I Am The City

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I Am The City

The artificial neon sun blazes on
casting eerie shadows
that dance across the railyard,
as a final star rises in the east.

Last remnants of late night dreams
drift towards Jim Beam hotels
with their faded curtains,
peeling wallpaper,
and bricked in dreams of yellowed yesterdays...

I sit alone,
staring out the blank picture window
as styrene, plastic, cellophaned blondes
hustle towards work--
to IBM Selectrics,
and broken false fingernails,
and the cheap high of liquid paper...

On north Magnolia Avenue
the plastic curler salesman and his wife
sit at their breakfast table
while newspapermen and television shows and cereal boxes
think for them...

And on the south side
neat pin-clean house rows
of government wheelchair drivers,
sit and collect dust
as knee salesmen appear at the door
and knock and knock
til knuckles crack
and bleed
and stain pure white doors...

In Memorial Hospital
the beautiful tan skin of a nineteen year-old cheerleader
just back from vacation in Florida
lies in heaps,
as doctors slice and slice
to cut away
mutated scorched skin cells,
before it spreads to her mind...

And the artificial neon sun blazes on.

I sit on the park bench,
alone,
and watch the passing bodies--
photograph faces that cry out
and then pass on into obscurity.
And the lone star sits perched--
at the top of the sky.

I am the city.
Lazy afternoon air numbs my hazy mind
as fingers fumble and grope
for something not there?

Quiet peaceful sleep stretches on--
and on,
so quiet after late nights...
Sleep's blissful serenity
washes away thoughts of urban renewal...
and slums...
and pollution...

Piercing needles of pneumatic headache pain
rape my mind
as clots form in my brain.
Eyes turn shades of crimson and gold and green,
but no one really seems to care.

My decrepit, creaking veins
bleed suburbanites,
flowing to blue plastic bird baths
and astroturf lawns,
aln neatly watered and fertilized,
and unopened croquet sets,
and sets of encyclopedias with blank pages...

I am the city.

I stand alone in my room
and watch through streaked panes
as the final cold polar star sets in the west,
through clouds of smoke--
ash gray black hued sky--
and the artificial neon sun blazes on...

Finally,
after streets are still
I wander along
and toy playfully
with my railroad,
and my fleet of fiberglass sailboats,
but the oil-stained dead seagulls and fish
keep getting in the way.

Still I wander peacefully along, proud--
I am the freight handler to the nation,
hog-butcher for the world,

And as I stand in the lonely opaque blindness of the streetlamp,
I watch the artificial neon sun set in the west,
and I hear the haunting melancholy whistle
of a train out of nowheres,
that I knew
I should have been on.

Joseph Heitman