

poems for a sunny day...

... in 2006...what used to be the future...

by

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### The Saddest Thing I Ever Saw

I used to work as a house painter.

I had an old '72, powder blue, two door LTD  
with no side windows and a ripped, blue vinyl roof  
that I drove to work.

I lived in Austin and turned up South Congress every morning,  
to hit Riverside, and then Lamar, heading north, to the shop.

It was a hot, humid morning, already 80-something degrees, as I sat there  
at Oltorf, waiting for the light to change, the pink granite  
Capitol of Texas, high on a hill before me, at the end of the road.

I turned to my right and saw a young woman,  
waiting to cross the street before me.

She had thin, bleached blond hair  
she looked like she'd tried to curl,  
but the humidity had already killed it.

She wore cheap clothing, old jeans and a tight  
yellow shirt that stretched across her bulging belly,  
like she had a big round pumpkin under there,  
her large, sagging breasts,  
slowly melting around it from above.

She was not particularly attractive.

Her nose was oddly pointed and sharp,  
as she kept her head turned from me, always in profile.

Perhaps she sensed my stare.

She turned to me suddenly though, and  
I saw that her face was horribly deformed,  
that one side had been fairly normal and homely,  
but she was missing her other, right eye.

Her nose so sharp because there was only an open cavity  
where the rest should have been,  
her skin and cheek so shrunken and torn,  
that her mouth, on just that side,  
was pulled up into a permanent,  
smiling grimace of teeth and gum.

I looked away.

I didn't want to be rude.

I felt sorry for her.

What kind of accident had she been in? How did it happen?  
A car wreck? A fire?  
She crossed the street before me  
towards the bus stop on my left.  
I saw her child then, a little girl, whose hand she held,  
like a good mother, helping her across the street.  
And it was when they reached the other side,  
that her little girl turned towards me  
and I saw the same deformity in her small face,  
the hollowed out and empty,  
right eye socket,  
the pointed half nose,  
and that twisted, mirthless grin.  
They were a somber couple those two,  
as they sat on the bench and waited for the bus.  
My own light had changed, turning green,  
and it was time for me to go.  
I couldn't help but wonder:  
What kind of God  
would curse two people so?  
This was genetic.  
What kind of cruelties had the mother endured over her life?  
And who got her pregnant anyway?  
And why bleach your hair, when you're a freak?  
Could such small vanities,  
ever work at all?  
They say looks don't matter...  
Well, they used to at least.  
But that is a lie.  
The pretty are always one step ahead of the ugly,  
while both turn cruel, to their own degree.  
I've used my own nice smile for years,  
to get me by,  
as others have used theirs on me.  
Beware the smiling man, in fact, is what I say now.  
I drove to work then, for another hot day in the sun.  
And I say that was the saddest thing I ever saw,  
but that really isn't true.  
I've seen other things now, sad as well.  
That woman has stuck with me though  
for twenty five years.  
What hopes she must have had for that child.  
Surely, she wept at her birth.