



## MORNING WITH THE OLD DOCTOR

BY

LACHLAN J McDOUGALL

**WHY I LIKE IT:** *Fiction Editor JOEY CRUSE writes...*

*“Morning with the Old Doctor,” by Lachlan McDougall is as much a play on the word “mourning” as it is a beautiful glimpse at the end of the world. Shopkeepers and fisherman doing their daily duties, preachers condemning the behavior of boys as if nothing that they preached was going on, and an old doctor orchestrates in the breath of airlessness and silence before it all disappears.*

*This story is like watching the perfect sunrise and being content in knowing it is your last – a knowing blink before the blackout. There is a flutter of activity from those who go on about their business, their habits unbreakable; there is a solemnity that surrounds each word as the characters rise and fall with the line; there is a beautiful sense of humanity, as there always is at*

*the end, when you recognize the deep loss being portrayed and the regret and nostalgia set in; and it's as if a second has been a lifetime.*

*I like this story for its description and voice. McDougall has heart and writes like he has one.*

*While I always make apocalyptic comparisons to Cormac McCarthy, "Morning with the Old Doctor," has an emotional depth that I can only describe as hope. The sun also rises and all that bullshit, but, with a world in which there is no one left to save and no one who can save it, there is a painted picture of beauty in the impending demise – as if time has stopped and you can finally take in everything.*

*Enjoy.*

*Five Stars.*

**QUALITY QUOTABLE:** BOY: Oh, to be a boy in the world—flying on the rooftops and ramparts of waking morn and settling on the sleepers still asleep in their get-out-of-bed drowse. I am a no-good boy, up to no good and this is my life amongst the flowers. There is nothing that can stop me excepting the wash of age and the rinse of the grey-haired girls that delves deep into my flushing soul and drags me down into the bay.

### **Morning with The Old Doctor**

**By Lachlan J McDougall**

Well, it all came down from above without any warning, a fine mist of vaporized banknotes working on the trunch and trudgeon of a million saps who thought they could control the flow of events with a single wave of their magic hand. The Old Doctor sorted that out with a raising of the hand shiny over the black dirt, Klunk, he came down slow like an automated machine whirring through the cogs and whistles and all the saps turned slow and blue and held tight to their spots and places of worship for a thousand years.

Agent, return to base coordinates!

There is no telling the mass of destruction, everything said up until now is like pulling a figure out of thin air.

These are the fragments of a fragmentary self. The old doctor saw to that and he will come down slow on a cool mist of vaporized banknotes settling hash in the cold light of morning. You will understand as the time comes to take away all this rubbish and refuse and the jellyfish sea will have you huddled on the dark side of the mooring with a gibbering idiot.

First off, there's Nancy Provereaux, retired seamstress and lover of women. Jellyfish slippery we climb up into her bunk where she has entertained duchesses and kittens from all across the land and we hold her nobbled hand through dreams of running through the streets and kitchens of nightmare, boiling the water and spitting on the flames. Old Nancy, she tells the time on a frayed old clock on the wall and sees through the dark to a breakfast table laden with cream puffs and pancakes slowly rotting down into a fine paste reeking salt and brine like the ever-present sea. And we move with her as she talks to the dead women of her dreams and makes plans for the dark day that is descending like a haloed light from the sky of her dreams

and settling in the bed where she tosses and turns and slips through the salt-brine into the half-waking melodies of sleep.

VOICE ONE: My dear, I am dead, and I am sick to death of all the dead that rains down upon the ground and gunks up my watchworks.

NANCY: Oh, my dead dear, How I long to be with you, flaunting my dying thighs on the plains of the Nephilim.

VOICE TWO: It's no use! You'll never get a seat at the table with that attitude. Drastic measures are called for and there's not too far to go before daylight stretches down and takes hold of your poor nobbled hands.

NANCY: Hold me, let's share one more embrace before the old clock decries that waking hour...

And with that the clock strikes the dawn and throws off the shackles of sleep leading us away and into the rooms of Mr Tobias Beecher, bookmaker, quack, herbalist and amateur surgeon, who is rousing himself from sleep with a gentle snoring lumberyard of sticks and stones that creak and sway beneath his bed and bulk.

The doctors of the world form up in a mason jar looking down at organs and fetuses canned, preserved, held on display for all to see in Mr Beecher's pressurised bedroom opening onto the world of bad poetry where nothing can compare to an eye, an ear, a zygomatic arch, the noble face peering over horn-rimmed spectacles and into the dark and gloomy atmosphere of the dawn-rousing morn.

BEECHER: Morning in the stables, and it's time to get up! My ghosts of sleep are long gone, the dreams of bank-tellers hidden in the folds of obsidian cloaks rounded out by the disgust of my tongue.

The devilled eggs and ham and bacon, liver, and kidneys, piled high on a plate of refuse holds tight Mr Beecher's leggings as he sits down to dine amidst the flurry of bones and orchids that make up his life. He throws one leg after the other over the side of his chair Klunk the Old Doctor lifts his hands slow and steady through the room of death-defying gravity and gravitas and bits of books in Latin. From space to the land of dreams our agent sidles across the room and

into the burlap sack hanging on the door rushing the festival of lights that has awakened out of doors. Out! Out! Into the streets where the saps and the rubes are eying off their catches and kills, jingling pocket-pennies, and twisting keys on long leather straps. Mr Wrathmall the baker is flying like flour out of doors and into a shirt dripping with sweat, Mrs Goggins, groceress and stamp collector, is playing the slot machines and clunking back into place with a robotic whirr that cascades down the hallways and streets of the half-formed morning and into the sea where all the sins of the world go to lay in the muck and the mire with the fishes nibbling down decadence and decay to a fine point to be spewed back up in the mouth of the furnace.

Agent! Return to base coordinates!

The mountain in the distance, which only you can see, is illuminated by the sun from behind bending a halo of light out around the small town and the obsidian pressurised spaceships which peek and peer over the edges of the night drift lazily like flies around the eyes of a thin old cow. The spirits and dreams of the dead world are peering over the covers of the dawning dark and the preacher is exiting the labyrinth of sleep, reading the books of old gods dead and forgotten, forging a path amongst the tombstones overgrown with weeds and mourning and here he is waking the town by the get-out-of-bed bell blind as the sea and slippery like the mud of the sea floor. He reads his poetry into the dawning air and feels the jellyfish sting of the old doctor pressing up against him and nagging at the tufts of his bard's white hair and into the air flying like nettles where the crows refuse to go. The spaceships leer and loom like an orgy of malevolence waiting for the right time to make themselves known to the townsfolk who are prying open curtains and blinds and entering into the waking world with a soft determination.

PREACHER: One, a day like no other, the sun blotted in the sky like an incandescent bulb. Would that I were sleeping still and lost in the realm of dreams but Alas! The day has come and the get-out-of-bed swell of the sea is rising up to meet the day.

Mr Craffy, the fisherman, is already out netting amongst the trash and stones of the bay. He hauls up a basket of fish that seem to shift in the light filling out flippers and fins and toothsome grins that leer into the face of sensibility and good taste. Craffy beats their heads against the side of the boat one by one and drops them into a bucket still squirming and flickering in the light of the sullen morning sun. He lifts a flask to his lips and salutes the salt-fry of the day drinking a deep draught of the nectar of the gods winking a single heavy eye and feeling the pull of the old doctor in a slow circular key rounding about his head as he rubes and saps his way back to shore, his magic hands pawing at the oars with an effortless tug and waiting for the slow chill to descend upon him and freeze everything like liquid air binding on wrists and ankles and cowering in the corner with the bedclothes.

The windsome morning has overtaken our sleepy town and the townsfolk are out-of-bedding and turning about the streets with a gentle pad-footed lope. The clock is chiming, the slow breezes blowing, and out on the bay the boats are bobbing like corks spat out from the wine bottles of the night. A deft winding noise fills out the hollows of sound as murmuring pastures greet the gentle morning with lowing and mooing through the skinny-boned calves of the quiet town. A black miasma hangs over and palls the light with a deathly glow haloed on all sides by the sun and the

remnants of the moon. Preacher black and bible-thumping the good news is given out to the morning like so much bad poetry swirling into the air like gnats. A hard cased currant-stealing boy leaps out into the air like a spry elf and swamps the sermon with mischief and good wandering about the hills and pastures verdant green over the bustling little town about its morning business buying eggs and flour paying the merchants in small,

rusted coppers and back home to eat and be merry before the workday wretches out the last inkling of quiet from their stony minds.

BOY: Oh, to be a boy in the world—flying on the rooftops and ramparts of waking morn and settling on the sleepers still asleep in their get-out-of-bed drowse. I am a no-good boy, up to no good and this is my life amongst the flowers. There is nothing that can stop me excepting the wash of age and the rinse of the grey-haired girls that delves deep into my flushing soul and drags me down into the bay.

PREACHER: You! You no-good boy! Listen to the sounds of goodness in this holy waterfed word and stop your racketing and currant stealing and back off to the schoolyard with the cowfresh dew on the meadows of your mind. Back! Back! before the doctor takes a look at you and wheedles out the freshness into a dank and cloying mist.

The old doctor steadies himself on a raised platform vying for time and air amongst the growing day of work and schoolyard, floating up amongst the reeds and rushes of time and bringing his old blue hands down slow on the proceedings of town life with a rushing Klunk settling the accounts and staying the merriment. Time stops in dead end whorls; the townsfolk bemuse themselves on cud chewing and long stays in the slow climbing sun. The spaceships in bombazine float and curdle themselves on clouds and fry up the light like bacon rinds. A death smell floats down among the lowing pastures and into the high-lit bakeries and taphouses where the bakers and the sailors and the farmers and the milkmen are drowsing their way through small un contemplated lives. The Old Doctor winds back the hands on the clock, back and back into the small hours of uncomfortable thoughts derrying in the morning winds and a deep unsettle rests on the tap rooms of the Sailor's Arms where the black pints flush out the salt from death-defying sailors wearing their stormy badges on the sleeves of their ruined bodies. A lull and dumbfound quiet presses on the town and into the places of mirth, routing out the last ekages of light and leaving only a black bitter darkness like the beer topped with creamy foam floating on the sea edge of the sailors' lives.

This is the day the world ends for peace and quiet and off-to-school children rustled in the morning light with tussled hair and pinched cheeks and pockets full of pennies for Mrs Stapleton the sweet-shop keeper who keeps the shop in a trim and trigger-happy order milling up the liquorice twists and jawbreakers and peppermint twirls in their rightful places doling them out to the children a penny a piece into their sticky sweet hands to be gobstoppered through the afternoon and into the early night spoiling dinners and vomiting a sugared gruel into the salt-brine sea. This is the day where the world ends for sailors tapering out their lines looking for catches in the briny bay and flooding the markets with flailing fish guts-on-the-table eyes a-staring into the air sucking grouse of town life. This is the end of the world for Mrs Stapleton

always ready for a fight but with no recourse left in her old age with gnarled fingers and bell-ringing mind washed out with the price of humbugs. This is the end of the world for the town and all its inhabitants. A deep slow death hanging over them bemused and unknown tinkling down from the rills of the hills to the valleys deep and the rivers flowing into the bay. A slow deleterious death from the inside out where the soul stops working and the preacher's words fall dead onto deaf ears and the preacher himself stops up like a cork and makes motions to dance with the frying black that descends from the heavens.

Oh Holy Mountain of death-town that speaks the free and easy language of unknowing demise! The slow channelled rivers float down from the darkened blots of the spaceship hanging like fat black flies and into the bellies of Mr Craffy, The Preacher, No-Good Boy, Nancy Provereaux. This is a world on the edge of the precipice into the great down scorching fires of hell and nobody is here to save it.

**AUTHOR'S NOTE:** *Drawing on the florid whirl of words and character portraits in Dylan Thomas' 'Under Milk Wood', I have tried to create a portrait of the moment before unknowing death that dredges up the wild characters of this earth. There is such a wide array of people who never appear in literature, and it is my hope to give these characters an airing before their inevitable demise. My other thematic concerns are with the nature of Death itself and the wide unknowing which accompanies it. We none of us are certain when or what will take us away and all of us are more or less unprepared for the end. Whether it comes like a thief in the night or due to pressurised spaceships looming on the horizon, there is always a degree of uncertainty about our last moments.*

**AUTHOR BIO:** Lachlan J McDougall is a word technician working and artist in experimental and cut-up literature. The founder and main editor at the small press LJMcD Communications, they delight in bringing the best of modern and experimental work into the world despite disappointing readership and sales. The author of numerous books of poetry and prose, their work and the rest of the LJMcD Communications catalogue can be found at [lachlanjmcDougall.wordpress.com](http://lachlanjmcDougall.wordpress.com).

