

miniMAG

issue105

heaven's mandate





SENATE BILL 6444—GOREGRAZING

Christian Stephens

AN ACT to bless a stretch of interstate winding
throughout the county seat for sake of souls
wayfinding.

WHEREAS impassive sun directs the picker's prong
and sprinkles glint amid the metal flow,
from gathered wisps of litter strewn along
the shoulders bear the lost of long-ago; and

WHEREAS in med'an grass there chars a brown bouquet
to caution sign attached by ribbon frayed,
the brunt of ruth prevails through crucifix
which stands as sentry o'er beloved "*Alex*"; and

WHEREAS some shards of plate suggest resolve once thrown
in momentary dare of past mistakes,
the Sharpie-scribbled *I will never break*
connotes relief without fulfillment known; and

WHEREAS discarded infant stroller nestles bugs
and blooms with sedges bound in twisted hugs,
may quondam babe have passed afar and blessed
in resting place serene to deliquesce; and

WHEREAS this bronze of pig reposed and pied betrays
a passing drollness lost to time or space,
corroded carcass feigns a sneer of mirth
that veils a verity by grit defaced; and yet

WHEREAS the picker prowls among the shreds of men
and prods the wounds of life forsaken,
behold, this vivar'um on asphalt worn
confining frog whose fate unfolds unmourned; therefore

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LITTERERS, THE LOITERERS, THE LOST:

SECTION 1. Walk aligned with the provisions of law
along the interstate and vehicles
and labor, asphalt your sod for blooming
fruits masticated though still saccharine.

SECTION 2. Give to your state and the venerable
an offering of erstwhile memory
so time may swaddle your young oracle
in oblivion far-flung and tender.

SECTION 3. Embed your being by operating
the highway as you would any windfall
whose sway is cast in matrices of pitch
compressing the pebbles of sentiment.

SECTION 4. Love the ludicrous your dusty darling;
Love the severe and its slashed remains;
Love the unbidden and go, Godspeed you
in nurturing the graves of our orchard.

THIS ACT shall take effect upon ratification,
the public welfare requiring
floccinaucinihilipilification.

B6444

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The Hour

Tracy Davidson

She boils the kettle,
makes his breakfast, as though it
were a normal day.

No words are spoken,
he hides behind his paper
to avoid her eyes.

She watches the clock,
chain-smokes just for something
to do with her hands.

She holds back the tears
as the hour hand turns eight,
feels her throat tighten.

Somewhere in a dark prison
their son's body stops twitching.

Family Reunion

David O'Mahony

He hadn't expected Death to be beautiful.

No hood, no skull, no oversized scythe. Instead just a woman, petite and well built with blonde hair down just beyond her jawline that Alex knew would curl slightly in the rain. She was in black, though. Nothing ominous or fancy, but a blouse and trousers that gave her a tailored, professional look. Her head was leaning slightly toward her right shoulder and her arms were folded as she smiled at him.

He recognised that smile. She would never be "just" anything to him. He knew her, because she was his wife.

Or had been, once, for far too short a time.

"Hello my love," he said.

"Been a while," she said.

"Got a new job I take it?" He wasn't sure it was his Rebecca.

"Something like that. You're looking well." She certainly sounded like his Rebecca.

And he was, in fact, looking well all things considered. As well as one could look lying in a hospital bed connected to machines that irritated rather than comforted him. His two sons sat on the right, one slouched in a hard chair near his hand, the other frozen standing near the wall

where he had been pacing. His daughter, so like her mother, was on his left, his hand in hers. It was as he had last seen them, only now they were frozen solid. Finally the beeping machines were silent, he thought.

“I’ve lost weight. My legs don’t work as well as they used to.”

Death was standing at the foot of the bed. She tapped his left foot. “I think if you gave it a go they’d work just fine again.”

She tugged at the blanket until it fell away. As he gently took his hand away from his daughter’s, he realised his legs, long consigned to being weak and pathetic things, not only looked as strong as they had once been but felt it as well. Heart pounding a solid rhythm. Everything felt stronger, more alive. He laughed at the irony, because he knew without being told that his time was coming to an end.

But he could go out on his feet, he told himself. That was something. As he swung his legs out of the bed, careful to avoid clattering into his sleeping youngest son, he realised he now had the hands of a younger man as well. It felt good to be young again.

“Thank you for this,” he said, gesturing to the face he knew looked as it had in his late twenties, when he had married Rebecca. “To be honest, in my head—”

“—this is how you still see yourself. I know.” And the smile he fell for decades ago grew brighter.

“How?”

“Did I know?” She arched an eyebrow playfully. “The same way you always got me flowers for Valentine’s when I said not to, because you knew I loved them.”

Alex’s heart stopped. “So…”

“So.” And she nodded a little sadly.

Alex seldom cried, but a single tear rolled down each cheek now.

“I’ve missed you. So much.”

“I know.”

“It’s been like flailing around with one hand in the dark. Like half of me was just cut off and never grew back.”

“They’re hard work,” she said, gesturing at the three siblings.

Alex laughed in spite of himself. “You have no idea. Well, I guess you do, don’t you?”

Her shoulders rolled up and down in gentle flow. “Only to a point, my love. Watching isn’t the same as feeling. Or at least it’s not the same on this side.”

Doing a full slow spin around the room Alex took them all in. “I’ll miss them.”

“You’ll see them again. Not soon, but when they’re ready.”

“I don’t know if I’m ready.”

Her smile melted through him and he chuckled. “That’s why I’m here.”

“Somebody sent you?”

A gentle toss of her tresses. “You’re not the only one who’s been missing their other half.”

“So... what do we do now?”

“Whatever we want. We can wait here for a while.”

“Stay here?”

“In this moment? We could. It will hold as long as we want it to hold. But why dwell in a hospital room when there’s a whole universe to explore?”

It had been a long time since he’d been able to enjoy silence with anybody. Their waxing smiles toward one another kindled a flame deep in his heart, and as whatever resistance was left melted away he nodded. A final sweep around the room, a final deep breath, took them all in.

“I never got to say goodbye.”

“You don’t need to,” said Death. “You’ve done your job for them. You’ve done well. Now it’s time for you.”

She reached out her hand, and as he took it he felt whole again.

Death

Salvatore Difalco

I'm sorry ladies and gentlemen,
but it has always been like this.
Death is an old dog who likes
everything just the way it is.



Maggot Therapy

Salvatore Difalco

Laughter makes endurable
the insufferable. Or it
should. Uncle Frank never
cracked a smile when
I tried to humor him
about the treatment
for his gangrened foot.

Joy and Loss

Huina Zheng

I remember my brother taking me to catch grasshoppers. Teaching me to ride a bike. Playing hide-and-seek with me. I remember his laughter echoing on the playground as we played tag. His joyful bubbling laughter. His face glowing in the sun.

I remember him in the hospital bed, a bag of bones, frail and skeletal. His lusterless eyes, dull like hollow caverns. The stifling bitter smell of medicine and disinfectant.

I remember how relatives whispered my parents' crushing debts from his fight with leukemia. How he was terminally ill. How today my daughter has grown older than my brother ever did.



Banane e Torsi

Salvatore Difalco

I dabble with plaster torsos and bananas.

Call me strange.

Call me antisocial, antimethod,
antipathetic and more.

But I know what I'm doing.

A wall defines my horizon.

The carousel of my mind
never sits idly by, the eyes
of its horses never stop
bobbing. And plaster never
symbolizes human presence
even though I do a punch
up job with limbs and torsos.
They're drawn from human
corpses that I visit at the morgue.

I know a guy who knows
a guy connected there.

We worked it out, good deal.

My art is everything to me.

And when things get too
strong or too unearthly,
the bananas keep it friendly.



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“Joy and Loss” by Huina Zheng

“Banane e Torsi”, “Death”, and “Maggot Therapy” by Salvatore Difalco
Book: [The Mountie at Niagara Falls](#) (Anvil Press, 2010)

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