

Love's Duty Lived (A Sextet Of Pictures And Poems) by Stone Riley

A set of illustrated poems tell both a dramatic story and a philosophic argument, offering the artist's life as evidence that true strong activism must be a magic work of transcending love.

This on the web: www.StoneRiley.com/LovesDutyLived

Riley's main website: www.StoneRiley.com

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Horus Is Conceived

Digital image based on two canvas / acrylic paintings; showing the old Egyptian god of will and courage, born of magic in a dark time.



Do The Hard Work

Shouldn't there be snow?

It's February in the outlying reaches of the Alps in southern Germany. We are out on the porch of a tavern that clings to a steep valley's green grassy wall, nursing mugs of beer in the rising twilight.

We are the tavern's only customers. We scarcely speak and scarcely make a sound for we are keeping secrets, each their own.

I go lean on a rail to watch the darkness move. It's coming toward me, rising from the valley's shadows far below. The air is still and clear and it's not even really cold.

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We are five men. Our little truck is parked up by the road. It's 1971 and we are U.S. Army soldiers, stationed in this country on a Cold War stalemate line instead of being carried off to fight in Viet Nam.

The old sergeant, commander of our little journey for this evening, he who kindly halted here and even bought the beer, comes to lean against the railing close beside me. The young corporal who is driving also comes and sits down on a bench beside and slowly takes a sip.

The old sergeant, this professional soldier, to show he's talking to me, close beside me, looks out there where I am looking. And he breaks the silence: "I admire what you're doing."

I've just done thirty days in army jail for doing war resistance work. He and his corporal are transporting me and two other malefactors also just released back to our regular duties. Now he has given me military information about morale.

He has spoken very softly.

Surprised, I look into his face. I don't know him in particular. I wonder: Where's he been for all this time? I whisper thanks. Sarcastically? Shameful that: Really, what are we he and I? And why?

But then I wonder what this means that I should do.

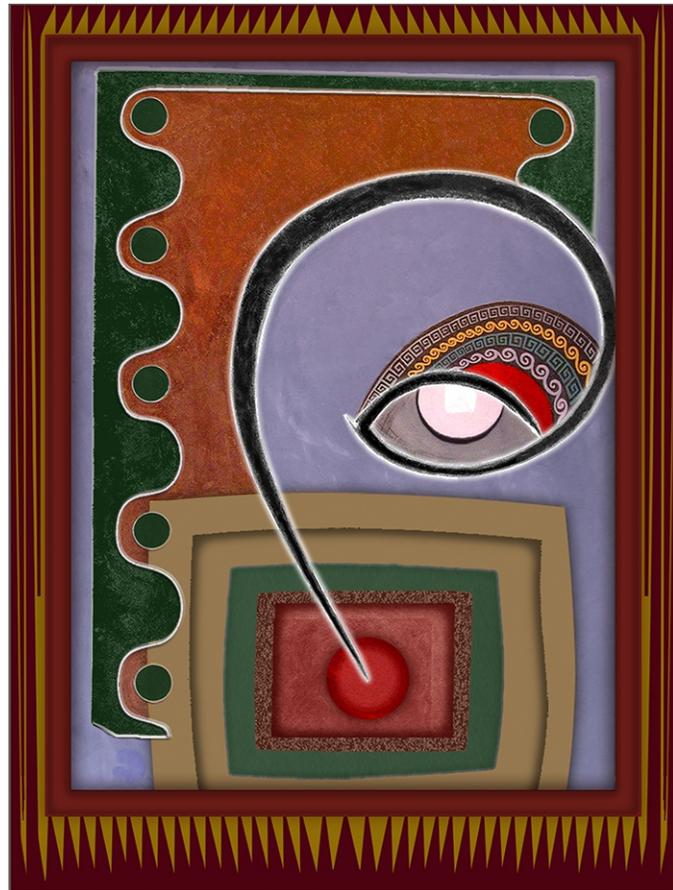
So then, down there below, laboring to rise out of the rising night, low to the grassy ground and laboring up this hillside, I see a crow at wing.

Do the hard work.

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Antigone

Digital image based on a canvas / acrylic painting; showing the first act of an old Greek tragic play: a sister, filled with grief, stubbornly demanding truth and honor for her murdered brother, goes to decorate his tomb.



**Withdrawal
Of Consent**

A poetic essay in political philosophy:

Around nineteen-eighty. Back then, we were in a time of lies, lies on a very wide and yet pervasively intimate scale, as though lies were the air you breathed. I'll tell you one example of those times that infuriated me:

My fellow citizens were mostly still in love with our national U.S. propaganda lies and so there was a nonsense question you could ask. You could ask Mister or Ms Citizen this: "Do you think America is the greatest country in the world?"

Nonsense on its face of course. To rationally reply, just to start, they must apply some greatness score to every country in the world. Then if this is somehow done and if we win the tip top score, how then to reach the actual meaning? For we know what is meant: America is good and noble by nature, in this world's nature of existence. How that? But if the citizen shall judge this inference is done as well the logic leads to marvelous conclusions.

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For if the logic can be proved, or is assumed, then it confirms a pleasant feeling dawning temptingly as the preferred conclusion is approached. For the climax of the thought is this: Them and their nation righteously dreaming, forcefully leading, sunshiny gleaming, envy of the world and by incanting this they feel themselves standing now with masterful sunshiny generous Gods.

So every American I asked ...

“Do you think America is the greatest country in the world?”

... with very rare exception, would actually do exactly this: Listen to my question, think momentarily and see the difficulties of the question, decide to abandon thought, and shrug often, and answer “Yes, I think America is the greatest country in the world.”

Too frail to dare traverse the shadow of a doubt, these my fellow citizens.

They were doing this even after the horrors of the very horrid Vietnam War that were just recently gone by, vast horrors done by our soldiers from the very start of it and repeated constantly with increasing pitch of desperation right to the end, horrors mostly done by public order of our generals in fulfillment of our government's public policies and constantly reported clearly in the daily news; yes it was even then after those long recent years of vast and quite intentional evil, that enormous spasm of pointless furious insane destruction, it was then in nineteen-eighty and I was finding most Americans still somehow clung to their cherished lie that our country, unlike most other countries, is noble and does good.

My fellow citizens.

(And one among the dead a friend. We men young together there were waiting, he among us chosen of the war machine and carried to the perpetration, he the murdered by the war machine, promptly murdered, us friends there waiting, us one letter back from him all full of scribbled horrors and he's dead. That long ago by then, dead in summer nineteen-seventy.)

Fast forward. Twenty-eleven. Thirty years more or less and every one of them a year of startling surprises.

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Two thousand and eleven. Me. Night. A city night. An electric glaring night of shadowed darkness here behind us where we stand but blazing penetrating light across the street.

We standing here – a large but unknown number of us – stood far out to left and right and all three ranks deep but crowding close to hold each other up against the blaring light – are actually, in military fact, a voluntary unarmed citizen militia, well disciplined by our ideals and ready. Waiting. Our drummers drumming loud and fast. Food and water being passed.

Waiting for the Boston Police to cross the street in line abreast and take the park.

The park, the Occupy encampment. The tiny liberated zone. The tiny zone of real democracy, of real news, real education. The zone of reality and courage.

Me a visitor tonight. Me with others come racing in a car tonight to make this muster, come racing from our smaller city's camp where we are fully occupied with our own version of the struggle.

Me old man by then but out in front to show some leadership, waiting crouching on the curb, but a squad of drummers shove in here so I fade back behind the line and find some other duty.

Me, I take up chatting. Chatting. Our fellow citizens, some of them, have come to stroll about behind our line and they want chatting. I hail one "Hi".

This one a man the age that I once was. In that electric shadowed thrumming rhythm dark he does approach, is not shy but can't find words.

Youngish, so-called white. Clean and warmly dressed this cool night.

He is not shy but fuddled, confused, trying seriously to think but can't find terms. Clearly sees the movement of these souls, clearly sympathizes but yet cannot see why. He seems to seem to himself cloudy drifty and opaque.

Me, I guess I'll clarify him. Me, I guess I'll put the question.

"Can I ask you something?" (Sarcastically? Ironically?)

Uncertainly: "Okay?"

"Do you think America is the greatest country in the world?"

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Mister U.S. Citizen: He hesitates. He hems and haws, haws and hems, almost makes a little dance, offers something, takes it back. Then, at last, finally his countenance at last, his countenance portrays as if perhaps as if a useful thought has found him.

So now at last – at long long weary last – praise any god you wish – finally he does not answer.

Withdrawal of consent.

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Lost Girl Found

True portrait of a wandering youth who found friends and work in the Occupy camp; graphite pencil on bristol paper, mounted on a frame of painted poplar wood, photographed on the wall of the artist's studio above his desk.



Lost Girl Found

Oh dear and darling daughter
whom I knew for brief and passing days,
you of grief and will to worthy deeds
here in this world,

I pray all goddesses who ever are
in past and future present time,
to fill your life with worthy deeds,
and blessedness and peace,
and hero's glory.

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**Six Of Cups
(The Past Speaks)**

An old overgrown garden at the ancestral home of the artist's mother, at the time of his grandmother's death, drawn from memory long after; originally 0.7 mm engineering pencil on on a very small square of bristol paper; here enlarged, cleaned and painted; one of 78 little drawings made in 1980 and self-published as



“The Simple Tarot” ever since; this Tarot card also says (below this picture and below the title “Six Of Cups”): “The Past Speaks.”

The Magician

A clot am I of earth, wind, fire and water.

A breath am I of earth, wind, fire and water.

A spark am I of earth, wind, fire and water.

A drop am I of earth, wind, fire and water.

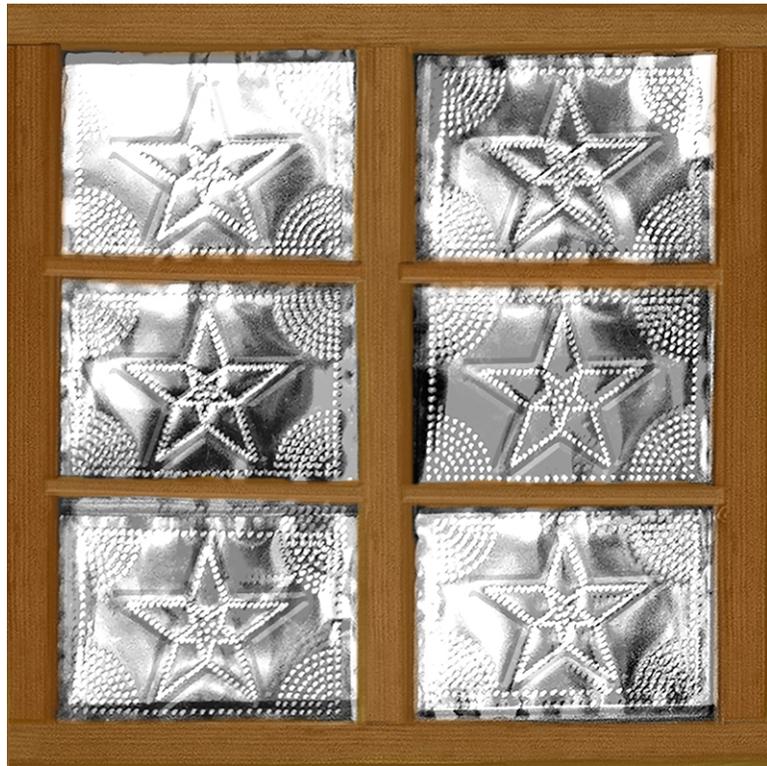
And yet I speak !

A human thing who names the gods.

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**The Substance
Of Reality**

Painted photo of a
cabinet door made by
the artist in his
home.



**Awaking
In A Dream**

There are many tales, of course, of Lao Tzu who, according to the legends, wrote *The Watercourse Way*, a little book of nature poetry upon which other thinkers then built up the lean, beautiful and tough spiritual philosophy of Taoism. Here's one of them.

The story flies us to the early morning of a day when our hero was a bright but sorrowful young man. He was a bureaucratic junior clerk in the palace of a rich and brutal warlord prince. The sparkling morning and the budding springtime garden grounds through which he trod to work belied the torment in the young man's soul. This day's duty was to be an awful deed which no one with an open heart could ever wish.

The garden path led on across a footbridge on a lovely brook and, setting foot onto the rising boards, his paces further slacked. His gaze was beckoned to the sparkling water. On the arch's highest little height the now unconscious footsteps stopped and – mind, heart and soul – he found himself drawn out into the clear deep rippling stream.

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This was the moment many humans ask of "there" and "here". As another poet wrote, do I dream the butterfly or does the butterfly dream me? Gazing deep into the world I see only countless things which mirror me, so what are "you" and "I" and what am "I" to do?

But in our poet's mind such shadow riddles fluttered by a blooming soul and sinking, drowning, drinking, thirsty heart. I and You are here and now, whatever boundless shimmering here and now this world may be. Whoever's dream our dream may be, the essence which our dreamy eyes, if open, see is flowing beauty. Our fingertips, if yearning, touch a supple yielding. We are conjured here to do what needs the doing.

No more could any doubts have weight. The fundamental knowledge that this florid, flooding and commanding clarity exists would henceforth lure and guide our hero's penetrating thoughts and steady steps. The fulsome beauty of reality had ravished Lao Tzu and he was struck with lifelong love.

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**Drone Strike
In North Waziristan**

Canvas / acrylic painting
after Kahlo and Picasso;
4 feet x 2 feet = 122 cm x 61 cm
in symbolic colors; e.g. the
bewildered U.S. soldier a sick pale
ghostly green and Earth/Woman
saffron with hair that is the sky;
often displayed at the artist's anti-
war poetry and storytelling
performances.

**Drone Strike
In North Waziristan**

My son and his wife just had a baby,
a beautiful new astonishing human
child. Last month two women went
out to a water well at night and were
rendered into bloody pieces.

I cannot pretend that these two things are different sorts of things, pretend that they are not the same type and quality of fact, for they are human facts.

I cannot say, Oh one is mine and one not mine, for my one human heart strains to encompass both and strains to examine them with the fear and hope and joy and shame and trembling pity that are all alike the province of one heart.

[End]

