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HUMBLED MAN
~ A Poem by David Spicer ~

“A man’s got to know his limitations.”
(Detective Harry Callahan, *Magnum Force*)

A young Turk who guzzled
Bordeaux from a customized carafe,
I deified myself with a gallows humor
and despised huckleberries, twits,
knuckleheads, and smarmy pricks.
I loved aging Beats who recited scat
poems in jazzy smoke under club
lights. A myth in my mind,
I needed my hollow ego stroked,
alone and hungry at a cheap table
composing bad sonnets nobody read,
never working hard enough.
I was a minnow in the Headline
River, I admit, and traded loud
insults with smack-addled big-shot poets
at literary parties instead of reading
every poem I could find in libraries.
Betrayed by a lack of wisdom,
I sabotaged myself with beautiful
divorcees—after I slipped off their
camisoles on my unmade bed—
by whispering statements like
You’re not a poet or *You look*
tired, unaware that life is a contest
with one’s demons, and that prizes

elude competitors who crave them
too much. And the Turk? Old,
I lounge on the bluff, watch barges
and showboats travel the Headline
River, and write poems, waiting
for accolades that never arrive.

REDEMPTION
~ A Poem by Gary Beck ~

The state of the world
despite civilization,
war, famine, disease, climate change
destroys the lives of millions
threatens the lives of billions,
I lament my lack of power
to relieve suffering, save the lost,
yet somehow I persevere,
try to be of good cheer,
sustained for a moment
watching children at play.

TWO BOYS FIND A GUN IN THEIR DAD'S CLOSET
~ A Poem by John Grey ~

first they checked
the gun was empty,
then they took turns
pointing it at each other
and pulling the trigger;
one said "bang",
the other fell backward
their sister came in
and said they were stupid
and should put the gun back
where they found it
or she'd tell dad;
one pressed the gun
against her cheek,
the other screamed
"shoot her";
"it's cold" she said,
without specifying
whether she meant
the barrel or the sentiment.

HOME INVASION ENCORE ~ A Poem by Donal Mahoney ~

This time Wilma
is ready for the bastards
jimmying her front door,
coming back for more.
The first time she was asleep,
the bedroom light on,
the Bible open at her side
to John, Chapter 6,
“Do this in remembrance of me.”
Tonight, however,
Wilma’s lying on the couch
with the lights out,
the rosary in one hand,
her late husband’s pistol
cocked in the other.
Jack taught her how to use it
when she was a bride
and tonight she will pray
for the men now
coming through the door
and then she will use it
in remembrance of Jack
and call the police.
With all the commotion,
she’ll probably miss Mass
but it’s a weekday,
no sin involved.

SOLO BOXING
~ A Poem by Michael Lee Johnson ~

Solo boxing, past midnight,
tugging emotions out of memories embedded,
tossing dice, reliving vices, revisiting affairs,
playing solitaire-marathon night,
hopscotch player, toss the rock,
shots of Bourbon.

THE CHIC CAFE
~ A Poem by Dave Benson ~

He peers in the window
the chic cafe is full
his stomach is empty
aromas of grilled meat
poor from under the door
the patrons are merry
a man and woman at a table
the man sweetens his coffee
his lips say something
the woman chortles
she takes a bite of cake
chews with her eyes closed
the window laughs at him
his pockets are empty
empty is long
long hair and beard
his shoes torn holes
his clothes dirty
his coat tattered
the wind cold
his stomach is empty
the chic cafe is full
he shuffles away

TAKE OFF YOUR CLOTHES
~ A Poem by Michael H. Brownstein ~

We do the expected work of hard houses and jitneys
our knees stained, hands cut, lungs graying to black
We small talk, we barroom banter with hotties.
In the summer we do not go to the beach,
in the winter we do not sit on couches
watching bad cable movies. We write country,
we think work, we full ourselves with the ink of work.

Why is this poem about getting naked?

Hey, we yell to the woman in her kitchen,
Get me another beer. At the corner bar we ask,
Another round. In the convenient liquor store,
we say, Can you give me a six pack. I'm good for it.
I'll pay you on Friday. Hey, we yell to the woman
in our kitchen, Get me another beer. I'm thirsty. I worked.

EVOLUTION OF GRIEF
~ A Poem by David Lohery ~

I am a beached wail,
a lonesome dove without wings,
a caged hamster who's gnawed away
its paw.

I haven't done anything for which
I can be blamed. I'm like an anorexic
who's trying to disappear. Fifty
more pounds and I won't be able to stand.

I'd do anything to avoid responsibility.
I'd even give up sex. Better to be
repellent than to risk rejection.
Better to withdraw than be ignored.

Get out before someone pulls the alarm,
like a hoodlum fleeing through
the kitchen to avoid arrest.
I'll have to learn to pee sitting down.

Better to starve than to be fulfilled.
When you get too small to be loved,
you can call yourself a worm. You'll be
like a frog, too weak to croak.

A million years on, you'll develop
the ability to spit blood. Your glistening
flesh will be toxic. You will be left alone at last.
You will finally have the rock all to yourself.

**EPHRAM PRATT CONSIDERS THE PHONE CALLS HE
NEVER MADE**

~ A Poem by Jack E. Lorts ~

The phone calls
he never made

were the ones
he never made;

they were the hardest,
the ones he meant to,

but didn't, couldn't,
or just postponed forever.

In them,
he heard sirens,

dial tones in impossible keys,
the sound of bubbles

sinking slowly
into the seas,

dancing on the stilts
of Buddha,

knowing nothing of
the pageantry of bliss.

It is what occurs
during the summer solstice,

the time when calls
from the other seasons

don't get answered,
but are silenced forever

by the invisible doors
of another childhood.

HIDDEN CORNERS
~ A Poem by Gabriella Garofalo ~

No children allowed—
Look, sometimes I chance on her
In the hidden corners of the rink
Where art dealers, queers, pushers
Haggle over bodies, paintings, dope
And souls whirl around or crouch
To gut through the night—
So damn hard to get
The right spot, the right time—
Stop it crissake, it's just a trap,
See the skinny cat from no man's land
Trapped by the city's greedy lights?
I know her story, whenever a creep
Ogles her it's always wise to say yes
And get it done fast in a motel,
Then off to hide from the drizzle,
Sod it, the cafe nearby the coach stop opens at six,
What a mean time, running like hell for a shelter,
She's learned the ropes of course, all of them—
If only she could retrieve the old tunes,
Those night rhythms you mustn't screw up with,
If only she could retrieve them
And those bloody lights stopped banging her mind—
Was it her fault? No, when life fires you
Hunger shuts down and her mind's blue wires
Make her blow up your fingers,
How many lost their hands or ate her lips

Unwary that her teeth could bite strong and fast,
Such a bloody mess—
Anyway, game over, time to get ready
For the spots where people hide and meet,
Cheer up, she'll fret about her soul
Early in the morn, when wind and Rupture
Are on her way, she'll do in divided selves,
Nuts and carve-ups, all quick and neat.
Bless her soul, Granny would sigh 'Grief is so very cheap'—
So you don't care, not in the hidden corners,
Where you bet on beauty and lose, I'm afraid.

THREE POEMS by Christopher Barnes

*

LORD BYRON SCROLLS TV LISTINGS

<i>Far, dark, along</i>	the large-it ditchwater sparkles in this caper
<i>The shadows</i>	natch are maladjusted, trumped-up
<i>Start on the fisher's</i>	woe-talked face, soap-dodged, bristly
<i>Of island-pirate</i>	aggro in dogsbreath hand-me-downs
<i>And fearful</i>	the chap-esse shows mercy to hush-hush
<i>He shuns</i>	her resolve in caveman frowns

Glossary of slang:

Large-It: Behave Boisterously; *Natch*: Naturally; *Soap-Dodged*: Dirty; *Chap-esse*: Woman.

*

LORD BYRON OPENS SPAM

<i>Slight are the outward signs</i>	the trapdoor darkens boo-booable
<i>Within— within—</i>	a lure that's viral, a poisoning collapse
<i>Love shows all</i>	are diddled, when grasping is streamed
<i>Betray no further</i>	this error-mist any birdbath could gutter
<i>That lip's least curl</i>	snarls, not in the reflection of rosebuds

Glossary of slang:

Birdbath: Silly Person.

*

LORD BYRON SIGNS AN ONLINE PETITION AGAINST CENSORSHIP

Such is my name and the fittingness to pore on a schmeckle is mine
Confessor anorak of cramped ideas, you're drabbie, pesky
I breathe the bin-diving swill queer authors fuse
And thank thee not to blatherskite your untaught state
This glazing eye Specsavers each aromatic phrase
Then lay me dreaming, used-condom style, into fervent night

Glossary of slang:

Schmeckle: Penis; *Anorak*: Studious Person; *Drabbie*: Frump; *Bin-Diving*: Freegan; *Blatherskite*: Boastful.

LITTLE BOY'S TEARS
~ A Prose Piece by Jerry Vilhotti ~

While I was in their midst—my mother had to add that all the other walls my father had built on the street looked better than his own wall which was really true in that my father took great pride in his work which he did for other people. This was when he went into his Cincinnati Reds pitcher's Ewell Blackwell's windup sending his half full cup of coffee against our white kitchen wall; creating an image that looked like a group of people looking at us with distorted shocked expressions. I cried my ten year old tears which made them stop fighting.

NODICE

~ A Prose Piece by William C. Blome ~

I had occasion later in my travel to ask the girl's parents how long she'd been bouncing up and down like that, and the neatly-bearded dad (whom I had already dubbed "Van Dyck Valiant" when I spotted him earlier in the club car) would only say she had started two and a half years ago, and that as long as her feet felt something solid beneath them, she kept on bouncing. The girl's mother added that unless someone steered her forward—kind of positioned her and then released her in a particular direction—she seemed to prefer to stay fixed in place and to keep doing her bouncing that way.

With the kind of cruelty I've regrettably been told comes as natural to me as soft sheets of evening rain do to Rio, I wondered out loud to Van Dyck Valiant and his woman what might happen to the girl and her bouncing if someone were paid a princely sum to locate the girl at a given point in time, observe her carefully for awhile and project what her likely path of immediate travel was eventually going to be, and then go out ahead of her and crouch down as nearly as possible into insignificance so that he or she (if they had guessed correctly) would be in a sure position to trip the shit out of the little up-and-down princess. Didn't this seem to be a worthwhile and even, perhaps, a suggested best-practice for ending a St. Vitus Dance? And might not, oh just might not, the physical trauma so engendered be sufficient to jolt the bouncing out of and away from the girl (and her psyche) entirely, once and for all?

Well, Van Dyck Valiant was immediately thumbs up and all-in on the idea and eager to give it a try, but mama looked me up and down as if I'd suggested something like disrobing her daughter and then sniffing the little bouncer's panties nonstop for an indefinite length of time. She came at me with "O just what the hell you proposin', jackanapes? You want us to consider damaging our treasure in order to maybe get her to stop this motherfuckin' hoppin', and to do it by forcing her to take a very nasty spill? Well, no dice, buddy boy, no dice. No dice, you animal, no dice!"

Of course I couldn't help but notice she uttered nary a word to her husband, who had, as I related but a moment ago, heard me out and been quite warm to my thinking. However, I certainly wasn't going to press things. The mother's nasty opposition was really all it took that from then on, we each jostled along our separate way inside the train.

PUNK ROCK POSEUR

~ A Short Story by Bradford Middleton ~

The night was running out of control but for Jack Thompson that was nothing new. Most of his adult life had been running out of control but this moment felt as if he was on the edge of something really strange; the strangest thing in a life dominated by strangeness.

What the fuck's up? Jack thought to himself as he looked up from his drinks and around the bar. He frequented the corner stool and despite the fear that was growing in his mind it all seemed pretty normal but then his paranoia thought that this normality was almost too normal, as if something inexplicably bad was just about to happen.

He looked back at his drinks and picked up the double whisky and downed it in one quick move before gesticulating to Amy, the bargirl, that he'd like another. She whirled into action and presented it to him just as he'd located his wallet in his jeans pocket.

"Are you alright?" she asked as he handed her the kings' ransom a drink cost in this town.

"I think so, just got an odd feeling something's about to happen..."

"Oh no, don't say that Jack," she retorted remembering the last time Jack had uttered those words on a shift she was working. That night had descended into a chaotic and violent crescendo of broken glass and broken bones with police cars and ambulances dominating the street outside.

As the door squeaked open Jack turned and suddenly he knew why he'd had the horrible feeling in his gut. A poseur wearing a Black Flag t-shirt walked in, his earlobes were as wide as the channel at the bottom of the road and his jeans so tight they should have crushed his nuts.

"Oh shit, here we go," Jack mumbled to no one in particular.

"Have you got any flavoured cider drinks?" the poseur asked Amy causing her to frown and list off all of them.

Jack took in the scene and knew immediately that this clown didn't have a clue about anything, let alone Black Flag, the greatest punk band to have ever stridden the planet. After he ordered a couple of drinks for himself and his ever so beautiful girlfriend Jack turned to him.

"So you like Black Flag yeah?"

"Oh yah, I do" was the very posh response.

"What's your favourite record of theirs then?"

"Oh, erm... I don't know there are so many!"

"Really, well is it Damaged, My War, The First Four Years?"

"Oh yeah, I love all of them!"

"Well how about Salad Days?"

"Oh that's the best..."

"You fucking fake, I'm doing my bit in my own Black Flag way to reclaim my band from fuckers like you. Bet you got your t-shirt right out of Primark didn't you or was it some retro wank shop?"

Jack didn't wait for the reply as his fist clenched before unleashing a pile-driver of a hit right into the poseurs' face.

"Here we go again," Amy said.

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