time to stop.

|t is never over.
There is no end
to this beginning.
| would be over the edge
if there were an edge.

And so | hold the moment.
| choose to fall again.
This time | will drift
down like a snowflake
onto the warm, waiting tongue of the muse.
| am not alone after all.

Section II: From Here to Here



Slow Blues in A What?

to do what
to do what what
you want me
you want me to do
to do to do
what what what

it is
it is
it is it
it is here
here
here it is
what
to do
what we want
what we want to do
to do it
it is
here here here

now it is what
now now
what what what
what it is
what it is to do
to do what we want
from here to here
it is it is what
it is what it is
it is what we do when we do it
I will do it
it it it
from here to here

I will it
I will to do it
to do
to do what
to do
what what

To the Poet Asleep in My Father

bred of saw dust
the puppet unseen
eats his own heart out

in the park he jogged faster
stuffing himself green with more of red morning
till birdsong oozed from his pores

a tear

from the dawn

perched

on the stiff twirled hair of his chest
dangling for only a second

if he chose to play the golden villain
to snort up that sparkle of salt water air

sneeze

his rainbow

past the sun

and with his strings a tangle
still manage to roll the black end of his mustache
into a pencil point

would he then still

the moment he flickered in fancy
the hollow moaning of his heart

Chimes

There is a music that comes from this,
this hanging by a thread in the air,
this ride on the whims of the wind.

This rubbing electrically together,
the random ringing and often hollow spark
of touching, enriches the open space

of falling apart again. It is nothing and
it is everything to sing like this together, clanging
in and out of each other with no thought of why.

Why

Why is this all so painful?
Nothing is ever forever
save the loneliness of our bodies
and the oneness of our souls.

Azurite

BLUE

It is, not just in color,
But blue in shape
Smoothed into the salty sand
Slipping through a maze
Of dark and light
Streaked with foam.

It is not just sand,
But a fine, strong voice within
Rising and retreating.
With each surging
Breath, it ends.

It is not just an end,
But the never-ending light
Shattered over the surface
Of the dark blue water.

It is not just over,
But over and over
Again,

It begins.

Section III: Love Poems for Strangers



Letter to a Friend Who Came from Nowhere

I know you must also know it is there between us
dark and rich as molé sauce
an ocean of love
so vibrant, so sensual,
so sustaining and intense,
it would be madness to ignore it.

I know you sense it, too,
so wild and rhythmic
it calls to us in the song
of the night birds unseen,
but do you not fear it as I do:

The pull of the undertows,
the trick currents and false lights,
the hunger of the schooling monsters below,
the razor coral beneath,
the stinging life clinging
to the innocent mats of weed?

And now that I know that we both know,
what am I to do with it?
I can neither leave nor go into it
I fear it so that I will not even go to the edge
of that place where the waves crash hot on the wet sand.

And you who came so far
to be here in the open
by this sea
are ready for a plunge,
and, at the same time, so afraid of my ambivalence
that you need to walk on ahead alone.

Please do not leave now. Stay with me.
For is it not enough, to simply enjoy
the warmth of this beach together?
(Just the touch of your voice
so calms the storm inside me.)

Please, just stay a little longer,
because it is the understanding stroke of your words,
that smile that falls so freely into laughter,
those eyes that pin me to my true self,
and your heart so magically open
that keep me from drowning in this long night.

I Heard You the First Time

That night when you sang,
you were transformed
as if lifted on the wild
wings of the wind's song
into the glare of the sky.

A face inside your face lit up.
The mouth was ageless.
I wanted so to taste those lips
that formed those dancing words,
and to fall through the holes of your bright eyes.

Somehow I knew that inner woman.
In my mind, I had already pressed my lips
to your lips, softly covering your mouth,
and drank in a dark, unheard harmony
from the bright fountain of your song.

That night when you sang, I was transformed
as if carried weightless by the wings of your music
into another world, one that made total sense in the moment
and yet changed with each turn of phrase and climb in pitch
where I could soar and slide with each ripple of your voice.

When we talked afterwards
it was as if we had already made love.
How long have I known you?
Where did you come from?
Why do I want you so deeply now?

I Need a Love Poem

- for Anita

It is late.

The soft monkey of my heart
would do tricks for you,
but you are surrounded
by beautiful men,
all who could love you.

You come here
with many different faces.
You try them on at random,
one by one,
each fits but none sticks.
There is something else there.

I look at you and wait.
You turn, and we look
through each other.
You put on the face
with the beautiful smile.
There is something else there.

We eat peanuts and drink more beer.
You speak of your plans in music therapy,
the demands of your study, and how
the business of your life has separated
you from the poetry you once lived.
It is all still here.

You are right about the music.
It is physical and heals from the outside
by worming its way in vibration by vibration,
until we are all connected together,
but you have forgotten the power of the muse.
It is all still there.

The words that shudder from within,
heal from inside to inside,
they take us to that place where we are all alone
and yet one. You have no choice.
(It is time to return to the soft monkey of your heart.)
It is all still here.

Shannon

When I told you
that I had friends
that are rocks, you pulled
a handful from your pocket.
There was one that was green as glass,

rounded and weathered
by the washings of water. It stood out
from those others you collected
during your walk around the shore.
“What if it is an emerald?” you offered.

A river ran through
your eyes as brown as the
Mississippi during the thaw.
The air bristled and popped
with electricity all around you.

You dove into beer after beer,
yet as deep as you sank,
you were more here
than anyone
I had ever met.

“We are alive. Aren’t we?”
It was so simple. The pain was
only there to wear
the green glass smooth.
I had to agree.

“Do you love yourself?”
you ventured. I hesitated, unsure,
fumbling for an understanding.
“The correct answer is yes,” you suggested.

As if no other answer were possible, you held me
in your arms. Like a tree holds the sun,
you swallowed me up into a hug
that was more complete, more intense,
more real than any I had ever known.

I could feel the wind scream
between us. We were like two
abandoned buildings in a ghost town,
falling in on each other,
stark and splintering.

Within this tight circle of our arms,
we opened to the dark ravages of gravity.
The wild wind inside us
polished the litter of our hearts
into gems that shone alone.

Awakening

I close my eyes
you are next to me
kissing my bare chest
You brush your fingers over
the skin your lips have just awakened
I realize what you have to teach me
will change my life cell by cell

Section IV: Fountain of Fire



Steam

Your love awaits me
as open and steamy
as a swirling Jacuzzi.

I pause here.
I sip our oneness
like a cup of warm tea.

It is in this gurgling place
that I spent too long before,
here that I almost drowned.

I return now to heal,
dry and naked,
unwrinkled and shaking

from the cold,
but where is the breath of my spirit
among these vapors of love?

The Touch Within

The touch of your skin lives within me.
Even this morning as I sit alone in the sun
the trembling of your lips is upon me.

The swarm of your kisses lives
within me breathing
the impossible air of my blood.

These ends and beginnings,
the love and the pain
of starting all over again.

As we make this new start,
I cradle a precious piece of your heart
that broke off like a chip of red china.

I blow upon this jewel,
this ruby of a coal
giving flame to the reluctant ember.

Can we follow this embrace, this entanglement
of our bodies opening in the dark,
with the quiet marching of our hearts?

Fountain of Fire

I reach
and reach again
yet your love alludes me
like a shadow
flees the flashlight.

I try
and try again
to separate my need,
to leave you pure
within the soft light
of your giving,

to breathe in
and breathe again
just a shimmer of your love
fresh and vibrant as the spring
like the half light of dawn.

I try
and try again
not to take in more
than is natural,
more than the flow of my lungs will allow.

Never before
have I felt like this.
My greedy need
like a dog begging
for the meat of your love.

I want you
more than life itself.
Is this right?
Where do I begin and you end?
Where is the I in the we?

I must ask you now
the simplest
of all questions.
Do you love me
in this moment? Is this real?

Are we strong enough
to stand alone together
in this luminance we share?
You fill your empty cup
from the burning fountain of my heart.

A Letter for the Fireplace

There is this
empty page here
that I must fill
with thoughts of you.

It calls for the truth
I am afraid to share with you,
that sweet kiss of ink that could
make you turn the page on me.

You always tell me
you are dangerous.
Indeed, I am now
full of fear

because of how I love you.
When we first met,
you told me that love
was wanting someone more than life.

I understand now
that love you had for the other,
because it is
the love I have for you.

I have always
told you everything,
perhaps too much.
I can be brutal in my honesty.

But now | feel
| must keep this from you:
*/love you more
than life itself.*

This letter now | set
on the dwindling embers,
because without you,
/would be dying, too.

Here Again

So I am here
cold and alone again
burned by the fine
ash of the fallen towers.

Trembling in the darkness
like the first star
on a windy night,
I wonder if I will ever love again



Mark Friedman's second book, *From Here to Here*, is an involuntary exploration of the polarity of love and loneliness. A fresh perspective on connection and solitude emerge in this twenty poem cycle.

