

streetwise in America

By Jerold London

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“Hope” is the thing with feathers
That perches in the soul
And sings the tune without the words
And never stops at all....

I’ve heard it in the chilliest land
And on the strangest Sea
Yet never in Extremity,
It asked a crumb of me.

– Emily Dickinson

Today, hope is sustained above all by the prospect of meeting new people.

– Theodore Zeldin, *An Intimate History of Humanity*

streetwise in America

Two weeks later (in an autumn of the 2020's). Upstage center is a window. At the rise a body is seen jumping out of it, away from the audience.

JOE (offstage)

Rattler?

RATTLER (offstage)

Joe? Is that you?

JOE (offstage)

I found her.

RATTLER (offstage)

O my God.

You found her?

JOE (offstage)

I followed the followers.

RATTLER (offstage)

The FBI?

JOE (offstage)

And he jumped.

RATTLER (offstage)

Who jumped? Griff?

JOE (offstage)

Base jumping off a hotel they're demolishing.

Without wings or a parachute.

For looking at some pictures of pre-teen girls, swimming naked on a beach

RATTLER (offstage)

What?

He jumped? And killed himself?

For that?

JOE (offstage)

It's the way he wanted to go out. Flying.

He loved flying, he told her. Where you're all alone. In the clear.

Nothing around you to disturb the peace and quiet of your last thoughts.

RATTLER (offstage)

Until you hit rock bottom.

JOE (offstage)

Right.

RATTLER (offstage)

How's Dee?

JOE (offstage)

They're releasing her this morning. And we'll be home.

Down another homeless street in another homeless city. Lying on a sidewalk at the far side of the street, and into the gutter, are two discarded couches, which someone has made into a home/hiding place. JOE enters, looks around, and respectfully goes over to the couches.

JOE

Molly? Molly?
Are you in there?

Lengthy pause.

MOLLY DEE

[from inside the couches] Go away.

JOE

Dee! It's me. Joe!
Joe Ya-Know!

MOLLY DEE

[from inside the couches] Joe?

JOE

Yes. Yes.
Joe Ya-Know, to bring you back home!

MOLLY DEE crawls out and stands. She is frightfully thin. JOE embraces her.

MOLLY DEE

[exhausted and on the verge of tears] Joe ... how in the world?

JOE

I followed the followers.

MOLLY DEE

And you know what happened? To Griff?

JOE

I know. And you look
I'm getting you to a hospital.

**Lights fade. On a screen there are played
flashbacks –**

FLASHBACK:

**MOLLY DEE takes a piece of paper out
of a pocket, tears it into several smaller
pieces, and puts them on her tongue.
Then, making a face, she moves her
tongue, back and forth, in and out of her
mouth a few times, wiggling the pieces of
paper on it.**

MOLLY DEE

What am I?

FLASHBACK:

MOLLY DEE

'Tis strange, Valentine, How I don't know a real name for you.
I do hope I see you again. With your shirt on, or with your shirt off.
Either way. It doesn't matter to me.
There's something I forgot to ask you.
Before we waved Goodbye, and you signaled to me to call.
Have you ever slept in the library? Have I ever seen you before?
In Millet? In Van Gogh?
Will I ever see you again?

FLASHBACK:

MOLLY DEE

I've lost my best friend.
In all the world.
My deepest breath. My sense of circulation.
My sunny clouds, drifting. My thumbs.
My understanding eyes. My meridian of time.
My best piece of hope.
With a string attached to it. Flying down city streets.
A perfect wind blowing.
With no friend to come help mend a broken heart with me.
And do you know what that makes me?
It makes me love all the more what little is left.

FLASHBACK:

MOLLY DEE

I know Jesus, but these friends of mine are as good as any.
There've been three pillars in my life, Sister:
God, whom I call Good, who is Love.
Satan, whom I call Evil, who preaches hatred in my ear when I'm not careful.
And passion, whom I called happiness,
which I've lost along the way. Getting so hungry.
The rest of life is simply a chaos that luck and tragedy swing around.
It all depends upon how you choose to look at it.

FLASHBACK:

MOLLY DEE

Look what I got. [*excitedly*] Here. Look:
These are sponges. With sparkles.
With sparkles! Glittery sparkles! Glitter's my favorite color.
And just look at this: All the plates and glasses I'll ever need here.
And coffee cups. This one says "Home" on it.
And pots and pans. Sheets. Wrapped. And blankets. And pillows.
And a toaster! Pretty awesome. Right?
And a kiss. I have everything in my mind, just how things are going to look.

FLASHBACK:

MOLLY DEE

Welcome to *my* Happy Place....
You know, Griff, number one:
Everything changes.
Nothing, not bad luck, or anything stays the same.
That's what I'd always tell myself when I was down:
That for as many negatives as there are in the world
There must be just as many positives. So I looked for the positives.
So many beautiful colors, and things.
You just need to look around for them.
They're there. Plenty.
And today's a beautiful day. Isn't it?

FLASHBACK:

MOLLY DEE

For seeing pictures of naked girls having fun on a beach?
I've seen more in Renoir and Mary Cassatt.
And what about that famous photo from the Vietnam War?
No country has the right to control your mind that way.
Starve you, maybe, but not your mind.

FLASHBACK:

MOLLY DEE

There are so many negatives.
Just look at the positives.
There are at least as many of them.
The sun, when it's warm.
The moon, when it's not alone.
The air. Birds in it. Songs in it....
Hedgehogs!
Marmite.
Showers. Alone.
Showers. With you in it.
Woods. And gardens. And my secret paths through them.

Morning. RATTLER (with his dog) and JAKE are standing outside Molly Dee's micro house, next to a woods on the grounds of a convent. JOE YA-KNOW enters, with MOLLY DEE.

RATTLER

My God!
Our Molly Dee.
For real.

JAKE

Never thought I'd see the day....

The two of them rush up to her and hug her at the same time.

JOE

She's a little weak.
Street's been hard on her.

RATTLER

And a little thin, Id' say.

JAKE

Too Goddamn thin, I'd say.
I've seen too many homeless waste away on the streets
And one day, no one ever sees them again.

JOE

We'll take care of her.
She's home now.
We'll fatten her up.

MOLLY DEE

Didn't know when
If I'd ever
If I'd ever
If I'd ever be coming home again.
And see this place. And you all.

RATTLER

We've kept it up for you.
Just like you left it.

JAKE

Just like you left it.

JOE

She's been hurt.

MOLLY DEE

A pain in my stomach.
Pains lots of places, inside.

JOE

She'll be all right, they say.
Just lots of rest.
And soup.
And good, warm food.
And rest.

MOLLY DEE

Just lots of my friends.

JOE

Let me take you inside.

JOE takes MOLLY DEE inside her house.

RATTLER

Something's gone wrong with America.
Heart and soul.

JAKE

Maybe....
It's our leaders.

RATTLER

It *was* our leaders
When they preached discrimination
And what they did to Native Americans before that.

JAKE

Still is the leaders.

RATTLER

Who's going to repeal them?...
Maybe we don't need leaders.
Just good conscience and sensitivity toward others.

JAKE

How can I be sensitive to others when I'm torn up inside the way I am? For Dee?
Just last week they found three homeless girls
Beaten
And raped
And dead
Down by the river.

RATTLER

Innocent. And dead because they're girls.

JAKE

Because they're homeless.

RATTLER

Shit! No one to watch over them.

JAKE

When you see things like that
Or hear things like that
You can talk about love
Say the word
Sing songs around it
Talk about the love of God and the love for fellow man
But in my heart I will never understand what it really is.
Except it hurts. And maybe it's the last refuge where a person can feel he's
achieved something noble.

RATTLER

And life goes on, trying to understand why we are the way we are.
Why some of us have to be homeless.
What it's all about.
Trying to understand why they chase a man like Griff
From city to city
That never did a thing, really
And let homeless girls die unprotected.

JAKE

I never liked that guy, Griff.
Not even his name.

RATTLER

That's beside the point.

JAKE

Which is?...
What?
What is the point?

RATTLER

That our government chases and punishes the weak
While things like homelessness go on and on.

JAKE

What are government footmen supposed to do then?

RATTLER

Eat bureaucratic paper
And strive to be part of the same moral community as the rest of us.

JAKE

Is *that* the meaning of life?

JOE comes out of Molly Dee's house.

JOE

She's resting now.
Really tired.
But she'll be okay.
She's a trooper.
Rest.
And food.
And company.
They say that's all she needs.
To regain her strength.

RATTLER

She needs loving care.

JAKE

And *us* to watch over her....
If we lose her, I'll never get away from it.

JOE

She felt bad, she wasn't more excited about seeing you.
She was, actually. Just a little weak.

RATTLER

Hey, Man, we understand.

JOE

But she wanted me to tell you
That her Mum told her
That it's always a good day
To have a good day.

JAKE

I need a good day.

RATTLER

We do, too.
We all do.

JAKE

Joe?...
What is the real meaning of life? you think?

JOE

Maybe in America it doesn't have a real *meaning*.
Maybe life's only circumstance and reflection.

JAKE

Like magic?...
Or Fate?

JOE

[*beat*] Jake, I don't know.
We're all struggling with this.
All I know is that the most beautiful sunset I ever saw I didn't even see the sun.
Just its colors painted on the clouds.

**JOE, JAKE, RATTLER and his dog slowly
exit, as bells ring the hour.**

END



Photo from [Wikimedia](#)



Photo from [Wikimedia](#)

Our hearts do not call us to be successful, but to be obedient to what breaks them:
the needs of others.

Wake up, America! See what's happening to you.

Tent City, click [here](#)

“He committed a murder and was sentenced to life imprisonment. Then in his desolate jail ... he saved a man’s life and was pardoned. But when he got home he found his wife living with someone else and his daughter knew nothing of him....

“His attempt at suicide was also a failure. A monk summoned to his bedside said to him, ‘Your story is terrifying, but I can do nothing for you.... I have nothing but debts. I spend everything I have finding homes for the homeless. I can give you nothing. You want to die, and there is nothing to stop you. But before you kill yourself, come and give me a hand. Afterwards, you can do what you like.’”

– An Intimate History of Humanity (1994), p. 471, by Theodore Zeldin