Everybody Has a Heartache: A Blues

BY JOY HARJO

In the United terminal in Chicago at five on a Friday afternoon
The sky is breaking with rain and wind and all the flights
Are delayed forever. We will never get to where we are going
And there's no way back to where we've been.
The sun and the moon have disappeared to an island far from anywhere.

Everybody has a heartache—

The immense gatekeeper of Gate Z–100 keeps his cool.
This guardian of the sky teases me and makes me smile through the mess,
Building up his airline by stacking it against the company I usually travel:
Come on over to our side, we'll treat you nice.
I laugh as he hands me back my ticket, then he turns to charm
The next customer, his feet tired in his minimum wage shoes.

Everybody has a heartache—

The man with his head bobbing to music no one else can hear has that satisfied
Feel—a full belly of sweet and a wife who sings heartache to sleep.
In his luggage (that will be lost and never found) is a musty dream of flying
Solo to Africa, with a stop on the return to let go the stories too difficult to
Carry home. He'll take off his shoes to walk in a warm, tropical sea.
He'll sing to the ancestors:
Take me home to mama. No one cooks like her.
But all the mamas worked to the bone gone too young.
Broken by The Man.

Everybody has a heartache—
Everyone’s mouthing fried, sweet, soft and fat,
While we wait for word in the heart of the scrambled beast.
The sparkle of soda wets the dream core.
That woman over there the color of broth did what she was told.
It’s worked out well as can be expected in a world
Where she was no beauty queen and was never seen,
Always in the back of someplace in the back—
She holds the newest baby. He has croup.

*Shush, shush. Go to sleep, my little baby sheepie.*
He sits up front of her with his new crop of teeth.

Everybody has a heartache—

This man speaks to no one, but his body does.
Half his liver is swollen with anger; the other half is trying
To apologize—
What a mess I’ve made of history, he thinks without thinking.
Mother coming through the screen door, her clothes torn,
Whimpering: *It’s okay baby, please don’t cry.*
*Don’t cry. Baby don’t cry.*
And he never cries again.

Everybody has a heartache—

Baby girl dressed to impress, toddles about with lace on this and ruffle on that—
Her mother’s relatives are a few hundred miles away poised to welcome.
They might as well live on a planet of ice cream.
She’s a brand new wing, grown up from a family’s broken hope.

*Dance girl, you carry our joy.*
Just don’t look down.

Everybody has a heartache—

Good-looking punk girl taps this on her screen
to a stranger she has never seen:

*Just before dawn, you’re high again beneath a marbled sky.*
I was slick fine leather with a drink in my hand.
Flying with a comet messenger nobody sees.
The quick visitor predicts that the top will be the bottom
And the bottom will flatten and dive into the sea.
I want to tell her:
You will dine with the lobster king, and
You will dance with crabs clicking castanets. You will sleep-
Walk beyond the vestibule of sadness with a stranger
You have loved for years.

Everybody has a heartache—

This silence in the noise of the terminal is a mountain of bison skulls.

_Nobody knows, nobody sees_—

Unless the indigenous are dancing powwow all decked out in flash and beauty
We just don’t exist. We’ve been dispersed to an outlaw cowboy tale.
What were they thinking with all those guns and those handcuffs
In a size for babies?
They just don’t choose to remember.
We’re here.

In the terminal of stopped time I went unsteady to the beat,
Driven by a hungry spirit who is drunk with words and songs.
What can I do?
I have to take care of it.
The famished spirit eats fire, poetry, and rain; it only wants love.

I argue:

_You want love?_
_Do you even know what it looks like, smells like?_

But you cannot argue with hungry spirits.

I don’t know exactly where I’m going; I only know where I’ve been,
I want to tell the man who sifted through the wreck to find us here
In the blues shack of disappeared history—
I feel the weight of his heart against my cheek.  
His hand is on my back pulling me to him in the dark, to a place  
No soldiers can reach.  
I hear the whoop-cries of warriors calling fire for a stand  
Against the brutality of forgetfulness—

Everybody has a heartache—

We will all find our way, no matter fire leaping through holes in jump time,  
No matter earthquake, or the breaking of love spilling over the dreck of matter  
In the ether, stacking one burden  
Against the other—

We have a heartache.

Notes:
Joy Harjo, March 18, 2013 United Terminal C, Chicago and en route between Chicago O’Hare and Newport, Virginia.

Source: Poetry (March 2014)