

Winter Solstice + Four

By

Buff Whitman-Bradley

WHY I LIKE IT: *Poetry Editor HEZEKIAH writes... Buff Whitman-Bradley's poetry is hyper-bowls of "heliotropic" unhyphenated-splendor. In 'Winter solstice' "As the sun glides down / Behind the far hills / Pulling the sky's bright blue counterpane / Along with it / Dark begins . . . mushrooms hunker / And cold bides its time" And it proceeds with the seeded proceed of a most fertile mind. As we "crepusculars / Grab what morsels they can" Everyone receives their well-deserved trophies in 'A day in November.' It's delightful, get "The light today" don't be bashful, step right up . . . In his wordplay exposé pin the participation-badge on the dawning-kid-latchkey of privileged, pre-alleged, bumper-stuck, cossetting, helicopter-pilot-parents. It's hilarious. There is little need to entice you with quotes from Whitman-Bradley, suffice to say, read 'COVID booster,' 'A bit plonky' and 'Red berries' as well. Unless you have some aversion to genius. Buffs star burns brightly as "old friends – / Orion, Cassiopeia, the Pleiades . . ."*

Winter solstice

As the sun glides down
Behind the far hills
Pulling the sky's bright blue counterpane
Along with it
Dark begins to come out of hiding
From the low places
Where mushrooms hunker
And cold bides its time.

Kids race home on their bikes
With night following close behind,
And gaining.
Rumors of moonrise
Begin to circulate
Among the nocturnal crowd –
Owls, coyotes, possums, skunks.
The crepusculars
Grab what morsels they can
In the fading light
And the heliotropic among us

Start flicking on house lights
And holiday lights
Up and down the block.

This is the season of long nights
When we scan the icy
Star-filled blackness
For the pure pleasure
Of glimpsing old friends –
Orion, Cassiopeia, the Pleiades –
When we are reminded
By two trillion galaxies
That our existence is infinitesimal,
Of no cosmic significance,
And when we realize all over again
That what we call grace
Is not a celestial gift
Showered down upon us
From skies beyond the sky,
But a quality within each of us,
A soft ticking in the cells,
A whisper in the blood.

A day in November

The light today
Is the brightest kid in class
The kid who knows
All the answers
The kid who raises a hand
Even before the teacher
Asks the question

The light today
Is everybody's best friend
Dishing out compliments
Like shiny new dimes --
"Your whole face glows when you smile!"
"Sparks fly off you when you dance!"
"That picture you painted is radiant!"

The light today
Hangs by its knees
On the monkey bars
Kicks the ball a mile
Dazzles while jumping rope
Runs the bases
In a flash

The light today
Plays all the gleaming instruments
In the band
Writes its name
On easels and chalk boards
Lies in little golden patches
On bookcases and desks
Whispers to the most studious
To look up from their work
For a moment or two
And gaze out the window
At the gloriously hued leaves
The shimmering azure sky
The lengthening afternoon shadows
The sun drifting slowly westward
And light itself growing ethereally pale
Getting ready to settle in
For the long night
After another glittering day
Of being the star pupil.

COVID booster

As the tip of the needle
Penetrated the flesh
Of my upper arm
Just millimeters from
The Kokopelli tattoo
I thought about
All the cowboy movies
I watched as a boy
In which
The simple, honest,
Humble townsfolk
Get wind of
The impending arrival
Of a gang of thugs and rapists
And murderers
Intent upon wreaking havoc
And mayhem
As retribution for the refusal
Of the mayor's beautiful daughter
To marry their malodorous boss.
Learning that the vicious crew
Is only a couple of days distant
The residents pool their meager resources
To hire a notorious gunslinger,
A good bad guy,
To protect them from
The bad bad guys on the way.
Of course, the good bad guy accepts the job
But refuses the pay
Then goes about drafting
Various other good bad guys
To assist him
In fashioning a ferocious fighting force
Out of ordinary grocers
And blacksmiths and school marms
And preachers and dance hall girls
And housewives and stage coach drivers
And wheelwrights
And even the disgraced former sheriff
Who cannot keep his booze intake
Under control.
As the approach
Of the bad bad guys
Grows ever more ominous,

Which can be readily inferred
From the award-winning soundtrack,
Composed by a Slovenian immigrant maestro
Living in splendor in the Hollywood hills,
The good bad guys
Instruct the jittery citizens
In the fine arts of riflery and six-shooting
Of building fortifications with hay bales
And bags of unmilled wheat
And overturned buckboards,
Of strategically placing
Sticks of dynamite used heretofore
Only for peaceful purposes.
The music grows darker
The sound of galloping hooves
Becomes louder and louder
And suddenly the bad bad guys
Have arrived at the edge of town
Slowing their horses to a walk
And sneering right malevolently
As they pass by the dry goods store
The Broken Heart saloon
The sheriff's empty office
The one-room school
And Old Widow McCarthy's boarding house.
Hearts beat fast and loud
Breaths are held
Fingers twitch on triggers and . . .
"That's it," said the inoculating nurse
"You're good to go."
I rolled down my sleeve
Pocketed my vaccine verification card
And headed back to my car
Confident that as always
The good bad guys
(Who, truth be known,
Aren't really bad,
Just misconstrued)
Will save the threatened town
Then head out past Boot Hill
Toward parts unknown.

A bit plonky

COVID booster yesterday
Vaguely worried
About a bad reaction
But woke up this morning
Feeling pretty OK
Made breakfast
Took a walk
Got coffee
At the neighborhood joint
Sat reading in the big yellow chair
Early afternoon started feeling
A bit plonky
A bit overbaked
Reconnoitered the bedroom
And found the sun
Sprawled invitingly
Across the bed
So what could I do
But lie down
Joined soon
By the little dog
Who concurred with me
About the existential imperative
Of a sunny nap
So we had a fine old snooze
Awoke then
Heated some soup
Cut up an apple
Boiled water for a cup
Of peppermint tea
Steaming in a mug now
On the table
Beside the big yellow chair
To which I have returned
With nothing to do
But sit and sip
And read a book
With a lapful of warm dog

Red berries

When I was a little fellow
Tearing around on the cracked and crabbled sidewalks
Of our tiny community
Of Carter Lake Iowa
On my flash-and-dazzle three-wheeler
My mother would sometimes
Pack me a bag lunch
That I could take to a suitable spot
To have my very own picnic.
The best place
Was in front of my grandma's cottage
Where I would sit
Among her bushes with the little red berries
To eat my sandwich and cookie
And drink my half-pint carton
Of chocolate milk
As I idly picked handfuls of the tiny berries
Which my mother warned me
Were poisonous
So don't eat them.
And many times I did not eat them.
But one particularly lambent day
I kept gazing at those wee scarlet orbs
And wondering how anything so pretty
Could be deadly
And my curiosity got to be too much for me
So before I unfolded my sandwich
Out of its waxed paper
I lifted my oatmeal cookie from the bag
With one hand
Held a berry in the other
And shoved both at once
Into my wide open mouth
Then chewed and swallowed quickly
And waited to see
If I would get sick or die.
I did not.
Questions arose.

THE POET SPEAKS: *Buff Whitman-Bradley writes every day, a great ocean of gibberish, until an idea for a poem floats to the surface. Sometimes it's a keeper, sometimes he throws it back. He has lately been reading the poems of T'ao Ch'ien (tr. David Hinton), and Martin Espada, and finds in each of them qualities worth emulating.*

AUTHOR BIO: Buff Whitman-Bradley has two books coming out this year – “The Heron Could Be Lost,” from Finishing Line Press, and “And What Will We Sing?” from Kelsay Books. His poems have appeared in numerous print and online journals. He podcasts poems on aging at thirdactpoems.podbean.com and lives with his wife, Cynthia, in northern California. He writes every day, a great ocean of gibberish, until an idea for a poem floats to the surface. Sometimes it’s a keeper, sometimes he throws it back. He has lately been reading the poems of T’ao Ch’ien (tr. David Hinton), and Martin Espada, and finds in each of them qualities worth emulating.