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Empties

Rochelle Nameroff

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Three Poems · *Rochelle Nameroff*

EMPTIES

Not the sadness of the slag-heaps
or forests lost to garbage—
Jobs lost to garbage
and the people inside them.
Now rains the tin cans

crushed perhaps through joy
to prove an all-over toughness,
and toilet tubes and sodden rubbers
tossed in fear a Father would see you—
though there were no more fathers

unless bar stools were a form of home.
Broken and bruised, the litter
of loneliness I used to think about
and feel sad and feel angry.
Not the sickness stuck inside me now.

I walk to the Turkey Hill Market,
head down to watch for dogshit and human shit
and broken glass left homeless for weeks.
It's the mindless carpet of my city
adrift in cigarettes, beer-spit and sneers.

The sneer is mine as I push past
the nudie racks and lottery tricks and scan
beyond the hilltop of cigarette cartons
to locate food. I'm the only one here
buying milk, which sits somewhere near

the hasty lettered “beagels and cheez”
behind the stunted growth of produce
labeled “plumbs” and “tomato’s”,
and for my special delectation
as if I believed anymore in irony

a proudly printed sign that lets me know
“All food prepared on the premise.”
Of what? I want to ask the “huh’s?”
who wait on me, but instead
stand breathing in my own stale secondhand

breath to avoid theirs. And snob! I want
a paper bag, and make them ask The Boss.
I should be ashamed of my disgust
but I’m lost in this stinkhouse of tragedy,
no longer charmed by jokes nor sweet

misery. I hurry home to my teevee
and watch the mirrors of decay
and think about nothing. “You can’t
step on the same piece of water twice”
writes one of my students to quote

his philosophy class, to impress me.
But I’ve really stepped into it this time
and want to escape. I want to go home
to the world I believe in
which is outside this world.

So
which landscape is the smaller then—
the one great planet we all say we live on
or the tiny space of wilderness
that once housed my heart?