

Spy vs. Park

by Darryl Price

Things looked way too normal to be normal. The cold, gliding black eyed swans never once straying far from each other's wake, the cute blue jeaned lovers everyone secretly watched carefully picking their trickling way over small odd rocks and flattened leaves together like they were walking through some kind of careless mine field, the familiar small engine plane routinely buzzing in the far-off distance to the imagined local runway stripes, while some watched and others didn't care, the ice cream screams. I was on some kind of high alert inside I tell you. No doubt about it. I tried my official best not to radiate my unfamiliar paranoia too far outside of my presumed business posture, all brown suit, yellow shirt and silk tie, expensive tasseled shoes only a buffoon would wear, but I could tell it wasn't working on this particular party scene for some unknown reason. The young couple, both wearing Buddy Holly style glasses, eating sandwiches and reading thickly bound books on their checkered picnic blanket glanced over at me with startled looks on their faces, not once but twice. That's strange, I thought. The pretty cookie-cutter moms in fashionable plaid shorts and loopy sandals walking in twos with their strollers side by side inched over I noticed ever so slowly to the other side of the path right in front of my brightly polished shoes. Even the nutty fidgety squirrels stayed on the other side of their scratchy trees, even though they couldn't possibly help themselves from peering around the curvy sides and cocking their nervous heads at me from time to time. C'mon, James, I said to myself you've done this easy a thing a dozen times before, stop with the nerves already, get the job done, then go home, have a drink, relax. But I knew when something didn't feel right on assignment and this felt wobbly from every kind of angle. There was just too much to the picture that seemed painted in, as if there was no room for any real if normal unexpected chaos to suddenly happen on the scene. And that I knew wasn't reality. Not by a long shot. The leather holster under my arm had started to feel like a giant mole

that had been exposed to too much sunlight recently and needed a glop of aloe rubbed neatly into it. I started to sweat. And this made me extremely uncomfortable. I fanned myself with the lightly folded back together newspaper I was pretending to scan for clues.

But I also did like the service man that I am continue to do my very best to show to all concerned how I certainly did belong on my park bench along with the rest of them. I'm getting way too old for this bit of nonsense, I secretly thought. Go on about your comfortable everyday business here, people. I can assure you that there is nothing at all interesting about me for you to see. Just your typical, daffy old last century sort of man out for his late afternoon stroll you see in the balmy park air like the rest of you, seeking some respite from the cruelties of the modern age. A tad of today's newspaper to go down with the much needed freshly buttered air. Ah, that's the good stuff there, isn't it now? Maybe a little sideways glance or two at the pretty girls dashing by on their pink roller skates. The appreciation of beauty never goes out of style or fashion. At least I hope not. But all too soon I'll have to get up and return to my stuffy old office job and leave the lot of you to it. Lots of work to do yet before the full day on tap is considered to be properly well and done. A working man like me has just got to let off a little built up steam out in the open rooms every now and then. Remembering what's important. That's all. Nothing even more remotely to it than that, you old busy bodies. Oh I'd played this favorite bit to a crowd like this a million times before. So why was I so nervous now? Where was he? Who was she? I didn't like to be stood up by a co-worker. It wasn't professional. It made everyone's job that much harder to do. And I had to pee badly. And that race horse wasn't even in the race this time around.

Just then out of nowhere I heard something solid hitting the back of my stiff metal bench like an instant sort of unexpected slap to a hung out to dry old tent tarp on an old fashioned laundry line. "Whap!" it went. Instinctively I put my hand inside my jacket and snapped my holster free. Then I heard a quick, happy voice saying,

"Sorry, mister, did our Frisbee hurt you? It was just an accident, I swear. I should have caught it, but it was just too high even for me. We weren't aiming at you at all, I swear!" But when I swiveled myself around to tell the poor little fellow it was all right, there was no real harm done, to my sad surprise there was no one else there to hear me, no swans, no lovers, no picnicking intellectuals, no moms with their newborn babies, and no chattering squirrels, just a little round blue Frisbee left stranded on the crushed green ground with a hastily scribbled note stuck on the inside of it that said: You have been relieved of duty. Effective immediately. Destroy this note. Leave Frisbee. And, oh yeah have a nice day.

Bonus poem:

The Pink Pandemic Sky Blues

by Darryl Price

"There are many dark places;but still there is much that is fair, and though in all lands love is now mingled with grief, it grows perhaps the greater."--J.R.R. Tolkien

But, I'm not yet done! We are so sorry,
the number you are trying to reach has
been disconnected. That is the problem,
isn't it? While the so-called Guardians
were busy arguing over sex and

money, the enemy crept up on us
like petty thieves in the foul-smelling night.
Civilization has been suspended
until further notice. Perhaps you'd like to

be the first to travel through a new state-

of-the-art wormhole--the very best way
to go completely bonkers before the
crazy world destroys itself again. Yeah,
physics! Does anyone care? I do, and
so do you, or you wouldn't be here with

me at this poem. There have always been
sinister forces out there waiting in
the cracks of doom for opportunity
to cause panic at large, wearing faces
indifferent to the suffering of

others. We are not like them. We're the ones
willing to fight them back into the holes
from which they came with everything we've got.
We are the balance, and we are the hope,
simply because we have always cared. And

we always will. Rome is just an empty
square full of pigeons without a crowd of
gregarious folks and their cameras.
Paris is just another river town
without its tons of romantic dreamers.

The flowers and trees are never fully,
merrily appreciated until
we come along and experience them,
commune with them, dance with them. But we have
not been the best shepherds, have we? And now

we are surrounded by our own poor choices. .
Death's staring us in the collective
face. We meet on the battlefields once more.

We will win. Death will win. There're no winners
in war. Heal the earth and help each other.

Bonus poem:

Only a Hand
by Darryl Price

Now is so important to say I love
you. To not choose hate or fear to rule us
but impossible hope, even with our
red eyes full of soft sorrow. I'm glad you're
here with me. I am always with you. That
is not just a nice little saying, it
is the absolute truth of my being.
It is my choice. My freedom cast with true
love and a small grin, but on purpose. This
is no time to pretend our souls are not

in any real mortal danger. The world
has become a criminal enterprise.
As one people it's time to sing a song
of endless courage together. For the
whole bluegreen planet. For all size beings
everywhere. From fizzy atoms and sparkling
stardust cities to major elephant
herds and graceful billowing whales, mountains
in deep meditation and colorful
coral reefs, to blowing birds and humming
bees. We make up everything and everything

makes up us. We belong together. And
now is no time to trust the people with
all the stupid guns aimed between the eyes
of every citizen. We can't allow
unnecessary violence to become
the only street playing dialogue that's
available to us. It isn't. Use
the most universal languages to
communicate, to find meaning again,

and to remember ourselves: there's all kinds
of cool, amazing music being made,
and gut wrenching laughter to be had, and
dance, dance, dance. You have the right to feel a
joyful happiness. Ironically, that
also means right now we must fight, for a
visible justice for all, with the one
precious thing we've always had, our lives with
each other. I love you. I want you to
know that no matter what happens, it's true.

Damned, Do and Don't (Ticket)
by Darryl Price

The world is full of killers. It's
not a lie. I wouldn't lie to
you. They open their mouths, shovel
that shit in. All my life feels like
I've been waiting. Sometimes I don't
know what for. Always believed in
a beacon. I've never wanted
to be forgiven. The world is

one killer after another.

What's love supposed to do in the
face of a wall made of killers?
Whatever it is, do it fast
because I feel I need those words
you said to me more than any
others right now. The world is full
of itself. That's no big surprise.
We were always floating to the
bottom of the rungs like divers

holding hands and looking out
for sharks. The world is full of dreams.
Suppose I'm not ready, happy
to be here without you, but
refuse to forget. You can do
that if you must. The world is full
of killing machines. The carnage
is just what you would expect. I
thought you trusted me enough to

get the one thing you had to prove,
so did I. Here it's too late and
you're on some other side of the
room. Our killers find a way to
go on to the next plate as if
the taste of blood in their mouths is
nothing but normal walking through
cold air. I still want you to know
I care if the trees have their green

messages sent, if the rain learns
how to shake off the poisons and
arrives feeling better than hope

has a right to, if the creatures
stop dying of indifference.
I'm not waiting around. Playing
this poem for you is only
waving from my window at you
as you fly by in a car. Turn

around or don't. It will all go
on to sadness for me unless
you hold on to your dancing self!
Killers know what they are doing
is making the wrong direction
suddenly appear on the map.
Wax stains. I'd like you to receive
this because of desperately
wanting you to hear that it's true.

It's a kill or be killed world, but
I didn't join them then, I'm not
going to start. That's all I can
give you. It's all I ever had
to make you smile and stay and not
fade away. You're going to have
an amazing journey, one step
at a time. Remember when you
used to say, that's what I want to

do, go live on a boat, travel
the world? The boat doesn't have to
be a boat, could be anything
you create, anything you think
of, anywhere you find yourself.
I only wanted to cheer you
on to that possibility
before the world implodes. Here's your

ticket. Ride the hell out of it.

Crossed Fingers

by Darryl Price

When I get there--wherever it is, this
hidden secret place that I've been going
to all my life--I hope it wasn't just
for a stupid cosmic joke. Gray Angels
slapping each other on their feathery
backs and grabbing their honey knees in fits
of holy laughter. When they tell you the
journey is the main thing that seems just as
unlikely to make you feel anything
like better as the rest. I mean if there

is no point except the point of motion
forward what are we doing with all this
awful pain in our hearts? Those aren't the words
I was hoping to speak to you but they
are the words that spoke to me. Maybe yours
can say it in a much different way
that will actually matter to a
special someone. I hope so. I don't want
you to be misunderstood. When I get
there I hope you're there too, but I'm betting

you probably won't be. More likely be
dining with Saints in sandals who are all
regaling you with wondrous tales of time
travel and adventure, all in hopes of
seeing you crack a small genuine smile
without meaning to, because, after all,

loneliness is the most universal
of universal languages. When I
do get there I hope to see great gobs of
free and wild butterflies again and the

joyfully trumpeting elephants parading
around, lots of people mingling
the sun-drenched streets together and to hear
many loud choruses of laughter and
good-hearted play, not the sound of one hand
clapping. You don't understand. When I get
there I want to be glad I made the hard
sad journey through the poem and over
the crying hills. I want to see the blue
ocean again as a friend returning.

