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**SOMETIMES WHEN YOU'RE DEAD
YOU'RE SO DEAD
~ A Poem by Gale Acuff ~**

you never live again, resurrection
be damned and maybe that's what Hell is, all
I know is when I die I'll learn what's what,
that's what they say at church and Sunday School
and maybe they're right but right or wrong there's
no way in the Afterlife to let folks
know who are still alive what the score is,
maybe that's why I'm afraid of death when
I'm afraid of it that is, when it's not
my friend, which is most of the time save for
Halloween and Christmas and Easter, death
for those holidays seems to work out well
even though I hate it when life comes to
that. I forget who died on Christmas Day.

A FIVE FROM A BLACK BOWLER HAT
~ A Poetic Sequence by Mark Goodwin ~

1

each step round
a bowler's

rim is a

moment men
take leaves home

so a whole

journey round
a rim gives

a book thick

as a keen
beak is thin

2

to rise with trees
around one's camp

is to be greeted
by years ringed

3

by wood

every man has a girl
sure as wood and

ringed by flesh
in his core

3

a glade
some shapes
a breeze
& fragrance

are not

a hole
some loss
a hat
& a touch

are not even more

4

dance to drip
crack twigs

kiss to taste
names eva

porate

4

open a fold
fill a crease

swing a glint
feel an axe

stand back

5

someone upturned
a black bowler

and left it in a woods
someone else
let their bowels fill

a hat's void

someone beyond a woods
will wear one day's
aching on their sleeve

something in a woods
one day will wear

someone's shit

FRAGMENTS 26-30
~ A Poetic Sequence by Christopher Barnes ~

26

Lowlands — Cimmerian nostalgia.
Photo-electric cells balanced.
“Gaffer’s mishandling of workforce ...”
Rocking chair natterjack basks.

27

Coquette-ish anthem for gone-to-seed hour.
Range of tableau positioned.
“Feet-dragging soundings into bullying.”
Missing — trekkers at daybreak.

28

Defenestration, legroom, courtyard.
Subsidiary blind possesses a gap.
“Canvas how they would transfer.”
Disarming sapor, aromatic.

29

Corrigible tepidity of pool.
Juxtaposing accruing opening.
“Business Secretary underlines.”
Evidence-free, timeless.

30

Mouth-watering grapes.
Bang-on composition, no parallax error.
“Shrillness for measures.”
Tide scours profiles, aspects.

FOUR POEMS by Michael Lee Johnson

*

GHOST I AM

Here is a private hut
staring at me,
twigs & branches
over the top—
naked & alone.
I respond to an old 60s doo-wop
song: In the Still of the Night
Fred Parris and The Satins.

Storms are written in narratives,
old ears closed to a full hearing.
I'm but a shelter cringing.
In age, nightmare pre-warned redemption.
Let's call it the Jesus factor,
not LGBT symbols in Biden's world.
I lost my way close to the end.
Here is this shelter in heaven
poetry imagined spaces
prematurely still not all the words fit,
in childhood in abuse
lack of reason for bruises
rough hills, carp that didn't bite,
and Schwinn bike rides

flat tires, chains fall off, spokes collapse—
this thunder, those storms.

Find me a thumbnail
image of myself in centuries of dust.
Stand weakened by nature
of change glossed over, sealed.
Archives.
Old men, like a luxurious battery,
die hard, but with years, they
too, fade away.

*

CALIFORNIA SUMMER

Coastal warm breeze
off Santa Monica, California
the sun turns salt
shaker upside down
and it rains white smog, a humid mist.
No thunder, no lightening,
nothing else to do
except for sashay
forward into liquid
and swim
into eternal days
like this.

*

FOUR LEAF CLOVER

I found your life smiling
inside a four-leaf clover.
Here you hibernate in sin.
You were dancing in the orange fields of the sun.
You lock into your history, your past, withdrawal,
taste honeycomb, then cow salt lick.
All your life, you have danced in your soft shoes.
Find free lottery tickets in the pockets of poor men and strangers.
Numbers rhyme like winners, but they are just losers.
Positive numbers tug like gray blankets, poor horses coming in 1st.
Private angry walls; desperate is the night.
You control intellect, josses men.
You take them in, push them out,
circle them with silliness.
Everything turns indigo blue in grief.
I hear your voice, fragmented words in thunder.
An actress buried in degrees of lousy weather and blindness.
I leave you alone, wander the prairie path by myself.
Pray for wildflowers, the simple types. No one cares.
Purple colors, false colors, hibiscus on guard,
lilacs are freedom seekers, now no howls in death.
You are the cookie crumble of my dreams.
Three marriages in the past.
I hear you knocking my walls down, heaven stars creating dreams.
Once beautiful in the rainbow sun, my face, even snow
now cast in banners, blank, fire, and flames.

*

CASKET OF LOVE

This moon, clinging to a cloudless sky,
offers the light by which we love.
In this park, grass knees high, tickling bare feet,
offers the place we pass pleasant smiles.
Sir Winston Churchill would have
saluted the stately manner this fog lifts,
marching in time across this pond
layering its ghostly body over us
cuddled by the water's edge,
as if we are burdened by this sealed
casket called love.
Frogs in the marsh, crickets beneath the crocuses
trumpet the last farewell.
A flock of Canadian geese flies overhead
in military V formation.
Yet how lively your lips tremble
against my skin in a manner no
sane soldier dare deny.

GETTING THE JOB DONE

~ A Short Story by Bradford Middleton ~

The blitzkrieg bop gets Frank awake but what truly startles him is the sight of a beautiful woman, naked and laying next to him as if it were just any other morning in his decidedly unnormal life. You see with Frank's life, well honestly, it's best if you don't ask any questions about, well, anything really except to say that this isn't usual. He's had this bed a fair while and yet this was the first woman to spend the night. Right now though he almost doesn't care about how long it had been, all that concerns him is who she is, and how in the hell did he meet such a divine looking creature? His mind is telling him that the night before he hadn't even left his flat but that, well that, couldn't be right. She begins to squirm under his sheets as Frank pulls on a clean vest and boxers, walking over to his kitchen where he starts up the coffee. As it whirs into action his sheets flutter some more but suddenly his attention is taken when his phone calls for attention.

'Morning boss,' he says on picking-up before taking notes on what jobs need doing that day and as he hangs up the phone a beautiful face finally appears from under the sheets.

"Morning lover," she says, immediately reaching out for a handbag sat on the floor by the bed. When she pulls a clear little baggie from within Frank's memory whizzes and his mind suddenly fills with images from the night before. The drinks, the lines, the visits to the toilet to partake of another dose, damn it's all coming back now.

"Want some?" she asks whilst preparing her first fix of just another day.

"No thanks lover, tons to do today ..."

"Well trust me this will help you get lots done," she responds before bursting into laughter.

"No I really better not ... it's been too long and I used to have a bit of a problem if that's what I think it is!" he confesses remembering vaguely those youthful misadventures.

“Well do you want to get back in here and ravage me some more?” she says relaxing back on the bed.

“Oh god you know I do but, dammit, shit to be done. I can’t go upsetting my boss and he’s got a list of things for me to do today as long as your arm ... a whole host of shit is all I got on my agenda today but look ... we got to do this again!”

“Sure we have,” she responds as she pulls the cover free of her beautiful body and her nakedness sends Frank right on over and deep into her one last time, well for this morning at least.

“Fuck baby, now you really got to be going but don’t forget to leave your number on your way out,” he tells her as he collapses back into his pit.

“OK lover but look you better call me. Don’t forget I know where you live!” she responds climbing from the bed and immediately pulling her panties off the floor, no doubt lost in last nights’ feast of perversion, and over her pert arse. She walks around the room pulling clothes off the floor before dressing and as she walks towards the door she pauses, scribbling on a rogue piece of paper resting on his kitchen table.

“You better call me!” she says as she pushes his door open and gone for now.

“You know I will,” he responds finally climbing from his pit and reaching for his boxers and as he walks over to his kitchen table he realises his coffee must be really done by now. Grabbing the piece of paper a smile grows across his face as he spies the eleven-digit number and a name written with a little ‘x’ underneath.

With her gone he begins his day just how he has thousands before; a strong mug of coffee and a big fat joint that’ll help propel him towards the greasy spoon where he’ll devour his favourite breakfast. There he’ll work out his plan, or at least that’s what he’ll tell himself, but he already knows he’ll leave there and hit the pub almost immediately. He’ll need a drink, or maybe twelve if that’s what it takes, to do the job his boss wants tonight and soon he’s on it.

“I’ll get a pint and a double of the usual please Amy,” and as the first round goes down he knows it’s going to take plenty to get him moving today but eventually, after several long hours, he’s ready.

Frank walks north heading towards the land of multi-million pound houses and expensive cars, a world-away from his life, and eventually he spies a sign announcing the street and as he walks on up to number six he knows exactly what he’s got to do. He rings the doorbell and waits.

“Oh lover, you came!” is not the greeting he expected and to suddenly be stood in front of his lover of only a few hours before shocks him but he knows.

“Stella Jacobi?” he asks.

“Yes ... Frank?” she responds, almost sensing that something is wrong.

“Daughter of Leon, the oil tycoon?”

“Yes, but what about ... Daddy?” she asks him.

“I’m sorry Stella, it’s just my job,” and suddenly his big gun is against her temple and the safety is off.

“Frank, lover ...” she begins to beg as a tear falls onto her cheek. He responds by pulling the trigger and as her blood covers the expensive carpet Frank merely turns and makes his way back to the street and off out of this rich folks’ hell and back to the warm confines of his favourite bar.

“I’ll have a double-double tonight,” he tells Hunter the young guy running the bar and he knows it’s going to be a long session, it’ll have to be after that kind of day.

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