

ALGURF & other poems poems poems poems

By Howard *Brown*

WHY I LIKE IT: Poetry Editor HEZEKIAH writes... *Howard Brown lives in Lookout Mountain, TN. Lookout Mountain seems a tad tautological to me...how could you miss a mountain and who other than a longsuffering spouse in good standing and the right seat would feel obliged to admonish you for driving straight at it? I confess the human condition mystifies me, but Browns observations narrows that divide, "this baleful abyss" He has been here before and, as ever, a good read, but it is teatime at the Scretch house, I can hear her holler, and she got the good biscuits so I shall leave you to it and take mine. Settle in for some Smokey Mountain wisdom...(Spacing, format & font are poet'*

Augury

There was an old man sitting in a ragged-out, rusting wheelchair beneath an overpass, just up the street from the Y.

Anticipating he was begging, I fished around in my pocket and pulled out a couple of bucks. But he didn't ask, no, he just sat, staring into space, nursing a bottle partially concealed in a brown paper bag.

Unshaven, hair long and tangled, a string of snot oozing from his left nostril, his clothes in tatters. *Oh my*, I found myself asking, *what have we here? Another down*

and out stumble-bum. Too far adrift in an alcoholic haze to care, or do anything about it even if he did. Who knows how he found his way into this baleful abyss? But I read his image as an augury, a prophetic foretaste

of what my own existence might be if certain things played out even a tiny bit differently in the largely charmed life I lead!

7/13/2020

Another Monday

Monday morning rolls around, Monday number four thousand and thirty-three—give or take a few—since I came into this world. And I ask myself, where did all those Mondays go?

One by one they've slipped away, one-seventh of my entire life of which I have so little recollection. But if today's an exemplar, there must have been a shit-load of bad ones along the way;

The inevitable consequence of weekends filled with too much revelry. But why, at some nebulous point between sunrise Monday and sunset Friday afternoon, is that realization inevitably doomed to abnegation?

11/23/2020

Elephantine

They were big boys, and when I say big, I don't mean just a tad obese; elephantine would better capture the essence of their physiques, like characters out of a *Far Side* cartoon.

They lived with their parents, both also super-sized, in a drab, two-story, house on High Street, just South of the Frisco railyard; bordered by a bus station and a funeral home to the East; and, to the West, by a pair of billiard halls, one for Negroes and the other for whatever country peckerwoods happened to wander into town.

Willem was the older of the two; Caleb his younger brother. They were consummate loners and, except for school, seldom appeared in public. At times, we'd see them playing in their back yard, or out-front of their house, thundering down the sidewalk on their enormous tricycles; but it was always just the two of them. And when they saw us, they'd go mute, neither uttering a word as we passed; nor would we—a bit cowed by their monstrous size—say anything to them.

Willem was a couple of grades ahead of me and, by the time I was in junior high, he was a freshman in

high school. He still wore short pants to school in warm weather, and was teased unmercifully by the schoolyard bullies. He was also caught in the boys' restroom one day, pulling up a pair of pink panties, thought to be hand-me-downs from his mother, which only added to his shame. And rumor had it that he went straight home from school each day to sit in front of the tv and commune with Buffalo Bob and his goofy little wooden sidekick, Howdy Doody.

Caleb was four or five grades behind me and I don't remember much about him, except that he stuttered, would frequently piss his pants when flustered and wore glasses so thick he looked like an owl. In short, as with his older brother, he was a ready-made object of derision.

So, toward what were their wretched, fractured lives moving, one might ask. Perhaps they were merely eccentric, but fated, sooner or later, to come into their own, their hidden brilliance finally emerging and putting all the rest of us to shame. Unfortunately, that was not the way things played out.

They might well have been closet geniuses, but neither ever elected to reveal their purported sagacity, ultimately choosing (without explanation) to take their own lives, dying as they had lived, alone and wrapped in enigma.

11/18/2020

THE POET SPEAKS: *“You cannot defeat darkness by running from it, nor can you conquer your inner demons by hiding them from the world. In order to defeat the darkness, you must bring it into the light.” — Seth Adam Smith, Rip Van Winkle and the Pumpkin Lantern*

I generally tend to favor the more upbeat poetry of authors such as David Whyte and Mary Oliver. However, these five poems have a decidedly dystopian tone about them, more reminiscent of the work of Charles Bukowski, who I read in my youth. I've worried about this issue over the past several months as I wrote and again when I put these particular poems together for submission to the wider world. However, I think the pieces reflect, both literally and metaphorically, the dark time in which we've been living since the onset of Covid-19 and the related lockdown. And their composition has been a catharsis of sorts, an exorcism of my inner demons so that, hopefully, I can put it all behind me and move on.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Howard Brown lives in Lookout Mountain, TN. His poetry has appeared in *Fleas on the Dog*, *Burningword Literary Journal*, *Printed Words*, *Blue Collar Review*, *Tuck Magazine*, *The Beautiful Space*, *Pure Slush*, *Truth Serum*, *Poetry Super Highway*, *Old Hickory Review*, *Devil's Party Press*, *Tiny Seed Literary Journal* and *Lone Stars Magazine*. He has published short fiction in *Louisiana Literature*, *F**k Fiction*, *Crack the Spine*, *Pulpwood Fiction*, *Extract(s)*, *Gloom Cupboard*, *Full of Crow* and *Pure Slush*.

Dystopia

The *dark winter* spoken of during the recent presidential election is upon us. In fact, it arrived before the epithet was ever uttered. The sun may well be shining, yet we find ourselves engulfed in darkness of a different kind.

Ravaged by a virus no one can quite wrap their mind around; with the ensuing isolation, where you think twice before going anywhere, concealed behind a mask when you do, becoming just one more amorphous figure among many.

Yes, the vaccine is here. But will it be the panacea for which we've hoped; don't viruses inevitably mutate, adjusting to whatever stands in their way? And how optimistic can one be when there's still no antidote for the common cold?

So, as the casualties continue to mount, I'm reminded of Robert Oppenheimer's quote from the Bhagavad-Gita, after witnessing the detonation of the first atomic bomb in 1945:
Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds.

12/19/2020

Willie Roscoe

Who remembers Willie Roscoe, decrepit, old baggy-assed bum? Rumor has it he was once a carpenter, but somewhere along the way his mental plumb line began to sway, then swung totally off-kilter and, ultimately, he found himself adrift in a parallel, alien world from which there was no return;

I recall him shuffling down Main Street in a battered slouch hat, thread-bare suit coat, khaki work pants and a pair of cast off, black, high-top tennis shoes; reeking of b.o. and urine, pausing here and there to pick up a cigarette butt from the sidewalk, strip away the paper, then empty the tobacco into a Prince Albert can he stowed in his jacket pocket;

Go to hell, go to hell, go to hell was his mantra and, sotto voce, he would repeat it endlessly to anyone who'd stop long enough to listen. Main Street was only a few blocks long and after he'd trod its length a time or two, he'd reverse course and begin the long trek back out to the County Poor House, which he called home;

He'd also show up at the First Baptist Church from time to time, especially if they were holding a revival, ignoring the frenzied efforts of the ushers to walk him back out the door, his odor preceding him as he traipsed down the aisle (so that the congregants began to scatter before he even came into view), invariably taking a seat on the front row, hoping for some sort of divine intervention, I suppose, which would deliver him from his misery; but it was all for naught.

Now he lies in an unmarked, pauper's grave, his dismal life having passed like a loose sheet of newspaper blown about in the wind; and, sad to say, you'd be hard pressed to find much of anyone in this, his old hometown,

Who remembers Willie Roscoe, decrepit,
old baggy-assed bum!

10/31/2020