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By Howard Brown

**WHY I LIKE IT:** *Poetry Editor HEZEKIAH writes... Howard Brown is hands-down resounding and profoundly--even, occasionally, astoundingly--on-point in his poetic prose . "But no matter how slick you / think you are, nobody's / bulletproof." There is a line in 'Beach Dream' that is so penetratingly perceptive, I could only assume it was a stolen quote, but I couldn't find it anywhere...see if you can. I reckon I knew 'Don't Get Above Your Raisin' is a Southern colloquialism and Country and Western song, Brown's fixin' to put his own spin on it..." But there comes a point when you're / dissatisfied with what you judge / yourself to be—" 'Fledglings' prodded out of the nest like poems submitted for acceptance is a pleasing figurative word picture ...(Spacing is poet's own) HS*

### ***Pin Setter***

When I was in the second grade, Bobo Cates, the boy whose desk sat just in front of my own, worked late nights as a pin setter at the bowling alley. Perpetually dozing off in class, he was a ragamuffin, an urchin, the object of endless taunts and teasing and a constant challenge for our wide-eyed, young teacher.

Unwashed, his clothes threadbare, reeking of coalsmoke and kerosene, he was beyond the pale. But what stands out most clearly in my memory was the desperate state of his shoes. They were worn and scuffed, yet at first glance little different from what the other boys in our class had on— all our shoes were pretty much a disaster.

Then one day he turned in his desk, laid an ankle across an opposing knee and, grinning broadly, pulled back the sole of his shoe from the welt, revealing the bottom of his filthy, bare foot.

I was shocked—unsure exactly why, since the display didn't seem to bother Bobo in the least—and went home that afternoon, repeating what I'd seen to my mother. She had little to say, just listened quietly, smiling and nodding as she was wont to do when her talkative son began to rattle.

A day or so later, Bobo showed up in a new pair of Buster Brown lace-ups. He didn't explain how he'd come by them and I didn't ask, though I was somewhat taken back, as such footwear was clearly a high-dollar item, generally reserved for church on Sunday.

So, when the weekend rolled around and I discovered my own pair of Buster Browns were no longer in my closet, I went running to my mother. But I didn't need to ask, not really, it should have been obvious—even to a second grader—what had become of my shoes.

*I don't know, son, I'll talk it over your father and we'll see about getting you another pair,"* was all she said, as she turned and walked away.

Bobo moved on soon afterwards and I never knew what became of him. Yet, I'm certain that whatever road he took would not have been too much different from the one he was already travelling.

No matter, at least for a time he'd have been making his way through his uniquely weary, hard-scrabble life in a decent pair of shoes.

8/16/2021

### ***Bulletproof***

You cruise through life  
be-bop'n and Cadillac'n  
(as my old buddy, John  
Johnson, used to say)  
moving through time and  
space on what seems like a  
perpetual down-hill roll.  
But no matter how slick you  
think you are, nobody's  
bulletproof. Believe it or  
not, there's all sorts of bad  
shit out there, just waiting

for your nescient ass to  
come strolling along.  
And the baleful imps in charge  
of dishing out suffering are  
totally unhindered by the slightest  
notions of right and wrong,  
guided solely by what may  
strike their fancy at any given  
moment!

10/3/2020

### ***Beach Dream***

You knew it was a dream even as you dreamed it, yet the verisimilitude of its façade led you to believe it might well be real: the shallow indentations beside you in the surface of the dune; the gritty feel of sand on your backside; the brackish smell of salt water, not quite erasing the faint odor of perfume which lingered in the air; the swaying beach grass; the fleeting warmth of the sun as it peeked down between the scudding clouds. All of which prompted you to ask, *is it better to follow the rational logic of the mind, or let yourself be swept away by the beauty of false perception?*

3/30/2121

### ***Keeping Score***

Makes no difference:

from whom you're descended;  
where you went to school; how  
many degrees you hold; to whom  
you're married; how much money  
you make; what sort of car you  
drive; whether your home is on  
the grand tour; how many swells  
you count as friends, how many  
miles you've run; laps you've swum,  
weight you can lift, fish you've

caught; books you've read; poems  
you've published; whatever...

By the time you finally sit down to  
begin totaling the numbers, they'll  
all have somehow managed to  
disappear!

5/4/2019

### ***Dead Flowers***

Sitting in the expanse of an empty  
Wal-Mart parking lot, rain falling  
from a pewter sky, Townes Van  
Zandt on the radio, offering up his  
version of *Send Me Dead Flowers*,  
melancholy engulfs you suddenly,  
like a fevered dream.

2/20/2020

### ***Don't Get Above Your Raisin'***

You start life without pretense,  
innocent, filled with nothing  
more than what comes thru  
your genetic chain.

Then, bit by bit, random notions  
of what you think of as your  
personality begin to fill your  
psyche.

These notions largely inscribed  
by others; grandparents, parents,

siblings, teachers, friends, enemies,  
even rank strangers.

But there comes a point when you're  
dissatisfied with what you judge  
yourself to be—dull, monochromatic,  
a total f\*\*king bore.

Yet what you think of yourself is not  
always what you truly are. For even  
the notion of *self* is a delusion, a  
phenomenon constantly in flux.

So, when you finally decide to  
make a change, think long and hard.  
And whatever you do, like the Country  
song says, *don't get above your raisin'*.

12/20/2019

### ***Fledglings***

Like a mother bird,  
nudging her fledglings  
from the nest,

one by one,  
I send out poems,

then wait breathlessly  
to see which will take  
wing and fly

and which will disappear  
into the baleful abyss.

2/24/2016

**THE POET SPEAKS:** *Most of my poetry is based on actual memories of certain real-life events, as well as projections as to how those events might have played out under slightly different circumstances. Some of my favorite poets are Galway Kinnell, David Wagoner, Charles Simic, Gary Snyder and W. S. Merwin, although not necessarily in that order. I guess you might say the composition of poetry, for me, is somewhat akin to a dream—a pathway which tiptoes between the real world and that of the imagination, a means of expressing that which otherwise couldn't quite be put into words.*

**AUTHOR BIO:** Howard Brown lives in Lookout Mountain, TN. His poetry has appeared in 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, Fleas on the Dog 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. He spends his spare time teaching yoga, biking, and sitting on the back porch watching the world go by.