

CHICAGO

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I have met you
standing against the edge of water, rolling out into
patterns and flatlands, the extremes of season,
the diamonds of your nights, your shoulders bent
with the burdens of your days:
a giant, a miniature,
bathing in billboards and lottery numbers,
in the magikist lips rippling their red neon in and out,
the stench of sewers, sweat of a blues club, the spill
of wave upon wave of loneliness, drunkenness,
the steam of tortillas and chiles thickening like fog
in mexican barrios,
a child's stare through a chainlink fence, silence
pressed against despair.

we have spoken together
in the steel-screaming panic of union station,
before the figure of a woman in buster brown shoes,
in the garbled unison of voices in old, stony churches,
dissonant symphony concerts and department store bells,
within the desolate walkways of brick buildings,
the great lake slapping itself to massive concrete walls,
in the soleness of night, the hiss of traffic.
among black kids singing crazy in the rear seats of junked buses,
in the fusions and boundaries of world languages,
the fast pitch of a baseball,
before expressions of rage and love spraypainted on the girders of bridges.

you are eyes of questions and answers
the corner street explodes open in the sound of scattering pigeons
and beneath a rusted viaduct, the bareblack, bony silence
of winter trees beside a factory,
wastelands of abandoned trainyards, the garbaged geometries
of grass beside your highways,
the countless wounds of progress devoured by shadows.

I have cursed
your incisions of race against race, wealth against poverty,
your violent abuses of architecture:
tenements stacked up as synonymous insults to the poor,
street after street of bungalows,
their token trees and planterboxes dying in mediocrity and redundancy,
your lies of style, speed, acquisition.

we walked
through parking lots, through cementaries, hotel lobbies,
museum corridors, the promenades of parks, the worn floors of
neighborhood cafes, along the bannisters of staircases,
around the quadrants, the ashlar facings of university rooms,
their interiors of marble, wrought iron, deep mahogany,
over miles of the sculpted ice of sidewalks in december
into the labyrinths of libraries,
past your endless blur of faces
your face which becomes familiar and disappears.

you are history,
rewritten and hidden, public and private, yours and mine,
laboring within the realm of madness
stepping forward into reality and hope
from a nest of forest into an expanse of names,
the tragedy and miracle in the everyday,
intoxicating your people in promises, forgetfulness and bitter kisses,
whistling in the wind and percolating down through the sands
of your shores,
holding in each fist the daily excavations of fact
the chiseled monuments to war
the subtle smile of possibility playing in the streets,
your cracked wall, dried fountain,
the melancholy sunlight filtered by smog,
the moon hidden in a skyscraper,
you, Chicago,
growing and dying in the veins of time.

Juanita Huebner grew up
in Chicago, which she
regularly visits. She now
lives in Astoria. She is
a poet, artist and political
activist, and also works
for Recycling. "Garbage
and art are my life these
days," she says.

