

The BIOLUMINESCENT Woman

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Siamese Twins at the Ohio State Fair

They don't do it any more,
provide peeks at freaks for seventy five cents
as a feature of the midway experience.

In 1965 by friend Bob and me
tiptoed into a tent and saw two girls
older than us and not Siamese,
connected at the forehead,
languidly paging through a single issue
of Little Lulu.

One of them, the larger one,
was chewing gum

Bob and I tumbled down the out ramp.

We were such sarcastic, opinionated boys.

But we did not speak again

for twenty five minutes.

Aristotle, Chaplin And Matrimony

THE PHILOSOPHER believed men should marry at age 37 and women at 18.

By coincidence, he was 37 when he married, and his young bride 18.

And that is how philosophy works.

THE FILM STAR seduced young girls, then paid their mothers to go away.

One girl's mother stood firm, and she became his second wife.

And that is the essence of business.

When I Worked at Pickwick Books

Pickwick Books was the biggest bookstore west of Chicago, three stories tall on Hollywood Boulevard, a clock from Graumann's Chinese.

A clerk there opened his wallet and unfolded a cut page of a sonnet he had published in The Southern Review. Don't tell me I'm not a published poet," he said.

Yeesh, I thought, and I made a vow to never submit to The Southern Review.

Beau and the Bear

Our standard poodle Beau believed himself to be the acme of all nature had made, bred to look down upon all other creatures.

So when we tied him to a picnic table and went inside the trailer to nap, and left him there when a bear passed through, his attitude evolved.

No more the lordly, ungrateful snot, the new Beau understood his place in the scheme and was a better dog for the understanding.

But it took an entire afternoon of trembling and hyperventilation and contemplation of what he had momentarily locked eyes with to arrive at that understanding.

Chango by the Bay

That is the popular name of the bird though it also goes by Mozambique and the Greater Antilles Grackle, on account of its blackness, with a dotted white eye and a tail that expands asymmetrically for balance and display. This bird makes meals at a seaside eatery impossible. Swoosh it away, it defers, then comes right back. Whatever you are eating it expects its fair share of. He will get your dinner because he knows that you are the anomaly at this fine establishment that has been shooshing the sands for ten hundred million years.

The Puppy in the Pup Tent

You can't see her but you can hear her crying nonstop inside the nylon bag, hour after hour. Imprisoned by zippers, cut off from all that she loves, it is no disgrace to her to fill your day with yapping.

Giving the Boa Her Shot

A serpent's skin is engineered like chain mail. There are no chinks or portals to enter by. So when you place a needle between its scales and push, there is no give and then there is as you pierce the rind and the sick, discouraged creature, reminded of what is at stake, suddenly comes to life and roils in distress, its coils articulate like a dancing knot, reflexively tying and untying itself.

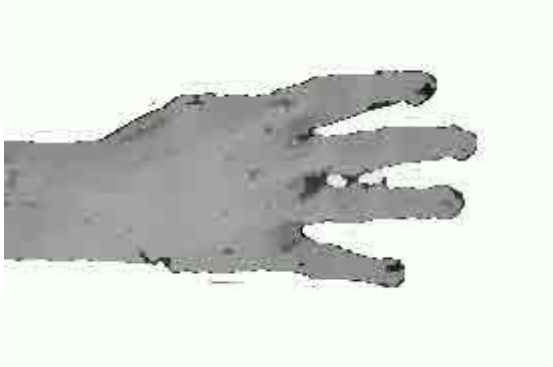
Nature

We came upon a mule deer, dazed, on the Wyoming chaparral. I held your arm to hold you back because something about it seemed wrong. Stout and red, with a concerned ridge above its eyes, it had the countenance of disease, We turned to go the other way and it clopped after us, not letting us give it the slip, down the crumbly path, placing all its hopes upon our appearance. Wreathed in a halo of flies, encamped by a division of ticks, and a stick foam oozing from its lips. Soon we were stumbling down the graveled slope to escape this thing of nature.

Subject Matter

My wife is writing a book and she is in it and I am in it and our children are in it too.

I feel like going door to door to everyone I have ever described in words, and apologizing.



The Complicated E

I hold out my hand, I tuck in my thumb, the four fingers make a complicated E. It is four hatchlings singing for the dangling grub. It is four butterflies dreaming of the life that is to come. It is the tail feathers of a chicken hawk, grasping a poor mouse. They are the four teats on a full bag of cow, offering suck to the hungry. They are a fan of carrots, hanging from a stand. They are four tube socks clothes-pinned to a line. It is a kind of a rake with which I maintain your lovely grounds. It is a hexagram signifying a well-plowed field.

It is the comb of the cock, aroused by the dawn. It is two brides and two grooms, they are dashing up the stairs. It is a naked heart, gasping in your hand.

Groucho in Paradise

I'd like to thank the academy but first they have to make me feel grateful.

I'd say you are an angel sent down from heaven but first explain the soot on your wings.

I asked the clerk at the desk for a bill of attainder. Whether Bill ever attained her is anyone's guess.

I throw myself at the feet of mercy. If that doesn't do I'll toss in my suitcase, too.

Catching the Cannonball

Never rush to greet it. It may seem bold but results are not encouraging. The opposite approach works better, where you turn and run and hope your speed and its speed are equal, and you can catch it softly in your arms. Known as the Hail Mary play, it constitutes a prayer because your top speed is about 18 mph and the shot is barreling toward you at about 250 mph. Physics does not provide much latitude. Then there are the clever few who imagine they can zig or zag their way sidestepping the gathering ball. This approach arises from a basic misunderstanding about cannonballs. They are not random events to be dismissed the way a matador brushes the raging bull aside. This cannonball was fired the moment you were born and it knows precisely where you will be standing. My best advice is to stare it down, to see it glowing and growing in size and find meaning in this fateful convergence.

Two Baseballs

One time, at the stadium with friends, a foul ball came my way, hit by Scott Leius, a journeyman third baseman for the Twins. I put out my hand and the ball went to it. I looked around and saw two boys, about nine, and handed the ball to them, even though I had a son of my own, about their age, back home. These boys saw the arc of the ball coming toward us, and it would mean more to them.

* * *

Ten years later Jon and I have invited a visitor from Brazil, Cesar, to a game. Our seats are in foul territory in right field. A player hits a fungo ball and its rises is a soft trajectory to us. Jon catches the ball, and without a moment of hesitation, places it in Cesar's hand.

When I Dash Off a Poem

I throw down the ballpoint and say,

Take that!

You ignorant unaware world,

you thought you were complete

but I have added to you.

I have done my insolent dance

around your staid sombrero.

I snap my fingers over my shoulder and say

Take that, you who thought we were done.

The Magus

There was a fly in my soup and I spoke to it: "Are you a spirit sent to instruct me?"

"No," it whispered, "I am a wizard, listening in on the lives of everyday people, so that I may share my insights with the world."

So I ate him.

I am going to read you a familiar poem and then tell you its new title:

Three blind mice, see how they run.
They all ran after the farmer's wife,
who cut off their tails with a carving knife.
Have you ever seen such a sight in your life
as three blind mice?

And the new title of the poem is:

**Have You Ever Heard Such a Poem
Told to Small Children for 400 Years?**

Little Dog of Maunabo

You are no cutie. Now you are no bigger than a Jack Russell, but what are you exactly? You have been bred down from too many street dogs. A dam with bright black spots has lost ground to a sire ambiguously gray. Your face has been tattered by too many scraps. One ear flips up, one down. Your balls are in evidence, two garbage cans clanging between your knobby legs.

Why do I get to eat, little fellow, while you lick your chops emphatically, communicating everything there is about you, “I am a hungry little dog.”

Why do I get to eat and eat, I eat so much it hurts my health, and each day for you is a battle and a quest.

If I feed you you will come to my hosts' door every day expecting more, and I know these people, they have found a way to live without torment and they have a dog of their own who would probably kill you, and I don't blame him, it's the world we live in.

Little dog I would like to take you to a landfill nearby where you can lick the yogurt containers dry and swallow the meat that no one wants, and grow strong and fat on our waste, except I know it is a crowded place.

Thought

We think we can put away the sorrows of our own lives by attending to the sorrows of others. My guess is we are right.

Women

Women are like elephants, fascinating to look at but the devil to maintain.

Oh Dad

I have done everything in my life so that you would notice. I wrote books, and autographed them “with love.” I won prizes, I was written up in numerous newspapers, I sent generous gifts, including a set of clubs and complete Sinatra. I came to visit and praised the life you chose to live, and cited the uphill odds against you, all these things hoping you would tell me you were sorry for leaving us that way, all so you would miss me, but I don't think that you did.

The Abominable Snowman

He seemed a cheery soul with his stovepipe hat
and corncob pipe,
standing on the terrace on Ashland Avenue,
until you saw his eyes and mouth were made
from frozen sticks of dog poop.

Palms

A palm like a palm, saying Talk to the hand.

A palm that is really made out of birds, as if all the changa birds ascend at once and fly the tree away.

The palms that are like skyrocket blasts exploding in the air.

A palm in a gale like a mime walking into the wind.

A palm with hairy coconuts embedded in its crux.

The endless trunk of a royal palm like a fashion glove pulled up to the shoulder, rising up to the sky, disappearing in clouds.

The Red Noodle

When you see the red noodle atop the turkey buzzard's head, and the bird appears to be suspended in space, don't be like the small child in the cradle, swatting at the mobile. This is a sign to you. It is saying it's time to get up from the hammock you have spent all morning in, and move around a little.

The Men

They want approval, a soft hand cradling their heated heads,
still damp from too much play, a kiss on each temple and
encouraging words.

But what do they want?

They want your company on Saturday afternoons, your reliable
smiles and the knowledge that you know.

But what do they want?

They want to touch the skin with the backs of their hands, they
want to kiss your lips and cheeks, to suck your breasts, to bury
their faces in every rift and valley.

But what do they want?

They want to extinguish themselves, their dying power dousing
the stars and the moon.

But what do they want?

They want to get away and hum their solitary song, wander
the plains, kicking the dirt – until they are strong again

The Return Stroke

Few of us see it this way
But when lightning occurs –
I won't say "strikes" –
It does not appear in the clouds
And then shoot down,
the way our minds tell us it does.
Something does strike, called the leader,
but we do not see it
and it does not light up.
But then, from the ground,
A visible bolt shoots up into the sky.
This is known as the return stroke,
It is the earth talking back, it is
returning the sudden energy

to the storm.

The weather supplies the electricity

But we supply the light.

Laugh Like a German Officer

*from a 1911 account of a lieutenant colonel
of the Death's Head regiment of Hussars*

I hear the way you laugh and I do not like it at all.

It pains me to hear you reduced to sniggers, titters or guffaws.

There is one and only one way a German officer can properly laugh:

short, sharp and manly.

Like this: “Ha!”

Did you hear how I did that? “Ha!”

Now repeat after me: “Ha! Ha!”

That is how we are to laugh from this point forward.

No other form of laughing will be accepted.

Now I want to hear you practice it that way. Come now: One, two three, “Ha!”

Come along there, you can do better than that.

I want you to shout it lustily, and with explosive, masculine mirth.

Then be done with the mirth. Do not reflect on the object of your amusement.

Now I want you to practice among yourselves!

It is time to be serious again.

Disposing of the Body

We begin as flower-fluff flushed by a breeze,
that alights in one of these trunklike things.

Allegedly full of science and wonderful
but basically leaden and unable to fly.

And how unhappy we are at the beginning
when poop is stuck to us

and no one rushes to our assistance,
and then, at the end, same thing

In between we master the thing
and beat it to obtain acceptable performance

It seems to want a relationship with us
with all that waving and moaning

It does not seem to fully appreciate
how disgusting it is

Nighttimes we abandon it. smacking
its rubbery lips, to go dreaming

There are those who become attached
and talk to it on long walks

Better to ride till it breaks down and dies
and wait till the next one comes by

Hedge Fund Manager

I met an old beggar, sitting in a hedge, with a coffee can heavy with centavos.

His distinguishing feature was a crippled arm, broken at the wrist at birth, his shriveled thumb and fingers gripping his elbow.

Coming from a family of beggars, the infirmity was seen as a sign of favor that there was no height he could not attain.

Aubergine

We call it eggplant, an interesting term
But confusing because the vegetable
May be vaguely egg-shaped
But it tastes nothing like an egg
And unlike any egg you would bite into
It is purple.

But aubergine, the word defines
The luscious taut curve of the fruit,
The gleaming countenance,
The color you could fall into,
And down and down and down,
And the taste, so complex,
With hints of grain and grass
and sour and sweet,

like a meadow of flowers
blowing.

The Bioluminescent Woman

Out on Mosquito Bay under a grinning half moon

The oars of the kayaks flash brilliantly

These are the bioluminescent waters of Vieques
reportedly the shiniest of its kind in the world

But tonight, which is St. Patrick's Night,
the moon is too bright for the full effect

So Rachel heaves herself over the edge
and slides into the water said to be populated

by bull sharks and hammerheads

but she transforms into a flashing angel

lighting up the area around her,
treading water like an aquatic butterfly

That's my bioluminescent woman
down there, an amazement

to those who did not know her



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