

lead with that hand dizzying me into blind spots
I would never wholly return from

frequently I lose my sense of direction
and have to play tourist to find my way home

I have lost the moment the hour the day
and once in another tongue the will to live

I lost you of course but that was written

after dreaming I lose my place in the waking world
everywhere I look strangers in a strange land

I am always startled to find someone knows my name



Tim Collins

JEREMIAD*

Night-time and the city streets are a test pattern nothingness, endlessly darkness dribbles away, the city becomes a bare refrigerator, then dawn will crack like an egg, the flashing neon lights grow weak from the undertow of morning light leaking through the sky's blind, darkness holds stubborn hope, but daylight intimidates, gesticulates its persistence. Day break, always a fresh start with

the hum of morning, the heat cracking all manner of things, with the moon gone, jettisoned over the curtain of blue, there is an innocence to sunrise just as day is unscrabbled, then the ghostly early morning trill of traffic, the city will saturate with activity, talking its own linguistic code, a code I am familiar with. My whole body feels like a tongue, the sound of a car door slamming ricochets through the

bones of the city, cities gather objects, I am a gathered object, my life is slowly winding down like a kid's toy, I walk, looking for breakfast and a jar into the

day, a Kambrook toaster and electric kettle speak to me from a shop window, I am used to such throw away talk; I walk, my heels hitting the footpath, jarring my body, jarring my body into the day. A menswear shop, full of forlorn

dummies, dressed in clothes they'd never wear if they were alive, the dummies in unison give me a cold malevolent stare. Clouds begin closing in the morning, a cat cramps itself into a rubbish bin, it is black, lucky or unlucky, it turns its head and shows me identification, its eyes, all eyes are different. I stop, the French Restaurant, a name list of courses sing at me, I slap the cat sideways, plunge my

hand into the black ectoplasmic bin hole, what had the cat found, I dig about, what had the cat found? Morning was now covered with a white sheet, fuzzy edged, off in the distance the sky a bruised wrung face, a storm today, these clouds will wake from their angry sleep late this afternoon, I dig around in the bin, I keep pulling out paper, a cab wheels by bleeding smoke badly, I find a firm

object in the bin, straightening I gaze at my breakfast, a take-away hamburger, almost complete, shadows played about me, the sun skirting through the flossy cover, I eat, a cyclist strobed by asphyxiating herself on the city air, healthy fitness at any cost, I chew, long chews, the city filling with people, morning rush time soon. I'd be working soon, watching dirty footpaths for twirling coins,

even begging, never stealing, well, not today, I'd had a good start with breakfast, it was fresh, last night's, again I plunged my arm into the bin darkness, I had to find lunch. Suddenly I glimpsed a young boy lying on the road; he'd been hit while walking the zebra crossing, someone said he was dead, nobody deserves to die, death is a terrible thing to whitewash, I thought about his parents, about my

own, thought about him, I kept walking, they'd carry him away and it wouldn't matter, the waves of morning crashed on, I kept moving, looking, watching, waiting, I peered into the hot bread shop, the owner knew me by regularity and he never, never offered me a scrap, yet leftover bread was shovelled into a truck, taken away for pigs, lucky pigs, I stood and watched him wipe the pale green

glass counter tops, he motioned with his arm for me to move on, I jerked my head in answer and in doing so saw the fans hanging limply from the ceiling, they sliced the atmosphere, but it was still the same air, stale smelling, past the alley-way, a bloke loading cartons onto a truck, the alley was a museum of cartons, I looked down, on the footpath scribbled in chalk, the next casket

number to be drawn, free advertising on the footpath, I flicked cigarette ash at the crude artwork, the ash fell, sat and then zipped away, drawn by the hungry wind, the wind was picking up. Stationed in the entrance of the fruit shop, a young boy playing *Space Invaders*, beside him another played pinball, lighting lights in the machine, talking a language with it, his thoughts bouncing

about under the glass cover. In the shop corner, a small desk sized roulette wheel, an old piece of cardboard flapped on its side, 'Display Only'. Covered in cream flowing robes, a splash of burgundy, and garlanded with small bells, an Indian woman floated past me without even a glance, she was like a prayer flag fluttering in the breeze as she moved on up the footpath. Clouds thickening, I hoped it

wouldn't rain, everything became so slippery, up ahead a fat lady was walking a poodle, a look of angst in her features, the dog not wanting to move, the woman flung her foot sideways, motivating the dog to keep her pace, her eyes flashed catatonia, all eyes are different, the little animal succumbed for the time being, the woman passed me, her brown jumper smelt of sweat. I sent my

focus back to the ground, money, food, on a good day I could find ten dollars, people were funny with money. Arriving at the corner, the petrol station was busy, and always that whirring sound coming from the petrol station, I could never make out where it came from. On the telegraph pole was impaled a sign noting cheap petrol, I was hungry again, flags spun, fluttered and jostled on a line

above the station, the line of flags like teeth, thoughts jelled in my head, a motorbike whizzed by, a bus was fleeing down the road, back to the depot, the numbers on its forehead turning to reveal a blank space, cracks in the concrete, but no money. I'm not a computer, but I go on looking, watching, I sit on the bus seat, sit there, there wasn't much else to do; sitting is an interruption, an irregularity. Sirens cut the

air, police or ambulance tearing down a nearby street, the song of those sirens hung in the air, I didn't hum with them but listened to the tone, the sharp beat, sirens have a metrical beat, a terrifying shimmering ability, the echo of the sirens like chanting, the air wept, I stood, walked on, I was like a windswept flick of ash, going anywhere, everywhere, I walked the street, raining. I inhaled, lit another cigarette, how many

left, didn't bother counting, I kept the match, twirled it between my fingers, I drew the smoke in heavily, watched smoke flower away, I was just a cinder, the streets were untidy, life was untidy, been out of work now nineteen months, it seemed

like years, I wished my mother was alive, even dad, you really think, when you think about family, I grieve for my mum, for my dad. I must visit their graves,

it was only bus fare. I needed a passport from my hassles, life is ruin when you can't afford an apple, I am reminded of my past, as a young child I was happy, now I'm confused, somehow night-time gives more meaning to things whereas day seems to disseminate and scatter meaning, like sand. The day gives back nothing but night seems to contain so much. I suspect I will die in these streets,

but how was I to leave and re-enter the stream of acceptance, an example of why I feel like this, I have not made a phone call in the last nineteen months, a simple thing, I receive no mail, I'm anonymous, I'm informed by what happens on the street, I have a surplus of nothing, waste nothing, own no belongings, a blanket, one set of clothes, I call them a set of clothes, my clothes belong to

me, I'm still walking, I'm nearing the park, in the park there are deals, plots, meetings, it happens here, at the park, the park looked great last Christmas, the lights, the people, the activity, the colour, I was not working last Christmas, this Christmas maybe I'll just enjoy the festivities. The delay of time each day till night comes round is frustrating, I was at the park entrance, the park was an

exhibition itself, things happened here, throughout the terrains of the park there were people, other people who wandered the streets, many were in groups, I was not a member, I had my own devices, to me, friendship had become a commodity on the street, there was little hostility on the street, most were equal, I wasn't paranoid, I hadn't found any money yet, I'd have to go through bins,

options, there were very few options, and, one enemy, oneself, I guess, I should have been happy not being in the cheque-book society, where I'm at there are no illusions, simply, you have to be able to sustain, I don't have holidays, I must look serene walking the streets, but women just pass me, most without a sideways look. There is a whole sub-scene in the park, the

butcher comes down on Tuesdays, he meets a young Asian office worker, why on Tuesdays, who knows, I'm not part of this scene, well, not yet, maybe it's a progression, men outnumber woman five to one here, says a lot about men, doesn't it? Entering, I see the butcher walking from one cubicle to another, it must be Tuesday. In here people change personality, things occur.

I take the middle cubicle, close the door, it locks, the council maintenance is exceptionally good, I cover the bowl, seat myself, doing what needs to be done, then I'm gone. It is hard to be busy on the street, I have become self-obsessed. There is a lot of narcissism on the streets; there are no moral comas on the street, you do what you have to do, although, for me that doing is within reason, for the

time being, you lose the sense of time on the street and end up with a caveman attitude, living by light dark conditions, and what is crucial on the street, survival, the street is life, how do I abandon this lifestyle, jump out in front of a truck, life is cruel here. I leave the park, I feel sick, look for the nearest drain grate, I walk to the gutter edge, I lie head over the gutter and empty my insides, I must be coming

down with something, I had cramps last night, I again vomit. There are certain ethics on the streets. Certain forms of etiquette, well at least I have these standards. It is getting cool, more rain, I walk on towards the University, light a cigarette, toy with the inside of my left pants pocket, as I walk it appears to me that the city is a dance floor with everyone dancing a different tune. I feel unclean; it is a struggle,

and I've been here only nineteen months, I meet no one, talk to no one, just walk, I worship nothing, I'm getting hungry, I have not been looking for money but walking and thinking, I must look for the money, I need more cigarettes, need coffee, I crave. A young office worker passes me, he looks resplendent in his suit, he frowns at me, he was one of my critics, there are many, I'm at the university,

I walk through the entrance gates, at the campus bus shelter a middle aged man scrapes dog shit from his shoe, scrapes it on the wooden struts of the bus seat. On the street that sort of thing would not be even considered, we value our home and its furniture, at least that's how I see it, as I walk I stretch my limbs, I am becoming tired, I cherish the university, universities

tolerate all types of people, knowledge, but I don't laugh often, while I walk I think about dad dying, I sat beside mum that day, for many hours, then mum died of a heart attack the next month. I lost my job and that was nineteen months ago. I think, perhaps, there was a degree of emotional stress in my circumstances becoming the way they are. Now I'm part of another culture, part of the street

culture, I wander, I wonder, I'm alone. Food. I am hungry, I hoped I wouldn't vomit again, yet I felt better than before. The wind has picked up quite a bit, dead leaves, maybe from the park, scattered ahead of me, I walk, there are weeds in the

cracks in the concrete, no money, I keep walking, I notice caked mud on the edge of the concrete, I think about the bloke at the bus shelter, the dirt had been washed

away or blown away from the grass at the edge of the concrete, the grass looked weak, not properly secured. I decided to head back towards the park, to go to the toilet, I feel the need to urinate. At the park I stand watching a mother bird feeding her young in a blossoming shrub, that bird and her young will probably live longer than me, I was unhappy right at this moment. I was nearing the toilets, I did not

feel well, I noticed a broken branch and a log near the toilet block, where had they come from, I thought, I entered, all the cubicles appeared taken, I stand at the urinal, cigarette butts in the pan jammed up the drain so that the urine rose up the stainless steel sides, the cigarettes were not mine, I finished, I turned to leave, on the floor was something scrunched up, a note, money, I stood motionless, deciding, it had

obviously fallen there, what was I to do, I leaned, a hundred, I closed my eyes, opened my eyes, then bending further to the floor I grabbed at the money, I straightened, looked around, no one, it was quiet, I clutched the note and walked, quickly walked from the park, sat on a nearby bus seat, I sat there clutching the note, I opened my hand, this much money, the last time I had a note was nineteen months ago when

I had a job, I rested my head back on my neck, closed my eyes and thought about what I'd do with so much money, looked at my open hand, coffee, buy a good cup of coffee, a loaf of bread, I sat there, what time was it, one o'clock, I stood, dusted myself, I suppose in pride, I was going on a journey, I had just decided, I was going to have my coffee later and buy my bread later too, I was going on a journey, I was, I was going to visit Mum and Dad's graves right now, and read the poem I wrote for them.

* Jeremiad — a doleful complaint or lamentation; a list of woes.

Oxford Dictionary

