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**What Every Poem is Trying to Tell You ~ William Taylor Jr.**

Over wine the famous old poet  
tells me how all he can think of anymore  
is the fact of his own death.

It dogs him through his waking hours  
and keeps him from sleep.

I'm 20 years behind him  
and already spend too many hours  
contemplating the looming  
eternity in which I will not exist.

It's what every poem is trying to tell you.

It's why we drink and fornicate  
and go to church,

why we fall in love with apathetic bartenders  
and assign meaning to the alignment of the stars.

It's why we read Dostoevsky and Camus

and travel to faraway places  
with exotic buildings and food,

why we nod to ourselves reassuringly  
when we read that 56 is the new 37

and scour the internet  
for something to make us  
bigger and wiser than death,

desperate for any distraction  
from the coming dark

and the old poet's  
haunted dreams.

**Sounds Like  
Brian Rosenberger**

Simple and to the point.  
Did anyone hear a woman screaming,  
Like she was being killed or murdered? Around noon today?  
I heard it from my backyard but could not pinpoint the direction.  
I drove around the subdivision for about 5 minutes.  
The screams stopped.

The responses:

I only heard the fucking leaf-blowers.  
Probably got their cable bill.  
Might have been a fox. They sound like a woman screaming.  
Might have been a bobcat. They sound like a woman screeching.  
Maybe an owl? But not likely during the daytime.  
Probably the brats at 1409 Stonebrook. They never shut up.  
Maybe a Jehovah's Witnesses at the wrong house,  
Maybe a coyote, a T-Rex, or Bigfoot? It's mating season.

Did you call the police? Did you call 911?

Someone did.  
Too late.

Sometimes what sounds like a woman screaming  
Is a woman screaming.

**The Voyeur Inside**  
**Vandana Kumar**

I remember a locked door  
Against which a ten-year-old girl  
Pressed her entire frame  
A little above keyhole height  
The first time  
She heard her parents do things  
The first time she heard  
The mother moan  
And not in pain

The moaning ended  
The image lingered

Today the girl sits  
And watches a pregnant neighbour  
Wondering what her ultrasound looks like  
If it's a 'Rosemary's Baby'  
Growing inside

Another house to the left  
Has this woman in her early thirties  
A Belle De Jour  
Husband slouched with briefcase  
Unsuspecting  
In his 9 to 5 routine

The voyeur hasn't left me  
The seeds, too deep inside  
The ennui of our times  
When every subway loaf  
Across the globe  
Is precisely  
The same size

**My Mom Called Me a Son of a Bitch**  
**Ronan Barbour**

seven German beers and 10mg in  
I suddenly remember  
that my Mom called me a Son of a Bitch  
once  
another beer and she messages me  
how r u?  
we just arrived  
in Vegas  
I suddenly remember  
and call her  
to wish her  
Happy Birthday

**SHOW ME DEM TIDDIES ~ John Tustin**

I was really drunk  
and I told her SHOW ME DEM TIDDIES  
and she just laughed  
a nervous laugh –  
uncomfortable  
but aware that I was harmless.  
She didn't say no  
but it obviously wasn't  
a yes.

We were alone in her place,  
in the kitchen.  
She was drinking  
but she wasn't drunk.  
I tried to compose myself  
but then I said it again:

COME ON, I said,  
SHOW ME DEM TIDDIES,  
I JUST WANNA SEE EM  
and that time  
she sighed  
and lifted up her shirt,  
removed her bra,  
showing me dem tiddies.

I stared at them,  
a drunk attempt to memorize them.  
I really liked them  
and I told her so.

As she began to put them away  
I wanted to ask her  
if I could touch them  
but, even as drunk as I was,  
I knew she had already  
done her good deed for the day.

**Half Way to Hades  
Alan Catlin**

She promised him “a fucking  
week of Christmas in hell,”  
but could only manage a few days  
of cooking voodoo chili so hot  
their dreams were soaked with  
sweat and blood, sheets torn into  
strips for open wounds they nursed on  
like succulents, passion fruits  
from lands so distant they might  
no longer exist. Nights, after hours  
of rough sex, they licked the desert  
heat from the short hairs on their  
necks, sipping liquid fire from  
the broken neck of Mescal Gusano  
Azul, drinking Tecate from chests  
half full of chips of dry ice, mist  
rising from within to form circles  
around the holes between clouds  
where a full moon burned,  
“I'll be your Maximilian, if you'll  
be my Carlota.” He said, in the collective  
voices of all the no-longer-conscious  
men they'd left behind along the road  
they'd traveled of dancing dust devils  
and death, “Shit, man, you take a girl  
out for an ice cream sundae and end up  
half way to Hades.”  
All the way, he thought, and then some.

**Jimmy**  
**Daniel S. Irwin**

Thursday night  
Sittin' 'round a table  
At Clete's bar, we all  
Try to come up with  
Ways to get some  
Extra money. Me?  
I'm sellin' a few things.  
Paul's workin' overtime.  
Poncho's just lookin'  
For the part-time job.  
Jimmy laughs at us  
And says gettin' by  
Ain't all that hard.  
"You want a Coke,  
Suck a dick. You want  
A pack of smokes,  
Suck a dick." None  
Of us were ever that  
Hard up that we even  
Considered following  
Jimmy's advice. But  
None of us had spent  
Twenty years in prison.

**Brittany**  
**Ryan Quinn Flanagan**

The cage door closes  
and he is someone's daughter,  
someone's Brittany,  
passed around like butter,  
bottom bunk bumping  
and lipstick for the pig,  
commissary property and certain  
protections on the yard;  
the guards running drugs and numbers,  
more favours in Favourland..  
our little Brittany sent to the infirmary  
to be sewn up brand new;  
no one likes a loosey goosey  
when all you have is Time.

she was sitting at the bar alone, save for an empty glass  
*what are you having* i asked, sliding into a seat a few down from hers  
 i caught myself staring at the black ink  
 that spilled down her collarbone  
*cosmopolitan* she said without looking over at me  
 crossing her ankles, she let one stiletto slide to the floor  
 my eyes were drawn to her slender toes, the neon lights  
 glinting off jet black polish

i flagged down the bartender and ordered a drink for each of us  
 when they arrived, she reached over and proffered hers for a clink  
 i noticed the pale circle on her third finger,  
 a faint indent where a shackle used to be

i felt emboldened by the vodka so i asked *you here alone*  
 only then did she turn and look straight at me  
*not anymore*

it took me aback – her directness – and i forgot my words  
 she smirked (a knowing smile) and turned back to her drink

she plucked the lime from the rim of her glass  
 and motioned it toward me  
*i love the tartness* she said,  
 and delicately wrapped her lips around the rind  
 her teeth tearing the flesh

we sipped in silence for several more minutes  
 then she asked *wanna get out of here*  
*where to* i glanced despondently out the rain-streaked windows

she stood up, and, downing the rest of her cosmo,  
 slipped her foot back in along the insole  
 she rocked her ankle back and forth,  
 gripping the edge of the bar for balance  
 i stared, transfixed, until her smooth, soft heel sunk home

*my room* she said as she turned and clicked away  
 i scrambled to leave a few bills for the tab before following after her

214 she called over her shoulder, leading me toward the elevators

i met her in the bay and attempted to join her in the lift  
 but she placed a firm palm against my chest  
*you take the stairs* she said as her fingers flexed,  
 surprising me with their strength  
 i backed up a step, the doors closed between us,  
 and i booked it for the stairwell

on my way up i loosened my tie and untucked my shirt  
 shook myself out of my blazer  
 tossing it over one shoulder, i found her door, and knocking,  
 found it was open for me

i stepped through the threshold and took in the suite  
 there was the softest sound, as of silk falling to the floor

i had long enough to see her naked before me,  
 long enough to grin like the fool i was  
 but not long enough  
 to register her own exultant grin

not long enough to turn around  
 or escape

room 214

**I Wanna Be Yours**  
**Bradford Middleton**

I wanna be yours cos right now  
No one else will take me cos I'm  
Just a modern guy stuck here in  
This postmodernist world where  
We'll have tories, either Red or  
Blue, always in power, and I just  
Dream of you and me running  
Away to nowhere miles from  
Anyone where I'll write love poems  
& drink only the cheapest of French  
Red wines.

**you don't love me...**  
**Puma Perl**

or maybe you do  
but only because it's Wednesday  
you won't love me on Thursday  
although you may love me on Sunday  
because you go to church on Sundays  
and you think you love everyone  
on Monday it will rain and  
you won't love me anymore  
love is never constant or unconditional

but it's okay with me  
that's why we have dogs.

**For Sarri**  
**Noel Negele**

On my SAT I doodled  
pornographic sketches  
because I saw a girl student  
crying over her test form  
and it bothered me to  
be amongst them, any of them,  
I detested people so overcome  
by anxiety and in my most  
immodest immaturity  
I maintained that I knew not of  
the feeling of anxiety.

Few years later  
panic attacks would land me  
to the ER were they'd  
inject my ass with liquid diazepam  
because of my frantic heart beats.

Brought things to perspective.

But back to high school—  
those sketches bothered  
the headmaster who saw it  
as an attack to the very  
virtuousness of the education system  
and troubled Sarri, a theoretics teacher  
and the only educator there  
who had an affinity to me and a belief  
that I suspect stemmed from  
the compositions I'd write that even  
with terrible grades because of  
the blatant disregard of the word restriction  
she'd always comment on them  
praise them even  
in front of the whole class as wonderful  
in meaning alone at least.

At the back tables of the classroom  
I'd wish for her to shut the fuck up  
and wondered if I'd have to start a  
fight again to authenticate the fact  
I was no dork.

Sarri, who I grew to respect  
with time and even had a soft spot for  
had sat me in an empty class room  
to explain to me how I was crippling  
my chances with my future education

She was trying to understand me  
and I was trying to explain that  
I was not interested in going through  
the hoops, that the world was filled  
with educated morons and that  
if there was no passion I felt to pursue  
through the appalling structure  
of their systems or societal configurations  
there was no reason for me to even try

I was turning my back to it all.

Sarri had used an Aristotle  
quote then, told me  
that if a man does not partake  
in society, he is either God  
or beast.

Surely I must be the latter  
I'd responded.

A disappointed expression on her face  
that had made me sad to have caused

She has then asked me  
what I thought to be  
the meaning of life.



Don't have a clue  
yet, I'd respond

And what about you  
Miss Sarri,  
what's the meaning of life  
to you?

A pause.

To love and to be loved.

This was a woman that  
was never married in her life  
or possibly widowed—  
many rumours in that school  
but one certainty—  
she lived a lonely existence.

Seen many-a times  
feeding straw cats  
in night time by students,  
been made fun of for this,  
going psspssps as the cats  
would surround her  
with their tails upheld  
and she would speak to them  
in a soft voice, a sweet tone

A woman who believed  
the meaning of life  
to be to love and be loved.

A woman utterly alone.

## if i was a wiser man ~ J.J. Campbell

i remember the shower  
and you coming in right  
as i was washing my balls

you looked me right in  
the eyes and asked may I

if i was a wiser man  
i would have married  
you right there

but that kind of shit  
didn't exist in me at  
the age of 21

but the images stuck  
in my brain from that  
shower still persist a  
quarter century later

i'm pretty sure you  
and your family are  
comfortable living  
out west

i still laugh when you  
said i'd be the perfect  
one to have an affair  
with since i was living  
on the other side  
of the country

well, here i am  
on the other side  
of the country

patiently waiting

**Gifts of Flesh**  
**Mistress Renee**

Each time is like  
The first date  
I dress to entice  
Paint my face  
To attract attention  
From the balcony

Stage fright  
Though I've played  
This role before  
Adrenaline flowing  
Quivering muscles  
As I strip you down  
But this isn't a show

Excitement sparking  
Like thrown glitter  
While I tie you down  
Letting my long hair  
Brush your bare chest

Ropes straps cuffs  
Duct tape sizzling from the roll  
Gas mask cinched tight  
Immobilized  
Cocooned  
Encased  
Totally at my whim  
Not just your pleasure  
Your very life  
Held in these  
Delicate fingers  
Squeezing the hose

Do you love me?  
Or is this unrequited  
Like the air  
Growing stale  
In your lungs

There's a look in your eyes  
When the animal panics  
A satisfying pop  
As your body spasms  
Drowning in latex and nylon  
You are no longer alive  
No longer a person  
Just perfect slave meat

But you should know  
This isn't a game  
It's not about pain  
It's not about power  
It's not about perversion  
Because when you fully submit  
When you fear me  
When you love me  
When you do as I say  
I am utterly your slave

**Birthday Cake Doesn't Taste the Same**  
**Casey Renee Kiser**

Eye of the storm  
I'm in a fake friend-neighbor's  
third floor bathroom; coke mirror haunts  
my devastation and  
resistance

Left the faucet running with  
Pulp Fiction on pause  
but the movie is still playing in my head  
Something's pulling me under-  
This party's fucking over; dumb bitch  
overboard, where the sharks serve me  
cake and truth-or dare me to bleed

Full moon in Scorpio  
and this frog princess has been stung  
a few hundred times or so, pondering  
too long at Crystal Lake; killer crossroads,  
stagnant bath water-over thinking,  
over drinking the death parade-kool-aid,  
slow motion blinking-  
I've been merely existing  
inside an esoteric yawn

god in the white lines; god  
in the mirror- eyes  
on the prize yo,  
Are you listening? Grow up,  
just a mini ego death on a Saturday night-  
The bitch is back *and all that jazz*  
I forgot how to have fun or maybe,  
I never knew at all  
The sharks giggle,  
*it's Tuesday*

I don't respond but I'll be gone  
by the time they breakdown

the doors.

**Salute to the One-Ballers**  
**Sean Meggeson**

Keitel, Dafoe, Clift,  
Cage, Walken, Pacino,  
and, definitely, Brando...

They shirked the  
limits of anatomy  
and—don't you know?—  
underwent an orchiectomy.  
Henceforth, they lope-lean  
into The Way, breathing  
from a space deeper  
than conscious craft.  
Impossible with a full sack.

Beware imitators.  
They but seem to lean:  
Cooper—imitator  
DiCaprio—pretender  
Pattinson—who dat?  
Pitt—nope

Imagine Tom Cruise (archetypal  
two-baller) with Walken's line:  
"I hid this uncomfortable hunk  
of metal up my ass two years."

It becomes sound against music,  
an F-14 landing *On the Waterfront*.  
*Deer Hunter* ending on *Love Island*.  
"Bazinga!" splooging onto "Attica!"

Hawke, Hardy, Depp,  
Cage, Clift, Dean,  
and, yup, McQueen

Think on their sacrifice  
next time you jam your hand  
in pocket, dreaming  
of Griffith Observatory  
under the luscious LA light.

## It's All Academic ~ M.P. Powers

Become a teacher.  
Get a mortgage on a house in the suburbs.  
Buy a car with good gas mileage.  
Get involved in the local poetry readings.  
Start a zine and publish only those who publish you.  
Use superlatives like 'excellent' or 'brilliant'  
when describing the lousy work of your friends.  
(Flattery is your friend too).  
Read William Carlos Williams.  
Become obsessed with his Red Wheelbarrow theory.  
Cultivate a garden in your backyard.  
Plant it with lima beans, bell peppers, radishes.  
Watch everything die.  
Give up on it.  
Read more William Carlos Williams.  
Be sober.  
Get tenure.  
Never miss a meal.  
Ignore your betters.  
Go bald.  
Get back to nature.  
Begin by mowing your own lawn.  
Write some poesy about it (in the Charles Simic style  
– trade Williams in for him).  
Become obsessed with chinch bugs and molecrickets  
and the growth of grass and various types of weed killers.  
Crash into a stump with your lawnmower.  
Do a flip over the handlebars.  
Get whiplash.  
Wear a neckbrace for some months.  
A fat and cumbersome one.  
One that presses down into your collarbones and pushes up  
into your jowls so your jowls  
drape themselves over the edges of it  
giving you the appearance of a Basset Hound with its flabby  
mug sitting on a linoleum floor.  
Believe that your students are noting your wit

when they're really drawing cartoons of you.  
Sell your lawn equipment.  
Hire cheap Guatemalan labor and pay off your house  
and pay off your car  
and be even more sober  
and buy a Hog  
and leathers and a plasma TV.  
And come home early from a faculty meeting one day  
and witness  
the meter reader  
or the software salesman  
or the bug exterminator  
working away on your wife.  
You start shouting  
and they start shouting and you ball  
up your fists and the veins stand up in your forehead  
and your whole bald head turns red and then  
a deep shade of monkey-vomit purple comes down over your face  
and he climbs off her  
apologizes snatches up his clothes and balls  
them up and placing them carefully over his nether regions  
slinks half-nude along the wall and out the front door  
and you go into your study  
and you bawl God out  
and reach for a glass of water.  
Then reach for Simic.  
When he fails  
reach for Galway  
Kinnell and Kinnell failing  
lick your wounds  
and check your pride  
and forgive your wife  
Because you can't really blame her.  
You turned her into your mother the day you got married  
and besides, a poet needs a little pain in his life.  
It gives him something to write about.  
But don't write about that.  
Keep writing your surrealism, or whatever you call it.  
Follow the herd.

**Saints of the Neons**  
**Tom Cirillo**

It matters not  
what bar, any bar,  
any town, anywhere.  
It is where us serious drinkers  
talk shit  
and gossip,  
backslap  
and bullshit  
yet  
hold one another tight  
when the time  
is necessary.  
And if two weekends pass  
we wonder  
where you've been.

We've broken up  
in front of beer taps  
and busted our faces  
at happy hour  
defending someone's honor.  
We've seen kids  
grow up  
and marriages  
grow old,  
new lives born  
and lights  
gone out.

We've heard every jukebox tune  
a thousand times,  
sometimes in one sitting.  
We have over-tipped  
to be over-served.  
Have woken up  
with the hair of the dog  
and passed out  
when the sun  
showed its face.  
We have done shots  
and been shot down.  
Downed pints  
and puked  
in the garbage cans.  
Embarrassed  
and absolved ourselves  
over Jaeger bombs  
and Bloody Marys.

Here we are equal—  
equally lost  
equally broke  
equally off  
and we look almost innocent  
underneath the neons.

We spend hungover holidays  
on barstool thrones,  
where liquor bottles  
stand like gods  
under Christmas lights  
providing us gifts  
we didn't know  
we needed.

Even though Sunday mornings  
can be brutal  
without a hint  
of redemption,  
we crawl back  
to the neons  
full of confessions  
and contrition,  
where we never have to order,  
they simply have it waiting  
with a beer back of forgiveness.

Feels better than church  
to saints like us.