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**SCRAP**  
~ A Poem by Ashok Niyogi ~

I spied his calling-card on my wife's dresser  
More than a month back...  
"Shamsuddin  
Scrap Merchant, Chawri Bazar  
9199873699  
Tring-tring"

Then last Sunday, "hellooo... myself Shamsuddin calling."  
Apparently, for madam-ji.

After my fiftieth year,  
Menopausal hormone lows  
Aggravate my hives  
Whenever scrap dealers, ferrets  
And sundry other 'ictim-perpetrators'  
Cross my morning verandah sun.  
My wife knows.

They thought they would be done  
Before I had risen from morning prayer.

My wife had conspired to hive off  
Three window air-conditioners behind my back  
Because, you see, we now have split-phase ac.

Much posturing, prostrating, imminent bankruptcy,

Ruination, usury, brother-sister bonhomie;  
And then the deal was done,  
Rickshaw called for, 'corpses' loaded,  
Destination scrapyards... for renovation.  
A coat of paint, some copper wire re-winding  
And "six month guarantee on new window ac".  
This, our wonderful motherland, is a paradise of fix.

Good riddance.  
So what now, on this Sabbath day,  
Were they whispering about?

"No, no madam, I buy no broken glass,  
Shattered mirrors, moth eaten wood,  
Or old men, in older chairs...  
The newspaper he is reading is fine,  
Today's, current;  
But sir-ji as you can very well see,  
Is himself past renovation or doubt."

#### NOTES:

1. The name and phone number of the scrap dealer is fictitious. I have the greatest regard for scrap-dealers in India. They provide exemplary service in carrying away discarded, abandoned stuff from our doorstep and paying us in minted coin. For trashing the same stuff, we pay dearly and often abandon clandestinely, in developed countries. What scrap-dealers do with their purchase is an overall mystery, but surely it is less nefarious than dumping garbage sanctimoniously in impoverished nations.
2. 'Sir-ji' I translate as 'sir-respected', as I do 'madam-ji'—'madam-respected'. This is a common form of address in our sub-continent.

**ROCK, PAPER, SCISSORS**  
**~ A Poem by Laurie Kolp ~**

Forget conventionalism.  
The figurative rock awaits  
a tangible reply: yes or no?

Paramount, the lies  
a quick off-guard paper quiz  
uncovers: true or false?

Skeptical, I await admission  
but it's written in your eyes  
scissor slicing the horizon.

**FINE TASTES**  
**~ A Poem by John Grey ~**

They sold off his library.  
A lifetime of collecting  
was dispersed, diluted.

Same with his music.  
Bach would still brush  
up against Beethoven  
but not in such numbers.

The paintings fetched good money.  
His old friends  
were now art's new masters.  
But the work was  
firmly in the cause

of the signature within the frame  
not the man who first  
recognized their beauty.

Of course,  
the house was soon on the block,  
and the furniture paid  
for some cousins' vacations.

But he died  
and that was the end of him.

He wrote this  
when he saw it coming.

**ANTONIO RODRIGUEZ' S HOUR**  
**~ A Poem by B.Z. Niditch ~**

In a chaos color  
of a mural  
in an October flash  
through light  
of a city traveler  
the eye  
full of pronouns  
wounds the hot earth  
near the warmest body  
at sea,  
when even the sleepless  
will rise on canvas  
to blanket the earth  
with pantomime green  
innumerable as half-moons  
on a brackish shore line  
of trees.

**PECOS PETE IN PUERTO VALLARTA****~ A Poem by William C. Blome ~**

Pecos Pete's newly sharpened spurs  
ceased to spin from all the chewing gum  
spit out on the boardwalk planks,  
and though Pecos Pete himself

never lost any mobility, never slowed his gait,  
as he tailed a worried prostitute  
heading home from an empty evening,  
the missing jangle from his feet

disconcerted Pecos Pete to the point  
where he had to take a load off  
on a sideline bench and examine  
his prized boots. He therefore let the chica

pro quickly disappear from sight,  
the same chica pro he first spotted  
a half an hour ago, smoking Kools on  
the arcade pier, the woman about whom

he had slowly muttered to himself,  
"Is it my imagination or what, but try telling  
me that's not her menses I'm sniffing,  
and damned if I don't want some proof."

But his clogged up spurs and strangely-quiet  
stride have derailed the Texan visitor,



and he concedes her menses (or lack thereof)  
will remain a permanent mystery,

as he picks away at the gray Doublemint  
and the pinkish Bazooka. Good thing,  
as it turns out, for the hurrying whore's pet  
chihuahua contracted rabies late last week,

and barks ravenously for someone, anyone,  
in the chica pro's tiny kitchen, as now  
she slips her house key in the lock  
and twists the knob of her red front door.

**CRAZY DAY HEAT**  
**~ A Poem by Curtis W. Coons ~**

Man Mercury ascending to my Hell. Higher and higher I climb as morning sparks  
the noon. My trigger finger begins to sing. A friend, a fly begins to buzz my senses.  
Calling my name, calling my name, BUZZZZZZZZ...

My friend lands on my face. Eye to eye. We see eye to eye. We truly see eye to eye.  
Fly takes flight. I soon will follow. I sit facing my wall. My empty wall. My senses  
raw and ready! Savage heat etching my desire!

Instrument of my power, my trigger finger's glove is ready to rock and roll. I sit  
facing my wall. I see my victim. I see You. My wings take shape as the Buzz begins!

**TICKET**  
**~ A Poem by Bobbi Sinha-Morey~**

In the bullet holes of  
my window dirt breathes  
in the mist and the poison  
ivy on the grey stone wall  
ripples in the damn cold  
breeze. I'm like an angry  
saint who can't get enough  
truth even from words;  
and, in my old slipshod  
house, mosquitoes spit in  
my ear. God mistakes me  
for the Alzheimer birds  
that make a home of my  
chest. All day I sniff at  
the sky and gunpowder,  
wishing someone had  
made firewood of my  
mother, kidnapped my  
father. It's as pretty as  
the ticket out of here.

**A BOX OF WINE**  
**~ A Poem by Stephen Philip Druce ~**

The delivery driver from  
the wine company mistakenly  
delivered a box of wine  
to the wrong house, and forgot  
to ask for a signature from  
the wrong customer, who said nothing  
and drank all the wine.

The boss of the company berated  
the driver for delivering the wine  
to the wrong house, and for forgetting  
to ask for a signature from the wrong customer,  
who should have said something and not drunk  
all the wine, and then he apologised to the right  
customer for not delivering the wine to the right house.

The driver then delivered a box of wine  
to the right house—asked the right customer  
for a signature, and also apologised to him  
for not delivering the wine to the right house.  
Then he went to the wrong house and  
told the wrong customer he had mistakenly  
given him a box of wine and forgotten to ask  
for his signature—“no shit” he said.

## NOUVEAU AND THE OLD DEMON, 1874 ~ A Prose Piece by David Massengill ~

Standing on the wet deck of a boat to London, Germain Nouveau listened to the young Rimbaud complain that he had wearied of poetry. Nouveau—who was 23—stared down into the churning gray waters of the English Channel and questioned whether his infamous companion might damage his own writing. After all, he'd heard the tale about Rimbaud listening to a bright new bard read in Paris, interjecting *merde*; at the end of every line.

Despite Rimbaud's periodic scowls and whimpers about the scar from The Ex-Lover's bullet, his presence triggered a monumental affection inside his roommate. Nouveau found himself anticipating the intoxicated moments they shared in their little room on Stamford Street. Sometimes when Nouveau read a verse or lifted a sketch, Rimbaud would smile approvingly in the candlelight, and he resembled something godlier than artist yet more sensual than spirit.

The men's friendship was deepening in that strange phase between winter and spring that looks like fall. Nouveau grinned as he wrote in his journal, *This is our season*.

Then came May, and a painfully sober morning when Rimbaud suggested that Nouveau pack his paints and novels and return to Provence. "I think I can teach French without a partner," Rimbaud said as they crossed a Trafalgar Square crowded with pigeons.

Emotions filled Nouveau's core, but rather than voice them he eyed the birds before him. Some had gaps for eyes, others lacked legs, and all looked filthy. He recalled an Englishman telling him the legend that the country would suffer an invasion if every pigeon left the Square. Nouveau considered dashing in front of Rimbaud and flailing his arms to shoo the creatures away. Yet he knew that just as a few lifted others would land.

\*

Sunburned and hunched, the 52-year-old Nouveau sat at the bottom of cathedral stairs in Aix-en-Provence, begging for alms. Two men walked past with arms around each other's shoulders, and the now-religious Nouveau chided himself for thinking of lost friends rather than god. He knew that Rimbaud had left France—and possibly this earthly realm—long ago, yet the poet's essence seemed to cling to his brain every autumn, like the scent of browning leaves.

Around sunset, a publisher who'd heard of Nouveau's past approached the vagabond on his lowly perch. The man asked if he could perhaps assemble Nouveau's poems into a book.

Nouveau's answer was shorter and more direct than *merde*; it was *non*.

## THE DISHWATER OF LIFE

~ A Prose Piece by Mitchell Grabois ~

I went to throw out the pan of the grey dishwater of life, but when the suds went flying down the driveway, I noticed my new Ram truck was on fire. No Guts No Glory, the commercial's gnarled western voice had said. I heard the fire trucks coming now and saw my wife with a can of gasoline and a match still smoking in her hand.

She was screaming at me about how much money I'd spent on that truck and how all I got her for Xmas was a crock pot and some cheap lingerie. I could see she was upset but I'd thought a crock pot would make her life easier. It's been a favorite of housewives for what? fifty years? And that red crotchless underwear? Our love life needed spicing. She'd said so herself.

Well, we've had our conflicts, but I guess they're over now. I'm guessing it's a good decade that she'll be in the Women's Arson Prison, and by then I'll have a new truck and a new woman.

My first foray into the dating scene was poetic, you might say. This stringy-haired blonde booed me at the Open Mic and afterward strode up to where I was sitting and said: "You're either naked and bleeding in pursuit of truth, or you're just doodling a meaningless acrobatic circus of words on paper."

"Wow," I said. "Do you mind if I use that?"

"Yes, I mind," she nearly screamed, and everyone looked at us, as if we were lovers, not strangers.

The waitress came with a plate of free food and I offered it to my accuser. It was Thai shrimp, raised on untreated animal feces, and I wasn't planning on eating it. I pulled out a chair for her and she grudgingly sat down. She was hungry and ignorant of modern aquaculture methods in the Far East. She started gobbling. I watched her with satisfaction, until she drained my glass of expensive microbrew beer.

## THE HORROR OF LIVING

~ A Prose Piece by Bradford Middleton ~

The life of any real writer is beset with its fair share of horror, tragedy and darkness but also of great fantasy and triumphs; Jack should know as he was one of those real writers. One of those who didn't need to workshop experiences to be inspired because with his life he had enough gruesome and horrific stories to fill a hundred books. In his mind Jack was already a legend and his genius was acknowledged by over a dozen publishers who'd shown the good sense to publish his work. Jack knew he was one of those real writers.

He would wake up every day with the intention to write; it was his new habit after years of ritual drug abuse and provided its own share of horror and routine. He would make himself some breakfast and brew a pot of tea before sitting down, the two slices of toast would be devoured as the laptop whirled into action. Washing it down with the beginnings of a huge mug of tea Jack would roll his first cigarette of the day and think of what he had to do; was it going to be a new poem or was there a story that needed working. Whichever way it transpired he would sit there for the next three hours and write; it was one of the few things he loved doing, sitting alone, smoking and writing. The only time he was happier was in the evening when a bottle of booze would sit by his side, slowly being drunk as he poured out more words.'

When he'd finished his first shift at the laptop he would go out for a walk, often to the library to pick up more books or to submit material to publishers of interesting magazines or websites around the world. He was often inspired or compelled to write something new after going out; Brighton would inspire him to despair or dream up fresh new ways of dismembering a hipster. He would find himself the target of abuse from builders driving through town or lads on an afternoon piss-up but it all went in to his mind, remaining there, being primed into story material. The writing had become a shield with which he blocked harmful words; the first story he had published came from an experience one night, walking home from work, when a car-load of young lads shouted at him. He took their words and



made it a story of a middle-aged man's triumph over the latest hipster trend for a spare penis. It was a crazy and horrific story but Jack found a publisher who loved it.

Back at the flat and after dinner Jack would invariably sit down to either watch a film or listen to the radio and write some more. If he had been lucky he would have some fresh inspiration from his afternoon walk, if not he would write a new poem or go back to an old story. He would occasionally venture out to a pub to drink and observe, hoping that something would happen to inspire more words. But the pubs these days charge too much and the life of a writer is never one of abundant riches.

Now aged forty-two Jack had begun to write whilst at primary school; he had won his first poetry prize aged eleven but had then given up reading by the time he was eighteen. By then he had more adult pursuits to interest him; women, drinking, the usual. The years slowly turned in to decades and then, the ultimate horror, the woman he loved dumped him and he spiralled out of control and rudderless for a few years, unsure of who or what he was meant to do. It was then he was saved, books appeared again and he began devouring them; the usual brash, drunk geniuses of the last fifty years were his bag and he loved them. It wasn't until he moved to Brighton at the age of thirty-seven that he began to really want to write again. It had been a long time since his life was afflicted by so many horrors that he just felt compelled to deal with them this way; he began writing of lives in squalid, ramshackle buildings like the places he lived, of those moments where madness takes you under her spell and you do stupid things. The true horrors of everyday living that people could identify with, the things that were real for him and millions like him, but whatever you do don't call him a horror writer.

Jack writes out of necessity; his stories and poems are the only things keeping him sane after a life on the edge of society in which he knows he doesn't want to fit in. It is only when someone really lets go and give themselves over to the writing that they can become a real writer, one who writes from experience, one like Jack.

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