

# ***Incidental***

## ***Music***

(Selected Poems)

by Sean Rowe

*for*

Her

*Virgin deershooter wild thing* the gods  
call her for her name  
Eros comes nowhere near her

*-Sappho, fragment 44Aa*

# ***Prologue***

## **Randall at Rest**

Here it is,  
what we've both  
waited for.  
You're not here  
to see it, but I am,  
(shivering, I'd like to add)  
outside this Quaker  
graveyard in the rain,  
wondering,  
(not the first or last)  
what were you thinking  
when you "seemed  
to lunge"?

No matter, I suppose.  
No matter, too, this anticlimax  
lack-of epitaph; we know  
who gets the last word,  
always, at the end.  
It comes to this  
in graveyard wind:  
You sang for us,  
I'll sing for you today.  
Unlike your own,  
my voice won't travel far.  
I'll get back in my car  
and fade away.

Dusted with acorns,  
ambiguous with rain,  
in earshot of the interstate  
and Chick-fil-A,  
your grave has told me  
all that graves can say  
(including, as for singing,  
please refrain).

**I.**

***Work***

## **American Farewell**

We were lovers in our youth.  
In peach fields and boxcars,  
on mountain tops,  
you fell asleep with me wrapped in your arms.

The speechless night, the spangled sea  
poured through our dreams  
before you turned your back.

It was love at first sight, I will remind you.  
From Spanish crow's nests down to me,  
how else could it have been?  
You with your Appalachians,  
your Yazoo and your roads...

I loved you, weeping,  
while the autumn came and I grew old.  
Nation of vanities and violence,  
enchantress, oracular,  
you have broken my heart forever.

I love you still.

Stay awhile.  
Don't go.

## **Where it Ended**

Down 70  
the dead are waiting  
in the wings.

Johnston's stallion  
whinnies in the mist.  
Sherman rises  
from a rocking chair.

They are here  
where no one any longer comes,  
or should.

Arbutus and birdsong,  
foxfire and hyacinth;  
a place for picnics  
with ghosts.

By twilight I take notes,  
a slave of sorts,  
like all of us born here.

“Beloved,” she wrote,  
“your troops say you  
have become a god.  
Come back to me  
mortal.”

The candle flickers on the table.  
The quill is waiting,  
here where the storm line broke:  
the black end of the red hour.

Johnston, trembling, picks it up  
and signs our name.

*-Bennett Place, October 2003*

## **At Hartsfield International**

For my birthday I flew in by private jet  
like some pampered rock-and-roller,  
loping through time zones,  
touching down in Greenland to refuel.

(I try to be just folks, one of the guys,  
but where I live to here, this place,  
there are no scheduled flights,  
no regular round trips.

My time was short at any rate;  
no Second Coming this, more like an incognito  
weekend in a foe's domain, a slumming glimpse,  
to watch a third millennium set in.)

Outside El Paso, turning east,  
I made the aircraft buck and jerk,  
and flew in low to marvel  
at my Father's handiwork:

a herd of pronghorn  
running over stone,  
possessed of moonlit motion  
for no reason but their own

and came at length  
to this newest Mammon-capital,  
a place devoid of center, come of late  
to occupy the Southern center stage.

A few blocks north of a manger scene  
I stopped in at a tavern, drank a beer.  
They were carpenters, ironically,  
who took exception to my longish hair.

I turned the other cheek  
while one bear-hugged me and another broke my  
ribs,

and then with steel-toed boots in barroom pirouette  
kicked out three of my teeth, declaring that was  
that.

Coming to, I crawled out to my car  
and when I could, drove north to where  
the city lights could not outshine  
the heavens' only stationary star.

She came in motel darkness then, a universal girl,  
and dropped her eyes instead of meet my gaze,  
and in the end explained I could not kiss her lips  
but said her feet, unbuckled from her pumps,  
would not be quite against the rules;  
and at the sink showed off her newest piercings  
while I watched and washed her feet and laughed  
aloud  
to see such things had come back into style,  
feeling my own scar-tissue itch in feet and hands.

When she had gone I watched  
behind thick drapes:  
The parking lot, the minivan,  
the baby at her breast...

I slept at last, too tired to die for anyone;  
warm, well fed and howlingly alone;  
and felt the age begin to turn  
in each blood cell and every bone;

But in the morning,  
wrapped inside of steel,  
I rose again, miraculous; I rose until  
the real became unreal:

a glass of wine, a wafer snack,  
the runway falling with the city lights;  
the world not out of chances  
that I might be back.

## **Wedding Song**

Now is the speechless night  
Hedgehog and bat, their time  
Whatever "I" survives this hour  
Ruminates on loves

Gray moon tell me  
What went wrong  
I loved her most accordingly  
Her eyes will never speak to me again

Bat takes wing from an eave  
Hedgehog muddles tilth  
The "I" that survives this hour  
Splinters in moonlight, free

In a season of weddings  
Wisdom comes on  
I find my joy in others' joy  
In Sarah and John

You will be like the hosta, the hibiscus  
the Florida palmetto  
A green flag flying  
Through storm after storm

The age is filled with reason now  
And marriage is the sweetest sleep  
That reason knows

## **Near the Euphrates**

Across the river  
In the hills  
There's smoke  
And flashing light  
I'm running fast for cover  
From a whistling on the right  
It's coming at us fast and hard  
This might be it for me  
And now I feel a sudden thud  
And now I cannot see  
And now the pain is coming on  
And now there's something wrong  
And now my heart is winding up  
It's short and lonely song  
O tell me what the desert says  
And what the stars might say  
To fools like me who left their homes  
To die so far away?

**II.**

***Love***

**drive me I'm a car**

recall the night you stole me  
from a lot near Omaha  
the way we crossed Nebraska  
hot wired, laughing at the law  
you took me up past 90  
till the prairie turned to stars  
drunk on wind my pistons whispered  
drive me I'm a car

under my hood it gets complex  
complexer than you care to know  
my nuts and bolts add up to this:  
I love it when you bid me Go  
with you I'm wreckage once removed  
I always want to go too far  
you keep a gas can in the trunk  
drive me I'm a car

start me in the dead of night  
and race me to the riverside  
past the junkyard and the graveyard  
ghosts that we once ran beside  
my heart's steel that turns to fire  
in this respect we're on a par  
you make me scream through every curve  
oh baby drive me I'm your car

## **Pascua Florida**

I was a hunter  
still through the winter  
no bang  
no blood on snow

I was a fisher  
Indigo drifting  
re-baiting empty hooks  
in storms

Now the spring  
the feast of flowers  
I coil my lines  
put down my gun

And love

Father, thanks and laughter  
I never doubted  
only a thousand times

## **Airy Metaphor**

I met her  
as the wind  
meets sail:  
softly first,  
at false dawn,  
fluttering her hems;  
then slowly,  
with her say-so;  
turning to jibe,  
I filled her.

I made the mast creak,  
made it ache remembering  
old storms;  
she loved me  
and the sun  
bloomed from the sea;  
her canvas swelled;  
billowed and bellied;  
our ship  
began to plunge.

None of it could be  
without this pairing:  
Wind: what cannot  
do its work free of  
the other, holding fast,  
as firm as land,  
yet moving;  
Sail: what can't  
fulfill itself  
without the one thing  
worthy to fill it.

## **Drowning Off Bimini**

Where is my woman now?  
I want her to be warm.  
I wove her a blanket once  
from stars and storm.

I cannot feel my hands.  
Our time is going by.  
I'm far too young for old  
and too far out to die.

(But all that's just a lie;  
I don't do what I say;  
I never weave a thing  
when yarns get in my way.)

*Dark of the moon, lay on--  
I'll fight you toe to toe!  
My lady blows me good;  
You don't know what I know;  
She fills me and my sails;  
(I'll fight you tooth and nail!)  
When I turn west and run,  
she sucks me toward the sun.*

What is that dark thing there?  
He's half a man like me.  
But where is my other half?  
(She's lovely as a tree.)

Down in this moonlit well  
there's no one here but me.

(I'll feed it to you fast,  
before the morning bells,  
before your acts of faith:  
I myself am Hell.)

Alive in my native land  
I only know one thing:  
I have a friend named She  
(I'm naked as the sea).

O dark thing in my way,  
she's better than a Me;  
she scores me to the quick;  
(let's get a gram or three;  
let's blot out all the gone;  
her She makes two a One.)

*Dance the dinkle-donk!*  
*(The hippos all are sunk!)*  
*Aphrodite claps her hands*  
*when we go bump!*  
*I like the way she sways.*  
*(She sways me like a tree.)*  
*When she walks down the street*  
*it blows me, like, away.*

I stayed up half the night  
to hear what dawn would say.  
O Night, fast fly me home  
past dark things in my way.

(I think I'm going west,  
the way we always did.  
I look up at the moon:  
My face and hers are hid.)

Love, fast fly me home,  
the way that sparrows fly;  
my hands are growing cold.  
I'm young but growing old,  
yet far too young to die.

## **Fair Maiden of Savannah**

Sitting by the river  
In the ruby light of dawn  
I'm right here and there's the bridge  
Which side are you on?  
Fair maiden of Savannah  
More restless than the sea  
You dabble with the boys of bang  
And turn your back on me

I sailed here centuries ago  
And stumbled through the town  
But you were hunting in the north  
For flowers for your crown  
Asleep outside your garden wall  
I saw my heart's desire:  
Your rainbow-colored amber eyes  
Your hair like woven fire

Fair maiden of Savannah  
So lonely and free  
You fiddle with the lads of blab  
And turn your back on me

I brought you gifts from other ports  
To take the place of love  
A cloak of midnight velvet  
Sewn from the stars above  
An absinthe spoon from Malabar  
Gold from a purple stream  
A monkey from the Congo  
That would bang a tambourine  
A bird with eyes of indigo  
A solitary bird  
To perch upon your crown of thorns  
And speak a single word

Fair maiden of Savannah  
So lonely and free  
You dabble with the boys of bang  
And turn your back on me

Your father was a giant  
With a voice like thunderstorms  
Who shrugged his drunken shoulders  
On the morning you were born  
Your mother owned a crystal ball  
But lived inside a cage  
A hurricane was what you got  
The day you came of age

Fair maiden of Savannah  
So lonely and free  
You fiddle with the lads of blab  
And turn your back on me

Sitting by the river  
In the silver light of dawn  
There's the bridge and I'm right here  
Which side are you on?  
Fair maiden of Savannah  
More restless than the sea  
You turn in circles on the sand  
But never turn to me