

The Burning City Smoking

Kevin Devine

40 million refugees with no place on this earth to call their home
One for every aimless graduate with nothing else to show for it but loans
And those of us who make a mark using someone else's blood
Our western stain won't wash away, won't vanish in the flood
It sets deeper with each hurricane and tidal wave and war:
We want everything we see and once it's gone we just want more.

Atlas had those shoulders, we've got Ambien and Jameson's and low
To bind us in a bubble, keep the newsprint nightmare distant and remote
But when we wake in guillotines and pitch our screaming fits
When the governor strikes up the band and gags our parted lips
When the worst case shows up dressed and dazzling ready for the ball,
Boy, that bubble's bound to burst and what a tragic way to fall
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The tabloids tell us, 'hate the rat who strikes those subways closed and puts you out.
Forget those 50 hour tunnel weeks inhaling steel dust poison through his mouth.'
Well, if he don't deserve a pension that makes his family feel secure
If we're now so disconnected it's our reflections we ignore
And if our constant choice is skimming past the writing on the wall
Then I'm sad to say we're lost and I'm embarrassed for us all.

Most days I can't put to rest the burning city smoking in my mind
So I play pretend the principals are nothing more than actors running lines
And I stumble through a movie set where torture victims laugh
At abandoned journalist who juggled knives and dagger glass
While they entertain a mob of heads of State and CEOs
I stagger past anarchist extras through saloon doors painted gold

I turn and I see Uncle Sam waltz out of wardrobe ready for the shoot
So I walk right up and talk to him. I tell him that I'm scared and I'm confused.
While they test the cameras out and get the lighting right
While catering fills coffee cups and carves up apple pie
And while the stylists trim his beard and straighten his lapels

I ask his empire eyes what made him drive us straight to hell
As my daydream ends he stands ashamed, a shocked and shattered
shell
But there's never any answer for my starving tongue to tell
The director's shouting 'action!' I'm thrown off set. It's just
as well.