

## Tobi Alfier

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### The Misplaced Man

A long wait for the bus,  
he buys two bananas  
and a bottle of rum.

Sounds like a sea shanty  
but he has not seen a ship  
in a long while.

He'd turned toward a journey,  
not away. Not because of love lost,  
but a pilgrim's need

to find something—  
indescribable and worthy, and he did,  
so now he returns.

The rum to warm and to cool him,  
a rag to dry tears, sweat,  
and the day's rust and relief

from his face. In his pack  
he moves a spare shirt  
and two books to make room

for his gifts of food and fatherly  
things. And husbandly things.  
We see him from our window

and we love him for the story  
of the man that he is, wish  
him a safe return, a life full

of all the love he has found within,  
and who he has become—a blessing  
for his family. A lesson for us all.

## **Down Anstruther Way**

It is summer.

A small crowd rides a crest of laughter  
propelled by somebody's radio,  
the speakers turned up and out,  
a rousing ballad.

He has drunk whisky  
to this song, broad smile, arms clasped  
upon the shoulders of fellow neighbors  
with a love for the farm and knack  
for turning rocky quadrants into lettuces  
and leeks.

He has hunched deeply over this song,  
head foggy with a wall of sadness.  
Remembering the fleeting dusk,  
her woolen cloak disappearing round  
the corner, the note not yet  
discovered, the silvering moon.

He knows the land  
but not the woman. He knows  
the skies and the vanishing tides,  
the brief grace between storms,  
familiar gait of his boy  
as he ambles toward home.

The sun finds its place deep in the west,  
an outdoor cathedral as light bursts  
onto the wet stone of uneven village roads.  
The radio changes to a dream,  
a young girl starts to dance.

## Holiday Dinner

Violets and sweet peas in small bulb-vases,  
like two hands holding water, cupped  
and nourishing. Tendrils gently easing  
over the sides, the blooms almost  
drooping with tender sweetness,  
almost the same shade as candles

bought for the celebration,  
blessed for the occasion.  
Salt cellars tiny with their little spoons,  
miniatures in hands large enough  
to place entire salt licks for deer in fields  
that border the farm. Pepper shakers

by every place, with two shakes worth  
and no more. No one can slide their farmer-  
thighs under the table but they try for the night  
to match the gentle grace of the blooms,  
and because it is so, they stretch for plates  
full of holiday fare—

Meats redolent of fruit, baked to caramel, a meal  
of decadence, wine, bread. They pray nothing  
loses its way on the open-air journey  
to sitting-far-back mouths, but that's what the dog  
is for, the dog who as a rule is usually locked  
out back, peering in at the table like a thief.

They have said grace together, prayed individually,  
caught the eye of loved ones, cringed at missteps  
or a poorly-worded promise. Such is their holiday,  
once a year, when the moon is high as vulnerability,  
when they love with unwavering generosity,  
go home with wholehearted relief.

## **Carmen & Felix**

Kissing the apples - right cheek, left cheek  
nose, forehead, chin and lips  
they say goodbye. Not forever,  
this ritual of the everyday,  
but everyday feels like part of forever.

She turns away, composing her lips  
into what she thinks she ought to say,  
while miles of thoughts dance around  
inside her head.

Mermaid hair gliding down her back,  
a blanket of fire threatening to warm  
and scorch, a signpost pointing the way to lonely.

She steps deftly across the white shag,  
the fluttering pile softly scrunching under  
webbed toes that remind her of sections  
of the mandarin oranges she buys quite often.

She stretches to the ceiling, her shirt lifting  
at the waist. A secret of fine lines  
survey the longitude of her sides, the slivers  
etching her fair skin like silver markers  
on invitations to nowhere.  
Her shoes are on.  
She's out the door.  
Another day in paradise.

**Tobi Alfier** is a multiple Pushcart nominee and a Best of the Net nominee. Her most current chapbooks are "*The Coincidence of Castles*" from Glass Lyre Press, and "*Romance and Rust*" from Blue Horse Press. "*Down Anstruther Way*" is forthcoming from FutureCycle Press. She is the co-editor of San Pedro River Review ([www.bluehorsepress.com](http://www.bluehorsepress.com)).