

# Plea Bargain

Contributed by Matthew Charles Siegel

Sometimes I need a day like this  
to remind why I don't carry a gun

today is the kind of day  
that makes a trigger finger restless  
a breathing exercise useless  
and this business of anger management  
run straight into the ground

the kind of day  
that reminds me of the difference  
between being unsociable and being antisocial  
between an empty room alone at home and a subway shooting spree  
today is a plea bargain waiting to happen

today my mantra changed from kill or be killed  
to kill or be bored, like war may not be the answer  
but it sure does make  
for some nice entertainment

today truth is tattooed onto our tongues with dirty needles  
sanity is sealed over handshakes with the devil  
subway wanted signs post the pictures of my heroes

today fear stopped being afraid  
and decided it was okay to start hitting back

today necessity bitch-slapped idealism  
and told him that it was time to grow up  
there are burgers to be flipped  
and bills to be paid, trade your youth  
for a hairnet and orthopedic shoes  
read the clues of where your pension went  
in your boss's crossword smile

today hunger will devour the big apple whole  
the city that never sleeps will go to bed without a meal

today fists are clenched like loaves of bread  
knuckles worn like paved-over pastures  
lukewarm smiles left to simmer too long  
hands bruised the color of dreary city skies  
reasons for getting out of the apartment

passing me by like cabbies  
who ignore potential fares  
preferring instead  
to stalk the green of this pigment  
with lures of  
"do you know where you are?" and  
"you should not be out in East New York after dark."

Some days I just find it difficult  
to romanticize urine soaked stairwells.

I'm running out of graceful ways to say no  
to the fifth stranger on the block  
brandishing an empty pocket like a weapon  
to ask me for a cigarette a dollar my soul  
sex smoke salvation, for the shoes  
the shirt on my back that I already gave  
to a guy two blocks back  
who didn't even stop  
to say thank you.

Today charity feels like a crucifixion.  
a punch in the face feels like a baptism.  
today a kiss or a hug  
sounds like an act of vandalism.  
today every "yo mama" joke  
will end in an abortion.  
my future running the risk  
of becoming an orphan  
in a marathon I'm destined to lose.  
making love, face to face with the brick  
of these walls, my favorite position in bed  
is no longer the fetal position.

my favorite hobby  
no longer the great metropolitan pastime  
of avoiding eye contact  
and mumbling under my breath.

My favorite food  
no longer the taste  
of blood in my mouth.

I'm tired of biting my tongue.

Matthew Charles Siegel is a New York City transplant. Most days, he is a healthy transplant, but some days he feels like a rejected organ and writes poems about it. He wrote this one on an MTA bus. A social worker from the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn by day, he is a curmudgeon by night, and considers the MTA his mortal nemesis. He walks to work.