

Taking on the City: One Mom at a Time

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Abstract

These three poems express the challenges of an urban mom to see the city despite, and through, her kids' perspective.

Public Art with Kids

7 year old: You come here for THIS?
6 year old: You are taking a PICTURE of it?
Mom: YES! See these pressed, rusty TINS on the side of that building?
That's actually an artwork... It's HUGE!
6 year old: YUCK!
7 year old: It's UGLY!
Mom: And the broken MIRRORS among the TINS? They reflect the sky
and the clouds and the buildings across, but kind of also distort
them...Broken Bridge II...
7 year old: BROKEN??? It's UGLY and it's BORING.
6 year old: There is no BRIDGE here!
7 year old: I want to go!
6 year old: You said there's ICE-CREAM on this SKYLINE. WHERE is it?
Mom: HIGHLINE, sweetheart...it's called the Highline...

A Playground Perspective

As I lift
my eyes
to meet the walking
signal on
Fulton
and orchestrate
the crossing
of my 2
toddlers
on mini
scooters
and my
mom freshly
jetlagged
from Europe,
I see you
running a
red light
to wherever
your GPS
tells you
I live
now, and
scream
your name.
You slow
down,
honk,
and make
a U-turn.
It's been
11 years
since we
last loved

each other.
What
business
do we have
meeting up
in the
up-and-coming
area of
Clinton Hill,
Brooklyn?
You: an
ex-husband
and father of 3;
Me: a wife
and mother of 2?
We enter
the playground
on Classon and Fulton,
where
mosquitoes hit
the swings before
kids do.
Cars rumble by
occasionally;
drug addicts
and drunkards
lean on
the sides
of bodegas –
it is a lazy
morning
in late May,
on the border
of BedStuy.
Swiftly,
2 cops chase
an undesirable
(a lonely guy
slouching on
a lonely
playground
bench) away.
You stand
tall and
funny as
you once did –
perhaps

a little
provincial
with your
cowboy
hat on –
which looked
so cool in
Blagoevgrad where
we first met,
probably cool
in Maine where
you come from,
but so uncool
in Brooklyn.
I stand at
a reasonable
distance –
close enough
to hear your
jokes and
laugh
but far
enough
to not feel
small and protected
the way I
once did,
lest some
other energy
runs through
me – like
fire – from the
tips of your
hair into
mine –
we know
how trouble
comes on –
before we
know it,
it has burned
us both down,
like that
trash can
on the corner
across
that became

ashes
in no time.
Who set
it on fire?
And why
nobody
bothered
to put it
out?
You teach
my kids
how to
scooter
safely
down a ramp,
and slide
faster
down a slide;
you exchange
cleaning tips
(the steam mop,
the robot cleaner)
with my mom.
She too
laughs at
your jokes
but in
moderation –
she is,
after all,
the mother-in-law
of another.
Later,
you drive us
home a few`
blocks away:
my little boys
sitting in the
booster seats
of your, older, boys –
could these
have been
our kids?
As you
fumble
with your
GPS,

which will
take you
away from here
away from me,
for another
10 years, maybe,
I wonder:
What if
I stay
in this car
with you,
to live the life
I did not,
but once
so wished I
did?
Will I
learn something
new
about
love?
You taught
me that love
was
all about
leaving...
and so
the first guy
who stayed,
I married
doubting
his love
since...
With a new
destination
on your GPS
screen, and
after a friendly
goodbye
you hesitate
for a bit
then drive
away
aware perhaps
perhaps not
that
there is

always
something
uneasy
between a man
and a woman,
especially
in up-and-coming
neighborhoods,
on lazy
spring mornings,
despite the
presence of
children...
...or because of it.
Love
is all about
staying.

An Urban Child Aspires...

with Moussa Toni and Malick Mikayil Cisse

A famous story writer
a fearless fire fighter

an expert Bay-blade spinner
a brave hockey game winner

an awesome basketball player
a fearsome dragon slayer

a classical music composer
a picture day perfect poser

an amazing knockout singer
a soccer team's best left-winger

a swift Christmas gift wrapper
a talented NYC rapper

a Lego Chima spy
a cool and funny guy

is all I want to be

but adults ask me
which ONE
specifically?

all of these plus
the driver of a magic bus

the master of the silent fart
the wizard of profound dirt art

the inventor of the no-stain shirt
the creator of on-demand burp

a Ninja turtle drawer
a fine paper plane thrower

an origami specialist
a Kung Fu gold medalist

a chocolate tester
a hilarious jester

a famed first-class Brooklyn rock star
with a glow-in-the-dark guitar

or simply a good, smart boy...
... and designer of my
best friend's favorite toy!

About the author

Blagovesta Momchedjikova takes on the city two boys at a time, whether ice-skating in Prospect Park or strolling on the Highline. To get some writing done, she wakes up early in the morning, when the only sounds around are those of cars speeding down Nostrand Avenue or drunkards singing and cursing on their way home. It is thus that she managed to edit the volumes *Captured by the City: Perspectives in Urban Culture Studies* (CSP 2013) and *Urban Feel* (Streetnotes 2010). By day she teaches writing at New York University.