

Art Deco

I am dark glass and bright metal.

**Born in the middle of the American Century
Into a family which came at its beginning
An immigrant saga of sweat shops, open-air
Markets and movie houses in a city where milk
Came to your door in a horse-drawn wagon.**

**Each fall my grandfathers built little houses
To protect their precious fig trees from
Winter's killing frost. Unknowingly they
Sought to also keep alive memories from
The old country...and memories of their youth.**

**In those days the "yellow water man" yelled
Up and down the narrow grid of streets; the knife
Sharpener came to your door and the banana man
Parked his wagon at the corner, leaving behind
Manure my granddad took to his garden.**

**We road our bikes on those narrow streets
Over cobble stones, between parked cars
And the moving trolleys, down to the waterfront
Or to the parks – our little Moore Street Gang
Gave a certain gravitas to our wanderings.**

**We played baseball and football on concrete
Because that was all we had. Junk picking
Supplied nickles for pinball and for the baseball
Cards we pitched like pennies on the sidewalks.
Cigarette butts came from the gutter.**

**All I knew then was a bustling city life where
Fish swam in a tank until you bought them and
Chikens lived in stacked cages, amid blood and
Sawdust, until they were purchased whereupon,
Neck-broken, they were taken home to the pot.**

**There were only ethnic neighborhoods back then.
In ours buxom Italian matrons in calico dresses
Bargained with spectacled Jewish merchant men
While kids played in the street until Dad got home
And calls to supper reverberated down the allyways.**

**Like most Americans of that era we progressed:
From the red brick row house with white shutters
To the suburban split-level with “rec room” and
Spacious yard; from the old Packard to a shiny,
Black 98 olds with leather seats and too much power.**

**In suburbia I joined the Boy's Club, won tin trophies,
Became a high school football star, an all-American,
A-1 student athlete, and won a scholarship to Yale.
It was 1965 and I was riding an American Dream -
High as a kite on life, ready for a surely sunny future.**

**Bewildered at Yale I contemplated suicide while
Mastering which fork to use and how to write
Cogent bullshit for a grade. One summer I traveled
And worked in Europe where I learned to speak
French and tried (unsuccessfully) to lose my virginity.**

**At Yale I rubbed elbows with the rich, the famous and
Soon to be famous...even with a future president.
I learned that there is a ruling class in the US of A
Which us “scholarship kids” were being trained to serve
But never to enter. I didn't much like the idea.**

**It was the 60's so I tried pot, liked it, joined a
Commune and grew long hair. War protests followed.
We formed “affinity groups”, got non-violence training and
Took our show to DC. We wanted to squash the state but
Ended up only getting arrested. The state endured.**

In jail we sung protest songs and joked with our black jailers while waiting for bail to come. Then we went to Woodstock. The song said “go to the country” and so we did, called the old farm “Clarity” and planted a garden. Acid, group sex and collective insanity soon followed.

That sort of thing could not last long and it didn't; Back-east country was looking too much like back-east City. “The West is the best” the song said. I pulled-up Stakes, riding my thumb and a dream to a new life, from Clarity Farm to a cabin in the canyon, above the river.

**So here I am
At the end of a century
Half a century old.
Dark glass,
Bright metal.
I am like Art Deco
And I still hold hope;
Waiting for another
“Rebirth of wonder.”**

**Etna, CA
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