

The Poet Game

Greg Brown

Down by the river junior year walking with my girl, and we came upon a place there in the tall grass where a couple had been making love and left the mark of their embrace. I said to her, "Looks like they had some fun." She said to me, "Let's do the same." and still I taste her kisses and her freckles in the sun when I play the poet game.

A young man down in hill country in the year of '22 went to see his future bride. She lived in a rough old shack that poverty blew through. She invited him inside. She'd been cooking, ashamed and feeling sad, she could only offer him bread and her name - Grandpa said that it was the best gift a fella ever had and he taught me the poet game.

I had a friend who drank too much and played too much guitar - and we sure got along. Reel-to-reels rolled across the country near and far with letters poems and songs.. but these days he doesn't talk to me and he won't tell me why. I miss him every time I say his name. I don't know what he's doing or why our friendship died while we played the poet game.

The fall rain was pounding down on an old New Hampshire mill and the river wild and high. I was talking to her while leaves blew down like a sudden chill - there was wildness in her eyes. We made love like we'd been waiting all of our lives for this - Strangers know no shame - But she had to leave at dawn and with a sticky farewell kiss left me to play the poet game.

I watched my country turn into a coast-to-coast strip mall and I cried out in a song: if we could do all that in thirty years, then please tell me you all - why does good change take so long? Why does the color of your skin or who you choose to love still lead to such anger and pain? And why do I think it's any help for me to still dream of playing the poet game?

Sirens wail above the fields - another soul gone down - another Sun about to rise. I've lost track of my mistakes, like birds they fly around and darken half of my skies. To all of those I've hurt - I pray you'll forgive me. I to you will freely do the same. so many things I didn't see, with my eyes turned inside, playing the poet game.

I walk out at night to take a leak underneath the stars - oh yeah that's the life for me. There's Orion and the Pleiades and I guess that must be Mars - all as clear as we long to be. I've sung what I was given - some was bad and some was good. I never did know from where it came and if I had it all to do again I am not sure I would play the poet game.