

LOCUST SEVEN

ISSN 1529-0832 Vol 2 No 7 - December 2008

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FOREWORD

In the Foreword to issue #6 (July 2008) the moment of the birth of a Locust issue was said to be painful, and in this foreword the idea of pain is also applied to these few words of introduction. Actually, Locust issues don't need any introduction at all. The various works are mature enough to go around the world by themselves. And that's why this foreword will be really painful, because there is the danger that the only idea left may be the trite end-of-the-year stuff. Fortunately, the editor has never worked for the BBC or the CNN, and he doesn't feel like indulging in the latest trends in news—Victorian sentimentalism... A quick Happy New Year will be enough... But even though we are all aware that the turn of the year is just a fictitious moment of change, let's be selfish and commonplace for a few seconds, and let's hope for a great 2009 for Locust Magazine! Let's hope that contributors and readers will go on loving and supporting the e-zine for ever! However, here is the editor's dream about his magazine's popularity. Just think of Richard Donner's 1997 movie, *Conspiracy Theory*, starring Mel Gibson and Julia Roberts. The FIVE subscribers to taxi driver Jerry Fletcher's *Conspiracy Theory* newsletter! That's the Locust editor's dream! A very happy 2009!

December 2008

IN THE GLOVEBOX
~ A Poem by Francis Raven ~

As when searching
The map is often arbitrarily
Folded into rectangles
Whose creases begin to contain
Nowhere. But what if we took them
As meaningful lines of concourse?
Lost deliverance?
Accidental rivers of information
Again dividing the country:
Oh you're from under the fold, aren't you?
I don't even really know where that is anymore!
On the other hand
There is no room in the mind
For wholeness. Everything that is kept
Is kept in pieces: roads, rivers, bridges, towns
The legend over
And now creases.

MY EX-BOYFRIEND WAS A PAIR OF SHOES**~ A Poem by Danielle Bauman ~**

Your singing barcode banter:
like heels bought on a whim,
tight on the instep slick at the tip—
I thought I could get used to it.

Your dancing debt ensued overdraft
and I had to laugh,
“what an insane purchase” resumed from the past.
Still clip clop it never stops,
and I will polish them tomorrow,
another bought reversed to borrow,
every temptation climaxed in a re-gift;
never looked into the interest rates,
if only I had chosen to shoplift.

Your flashing electric advertising the next sale,
but the wearing—in ain’t worth it.
My unnecessary accessory;
a swipe I should have snubbed,
I will return you like so many
pairs of fancy one wear wonders,
hitting the street on calloused feet,
receipt in hand I dust your scuffed souls
thinking, “next time I’ll buy something that keeps out the cold;”
invest in practical kicks for more than the rush of resist.

Yet a noble purchase is not easily one,
so I skip in new patent leather looking for pleasure
in the refund.

SHOPPING FOR COFFINS**~ A Poem by John Grey ~**

He knocks on coffin lids.
“Anybody home?” he asks.
He fondles the rosewood surface.
When was his body ever that young and smooth?
“Can I help you,” asks the man
in the dark suit.
The sales clerk guides him
on a tour of the showroom.
“Would you like something in oak?”
He can’t make up his mind.
It’s like buying a new car
but what do you trade in?
Who’d want this flesh, these bones?
“Here, feel this,” says the oh so helpful sales clerk.
He runs his hand over the satin finish.
Eternity will be comfortable if nothing else.
“My uncle Joe just died,” he explains,
“And I’m his closest relative.”
Finally, he embarrassingly asks,
“What’s the cheapest you’ve got?”
“That’s easy,” sneers death.
“You’re living in it.”

TWO POEMS by William Bryant

*

THE CAPTIVE PATIENT

I watch the ex-con walk into the exam room
He's not a dead man walking—He's a liar man talking
It's scary—when I think of him.
What did he do? Was he scared too?
I want to question him. "How was the food?
How were your accommodations?
Were you somebody's bitch?"
I want to question him, but I'm afraid I will anger him
And then he'll rape me.
I'm afraid of jail.
What if they wrongly accuse me—then wrongly abuse me?
Will the wrong person use me or the right judge excuse me?
I don't think I would do well in prison;
Since I'm not gay... and I'm white.
I don't have tattoos, a do-rag,
I'm not down with a gang.
I take particularly good care of him... in case I meet him again.

*

A GIFT OF GREENS

She loves greens.
In southern country we all do.
She smiles with her bad teeth and clutches the green greens in her jet-black arms.
"I brought you some turnip greens and collards." She says
I wonder if she washed them.
I wonder if this is her payment.
I have heard stories of country doctors being paid with chickens or hogs.

I wonder what the conversion rate is.

“Thank you” I say.

“Cook them with hog jowl.” She reminds me—as if she thought I didn’t know that.

I look in the bag.

She didn’t wash them.

But as I notice her beam, I realize I don’t care.

She picked the greens herself.

She thought of me.

I never think of her.

I wonder what I did to deserve such a rich gift.

She spins and says goodbye and I can smell the turnip earth left in her wake.

“This is why I came here.” I smile and my chest feels warm.

TWO POEMS by Joan McNerney

*

SUPER WOMAN

I wanna become superwoman
learn Portuguese in sixty seconds
end pollution single-handedly
feed rice a roni to the planet
win awards left and right.

I wanna become super woman
paint the Taj Mahal red
knock down bureaucrats by the dozens
create creative pandemonium
flying off the edge of everything.

Super woman, yeah, I wanna
become superwoman.

*

VIRTUAL LOVE

A
long
slim
poem
full of hyperbole
and alliteration drifted
into the wrong e-mail box.
There she met an erudite
rich text format manual.
They became attached.

Her fleeting metaphors
lifting his technical jargon.
They were a word couple
spinning through cyber space
giddy with inappropriate syllables.

TWO POEMS by Danol Mahoney

*

THE SCAPULAR

The money debated and settled,
flipped from his wallet, tossed in her purse,
they prepare to take off.

At first thrust, she reaches up,
throws the scapular
over his shoulder, shouts

“What’s this?” He rolls off,
stares at the ceiling,
says, “Cancel the trip.”

*

BICKER AND SWEAR

This morning at table
as the kids scream for breakfast
and I ask for peace
my wife stirs the porridge
and claims, “There are days
God walks me to the edge
and at the last second
drags me back.
I have to ask why.”

At noon, as I suck
on a strawberry shake
in a diner near work

and ponder her question,
two lesbians in a booth
bicker and swear
about who'll pay
the air fare to Miami.
I have to ask why.

THREE POEMS by Devin Davis

*

BARISTA

i'm the worst customer...
her pete's cup, hung over
bathroom floor, soaking

a towel
—soggy socks.

she's making it
from a bar; or stirs

cream
in cold-water coffee,

dripping
out of that faucet...

lets it
brew...

*

REGARD

what would neruda say
about he—that

he had a heart,
not his own...?

doesn't it sound
as though the poet is
drumming himself, just

a little...?

*

MAN'S LAUGHTER

can't
keep his little brother's 1-speed
bike—since he lost
the license to drive—

standing
against a paper rack,
at the liquor store,

tips
over, in
front of the door.

& that
wouldn't happen
if he had a car...

THE GRADUATED RIPPER
~ A Short Story by Mark R. Drost ~

“I’d never guessed,” Madame Hawarthe said, “but now I’ve seen, there’s no chance I could’ve mistaken.” She had risen from within the curtained linens and now stood in full view, the suspect she’d come upon still with his back turned but obviously in no shape to have been caught at this instant of his doings. “Turn around and face the light, Sir. You’ve been found out now face facts as an accused must!” she said further but he only cowered further away scrunching himself lower. He was so hunched he nearly did appear smaller to the Madame as she took steps in advance toward him. “Stop your pretending. Face me now like the guilty one you are!” she blurted. He turned finally, so very slowly she suddenly turned cold as his body was now half-revolved and somehow continued to render himself ever more shrunken as she watched the change within his face. By that moment which he stood full frontal before her she could no longer hold in the urge to wail in panic... the others found her, laid out on the floor where she had stood. As she opened her eyes, and overcame her alarm upon seeing the others about her, she carefully mouthed the words, “I saw him. I caught him. I know his name.” “Who was it, my dear?” Sir Aillen urged, “tell us quickly!” She replied, “I think he... entered my mind... I can’t remember!” Soundlessly she wept...

Like Madame Hawarthe we had all glimpsed it. The accused itself being one of our own close knit circle, we were acquainted with it, was in its presence at one time or other, and had only to wholly learn its methods of hiding. I was last to run across its tracks, as I had my stroll through the knolls of the outer court. Evidence of some aberrant phenomenon was all too noticeably close. First I found small fowl, their wings entwined in the tall grasses, their bodies strung by those fibers as if caught in a nonexistent spider’s weave. It wasn’t until I walked onward, and came to find somewhat larger beasts of the surrounding wood, netted and strangled in those ever more disturbing snares of growth, that I overheard the Server, calling, “Sir, will you be coming to coffee with the rest?” and was glad to be trekking back the way I’d come...

He awoke, so hurriedly that he was not sure at first whether it was late evening still or by now early morning, but an almost untraceable glow hung low

just out the window. Sir Aillen had worried himself more over the suspect's proximity the prior night and day, such that any bump in the night would jolt him from his rest. But there was no err in judgement this night; the sounds he heard were clear, near enough to his own door, and repetitious without pause. He was on their trail soon as he could cover himself and get on his slippers, then out he went in pursuit. "Who is there?... Speak to me!" he audibly called while his breath could barely keep with the words. "Did you hear me?—Stop where you are!" The footfalls ahead of him were weighty, coming down hard on the floor boards with such a lengthy reverberating creak, almost sounding with a watery slosh rounding out each beat. Sir Aillen's paces sped on up, the footfalls ahead of him edging closer while continuing their efforts to escape. Sir Aillen did not slow as a possible draft from a nearby slitted window blew through his robes, sending a chill up his posture. It was not until the moment following, when Sir Aillen made the discovery that the heavy wet paces he'd been hurrying to the beat of were not ahead, but instead bringing up the enclosed space behind him...

I was by my self in the dining hall, facing the setting sun within those great windows looking out on the terrace. My comrades, just about the remaining number of us on the whole I could see, out on the court a ways beyond, themselves staring down the dusk while enjoying each other's conversation. We had resolved to stay, all of us, until the one impure among us was found, and brought to answer... they were all so clever, my comrades, they would catch their prey,... and I was so, so tired of Old Eddington's Manor, wanted to run from here, run so far away... they would catch their monster alright... I would see to it that they would. I sealed my grip over the handle of the carving knife, lifted it from the table, placed the steel right beneath my jaw, and went through. My head collapsed upon the center platter, that devilish leer gave its final grimacing gasp as it lay by itself there alone, the first course of this evening's meal...

THE LOCUST PAGE
~ A Prose Piece by Arash Farzaneh ~

Such a comforting feeling to enter one's daily workspace; it's like seeing an old familiar face, you may not always like him or look forward to his visit, but you know you have many shared memories: my office, sparsely equipped—a desk with desktop and telephone, a somewhat comfy chair, a coffee-machine—because it is not a multi-million business we are dealing with here, but it is, warts and all, my second home.

Hours and hours of quality work produced here and sent out to the wide connected world, and perhaps, only perhaps, one in a million—more like billion—will draw the winning ticket and gain fames and riches. Your humble editor might jump up his chair, give the author a hearty visual high five and perhaps, if the author is of pure heart, I will be remembered in the heart of his hearts for having quasi launched his great career, for having believed in him, truly, passionately, wholeheartedly, when no one would give a damn about an unknown, unheard-of writer.

It is us really who get the ball rolling, small press editors like you and me. Some argue that we are on the safe side, like generals behind the line, that we may evaluate work, but we don't actively produce nor create living work. All we do, like the judges of American Idol, is make comments, most of them valid, honest, and to the point, but in the end, we don't do the singing or writing, we just share our wide knowledge of literature and the business world. Point taken.

Yes, I have been and still am, on occasion, a writer myself. Both, editors and writers face painstaking work, but the latter digs into the earth, while we appreciate and give value to their discovery to see whether it is gold or just pure glitter. I both adore and loathe the creative process. All those nights, when you face the blank sheet till your eyes go blind, heaving your arms towards the sky, pleading for a single drop of imagination, and other times when the idea is there on the tip of your tongue or finger, but how to put it in words, ay there's the rub!

And the idea is like the body and like a fashion designer you clothe it, with care and love, and the more colorful and beautiful you express the idea, the better the fabric glides around the curves and accentuates the legs, the sweeter and more

like honey dew will it melt on the lips and eyes of your reader.

Before that final transaction or interchange of thoughts and ideas, however, the editor appears on the scene. We choose and select, partly based on experience and expertise, partly on personal taste, and largely, on what is suitable and adequate for the magazine and our reading public. Every endeavor has its mental eye on the target audience and is based on how it can be packaged and sold.

The coffee is ready; let us get to work. There are several works to go through. Well, let's see. An author by the name of Arash Farzaneh has sent me a story entitled "the locust page". An obvious pun on our magazine, right? Interesting name though. Sounds exotic. I don't think anybody with such a name can make it very big. Prove me wrong. But Allen Zimmerman or Allen Konigsberg would not have made it huge, but Bob Dylan and Woody Allen everybody knows. Sometimes it is in effect in and all about the name.

Ah, the story is about an editor. Inventive. It is like a double mirror effect. On first sight, I am somewhat intrigued, but I am not completely intrigued. It will go into the heap of maybes; it needs to be discussed and mulled over with my mates and we will come up with a unified decision. But so much I can tell you, Mr Arash Farzaneh, you have escaped the burning funeral pyre, the oh, no! heap. At least for now.

That is perhaps the most difficult thing to swallow in writing. You have no control. You write your heart out, lay it bare, beating and bleeding for all to see, and the editor like Nero, with the flick of the thumb or snap of the finger can get rid of you just like that. We gave it considerable thought, but no—alas.

Right now, I am more in the mood for a modern love story. Love stories, well-written and with heart and originality sell really well; everybody knows that. No matter how cynical or intellectual you may be, we all crave love and if we don't get it in real life, it helps, at least, to live it by proxy and read about it. Or read how others have equally suffered and you find comfort there for a little while.

Which reminds me, I must call Emma. I will ask her out—again. The last two times she turned me down with the excuse that she needed some "space" to think things through and clean out the clutter of her garage. That was two months ago. Enough time for a good spring cleaning, I say. I will see what she will say this time around. Your humble editor is mortal after all; at least he has got his vulnerable side, his own Achilles' heel. Let's make that call. Not to forget that wherever you go, around each and every corner, there are always rejection slips along the way.

LOCUST SEVEN
Volume 2
December 2008

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Locust Magazine
<http://www.locustmagazine.com>
A Free E-Zine of Art & Literature, Edited by Patrick Gasperini
ISSN 1529-0832
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Locust Magazine PDF version
First Printed in December 2008
Reprinted in July 2016