

Tears of Baltimore, by Mark Safran, December 2010

The soothing, crooning jazzy Krall drifts through my noise-reduction Bose
snuggled up against my ears as Amtrak slides along.

And I slide in and out of sleep

half watching dripping, speckled light through rain that starts to pour
pounding hard against the window, then plunging to the ragged street
churning, bloody in the gutter with the tears of Baltimore.

Like a bombed out Afghan ruin I see block after block of tenement decay:
knocked out teeth of an all-American smile
vacant and dead.

Beyond our willingness to see or care

Beyond our iPhone glare

Beyond our ability to even share a morsel of our dreams and fortune
as if the whole thing might unravel in a slippery slope to socialistic Armageddon.

That's what *they* keep yelling, but you know we do it ourselves
compartmentalize our walls the way this gliding silver train cuts through November;
Insulating all our liberal, sympathetic souls from the graphite shadow of a kid down there
who drips along the chipped up curb wondering what to eat or what to be
a chrome plated coldness gripping his world, already broken, tired, and sore.

I can almost imagine the streaks of tortured shame streaming down his ashen cheeks
glistening in the freezing rain,

the tears of Baltimore.

And I wonder what it means to me

I wonder how I can ride this train from my high powered Beltway meeting
where we designed a better way to target more efficiently
and spend our pooled money on satellites and UAVs
to protect our sacred homeland.

I wonder if we know how we're eroding from within

as we lash out at the Talibanic ghouls a million miles away
leveling their villages in quixotic brazen hopes of keeping them at bay.

While here, our homeland villages are crushed before our eyes,

a onetime proud and working city cries.

I wonder if the kid down there

will ever get the chance to leave his vicious street,

escape the cycle and *be someone* or one day ride the train like me.

But I'm guessing that his only break might be to serve an Afghan tour

The only way for him to leave

the tears of Baltimore.