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Four Poems

John E. Hart

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4. *Masochist*

Word monoliths embludgeon, going his circus brain till clatter rattles like a snake throughout his ganglia. (Still wont pray.) Cain's ache is squeezed upon his sizzled spine and flurrying bibles saw and flaw with all that stir it takes— to mortify? (Dear man, you break our weapons, have your bones, be what it takes to ecstasize your limp of larynx whir.)

Divinities, he speaks, may squeal the bleat of boogie-woogie till the pulpits seat a million horde again. But do not ask, I would not pray if millions ten should task me, bite me, burn my conscience, flout my back, and hang my gorgeous neck till it turns black.

All stop in lack:
A ballad leaps enraptured from his face
and screams *do not* for thorn and kiss of rack
upon his unswaned dying grace.

MEADE HARWELL

FOUR POEMS

On Seeing a Dead German Soldier

Face to face we met in the snows of Belgium.
He was dead.
I was, presumably, alive.
Consequently, whatever the odds, they were against him.

Our meeting may be regarded as purely coincidental.
Except that it was not.
Or it may have been part of the grand strategy, a larger pattern.
Whatever the reason
(Whether the Lord had been praised or not—
Perhaps He had had no part in it whatsoever),
The ammunition had passed me, not him.

Coming suddenly upon him stretched prone in the deserted barn,
I merely stared.

You see I seldom ever speak to strangers.
This was hardly the time or place for formalities.
Consequently, there were none.

He had had full advantage of Time
(I had not) ;

He had lived his life from beginning to end.
At this moment, I had not.

With whatever personal prejudice, individual conceit, or supercilious
arrogance,

He had made his contribution to statistics,
An enigma in death for the triumph of a fallen empire.

No, This Is the Way the World Ends

Enter the program of ah! dancers, twisting through curling smoke.

Enter the jive music of ah! freedom, relaxing an uncertain blank
gaze toiling through red rimmed lids of seeing.

Enter the war workers dressed traditionally in black as if mourning
something dead.

All of this is quite familiar.

(No matter where. This is the place you came on the way to the
place you were going.

This is the place you stopped to consider what you thought
relevant—nothing else.

Truth? There was no need to confess as you did: All evidence
revealed nothing that could have been reached by any other
method.

The world, I think, is going to end again tonight.)

Enter the hostess, who offered a menu and quickly left forever.

Who was she?

Enter the waitress, who served everyone a pint of scotch from this
age of common can. Did that help?

Enter the lovers, whose obviously supple bodies were meant for
loving by a lake. Both were lost.

Enter the graveyard quartette, who took three cadenzas of a
coffin chorus before selling insurance to all present.

Exit the collective crowd like a group of pall bearers, singing
Sweet Adeline slightly off key.

Enter the garbage collector exactly seven minutes later, carrying
a new broom and holding his nose.
The world, I think, is going to end again tonight.

In Case of Accident Pull This Cord

It may have been the tracks, the locomotive, the engineer
or the passengers.
Perhaps the schedule wouldn't have made connections at all.
It may have been saboteurs, that is, something from the outside.
But wherever you ride, your opportunity is this:
In Case of accident pull this cord.
(In moments of chaos and crises no one ever does) .

If the reason for any accident is sufficiently clear,
You can ignore the consequences.
For example, even an April spring will seem worth while.
(In moments of confusion nothing does) .

If our feelings could have warned us—even had we pulled the
cord as we did not—,
We could have—with a certain amount of disillusioned pride—
avoided the inevitable,
As if, in case of accident, the cord controlled some destiny:

At that moment the man in the left was drunk.
The man to the right was asleep,
The human capacities in both front and rear were convinced
the catastrophe was inevitable.
Up to now our successes were only failures.
You may have your own explanation but anything satisfactory
leaves much to be desired.
Then it comes, then the warning comes too late or not at all and
as you wait, just in case of accident,
You pull the cord that was never hanging there at all.

Poem .

Wait, mister. Gotta light, a match, a cigarette.
No, thanks.
I'll smoke it or we'll both smoke it.
Somewhere along the line there's room for both.

Don't underestimate what I say about the cigarette;
Don't take the matter of truth too lightly.
Some things just won't sell for cheap at all.

Consider youth, the matter of things past:
Remember the long lost faces and scenes that leap half
 regretful from the years;
Remember the nothingness, growing into expectations and dreams,
All ending so suddenly when the trusted years betray.
The power of men, you find, has made man powerless.

Gotta 'nother light, 'nother match.
There's more than one way to keep a cigarette aflame.
If you flick away the ashes from the surfeit of war's debris,
You may, quite accidentally, find that lost self buried in the
 devastation.

Only Time usurps the lost faces, the lost moments, the dull
 forgotten hours spent,
The cigarette burning, the lighted match.
Time counts but consciousness;
Our sleep and death and unspent dreams add loss—
A past forever lost and gone.

I say you cannot smoke the same fag twice;
We live the years but once:
A windowed tower of damnation with fettered minds,
Unlocked by neither hopes nor fears
Nor keys from any kingdom come.

JOHN E. HART

THREE POEMS

Forfeit

The crime's wild eye
is open to dawn
the city open to plunder

What sky holds the hero's hand
the hero's restless head?