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“Difference”

We are different. We have differences. So what?

I think about this. More, recently, probably, because differences of all sizes and sorts seem to be the center of most conversations.

I am different from you, my oldest daughter tells me, over coffee. We sit outside in the spring sunshine. She has determined this at a young age – she just turned twenty-four – and admits that there was a certain type of privilege to growing up the child of a stay-at-home dad. One that reads and writes and likes cartoons, going to the zoo and playing in the park and fishing and many other children’s things. That she is different from me, is only one point she is trying to make. She is also different from many of her...well they can’t be peers, per se, can they? Contemporaries? Yes, let’s go with that for now.

Her privilege, she explains, is that she has always been listened to, by her mother and me. Her thoughts have always had merit, her considerations consistently worthy of moments of focus. And, she tells me, this is not normal.

I ask her if this is a good thing. To be different.

Most of the time, she says, answering the first point – different from me, and then amends her claim. No, probably all of the time, answering the second (more important?) point – how different she is from her demographic.

Did you enjoy growing up? I want to ask but don’t, because if she sees this question coming she will wave it off. She knows that I know the answer already, and I would only be posing it to make myself feel good. Fishing for compliments.

What my eldest child sees, is how many people at or around her age are already tarnished, scraped, scarred and troubled by the things they have been told by the people in their lives. Unhappiness is more than the weight of all of the things we hear in the news, are fed in our streams. We also pass on bad/sad/mad information out of the blue sky. Maybe some of that information is useful. Some is not so useful. Not necessarily lies, but grim, unsolicited observations about life that have been handed down to them, because that is

something we as a species do. *You're unhappy? Too bad. I'm unhappy too. Why bother to do that, nothing will come of it. I don't like your attitude. This is okay, I guess, but it's up to you. You're just asking to be hurt. Why bother? You don't have a chance in hell of making it doing that.* And this kind of bile creeps into the smallest, most mundane things. *You have the same mousy hair as I do, there's nothing you can do about it. Maybe if you didn't eat so many doughnuts, you wouldn't be out of breath walking up a flight of stairs.*

Because, she says, what happens a lot is that people pass on their negativity like seeds to an heirloom garden. They share, unfiltered. They weren't listened to, so they don't listen. They were saturated with criticism in their own lives – in the form of supposedly well-intentioned correction and carrot/stick child-rearing mechanisms – and told what they were doing wrong, wearing it wrong, look silly, smell funny, sound stupid, did it poorly, as a matter of course – so they continue that blockchain with their own children. Poison flows along the most worn path.

She tells me she knows life is going to be hard. Complicated. Full of *work*. And her mom and I have prepared her for this. And don't get me wrong – she grouches about the future, like we all do. But she thanks us for not making her feel that work and complication and difficulty are misery. More like...challenge. Find a way to get things done and still be happy. Or at least satisfied that you accomplished something.

I cannot admit to having any credentials whatsoever for getting it right. Rather, I seem to have stumbled into a happy childhood and satisfying youth for my own kids. How did this happen? My own childhood was good, fraught with hurdles I stumbled over, but mostly...fun. And societal circumstances (and my own folks) were indeed forgiving. But for reasons I can only just now see, because they are clearest upon reflection, my parents did not choose to mess me up (in the parlance of that time.) And coincidentally, my girls are happy, healthy.

I am different from you, she tells me. And the same.

I could fill pages with anecdotal evidence of her point: my daughters' were, are, good students – different. Curious about art, litera-

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CAUTION

to the river, drop me

Six Flashes on a Theme

by Gale Acuff

Nothing's Impossible

Something's going to happen to me when I die and I don't mean death, that's nothing, but where I'll go afterwards, whether to Heaven or Hell, to spend Eternity like Miss Hooker, my Sunday School teacher says. Hands-down she'll go to Heaven but as for me, the jury's still out — God will judge me when I'm dead. My spirit will stand there at His throne and He'll pass judgement on me, my soul anyway, my body goes back to the ground. So my soul's what matters, so if I've been mostly good I'll hang with Him, but if I've been bad then it's Hell for sure forever. I've got to watch my sinning now — I'll sin anyhow because Adam and Eve sort of set us all up for it. so I have to believe in Jesus and pray that He'll forgive me, and I don't want to sin anyway, believing that if I just say a prayer then I'll be excused — God's too smart for that but sometimes too smart for His own good; maybe that's why Jesus had to die. Miss Hooker didn't say so and I don't think it's in the Bible so I figured it out all by myself, and I hope that's not another sin. Satan's a wise guy — I don't want to be like him and I can't take pain anyway, pain hurts too much

and there's plenty of it in Hell. Miss Hooker tells us that we'd better be ready because death can come whenever. She says that dying's a part of God's plan but where I'll spend Eternity isn't, only the choice. I'm 10. Eternity's the time between now and Christmas morning, that's plenty long enough. But Miss Hooker's 25 so Eternity's infinite. I guess when you die it's even longer. Nothing's impossible with God, she says.

The Joy of the Lord

Jesus died on the Cross to save me from Hell, Miss Hooker says, and she should know, she's my Sunday School teacher, and I'll bet she goes to Heaven when she kicks, no questions asked, I mean by God, of her — I'll bet He just waves her on through the door and inside so He can get to the next dead soul. But she says that after people croak they live on in eternity, Heaven or Hell, one place for the good and the other for the likes of me though she didn't say that but I read, or heard, between her words in Sunday School class this morning and, besides, she was looking my way

when she mentioned torture in Hell forever. I turned red but she didn't notice; at least she turned her cheek and her head as well, of course, the other way. I didn't see me, either, just felt the redness, which was warm but Hell's a heap warmer so it's best to get ready for fire and brimstone and perdition right now. But I haven't given up hope — even though Miss Hooker's 25 and I'm just 10, if she can wait a few years — and I'm sure I can — I'll ask her to marry me on our first date, if she's had a good time, and that should help me to enter into the joy of the Lord, that's a fancy way to say Heaven, where I'll be safe from sin forever, which I guess means from me, too, though I think I'll crave some of my evils and try not to miss the best trespasses and transgressions--she sure knows her big words. And yet she says that Jesus climbed the Cross to die for me but I might go to Hell anyway. I'm not sure that I get it but that's all right because when we're married Miss Hooker can run some interference and maybe I can squeak by so we'll be husband and wife in Heaven forever even though she adds that up there there's no marriage. Maybe I'm better off being single forever — if I can't have her I don't really give a damn where I

go, I just don't want anyone else to know, me included. Now that's what I call saved.

Stainless

If you fall asleep in Sunday School it's a sin and sin enough times and you get Hell, to go there I mean, where Satan lives and all his devils, who knows how many, it's probably in the Bible somewhere but I've never checked, that's not really my job, I think, it's more Miss Hooker's — she's my teacher there — not in Hell but Sunday School where I go once a week to get the straight dope about how to get to Heaven when I die. I'm only 10 so I'm not dead yet. But Miss Hooker warns that death might get me at any time so I'd better be prepared because before I know it there I'll be, standing before God, or my soul if a soul can stand--I bet in Heaven anything's possible--to hear Him judge me, whether I can hang in Heaven or have to beat for Hell. There's Satan again -- seems like he's everywhere, tempting me again and again to sin. But if even Adam and Eve sinned then what chance do I have? None, Miss Hooker says, without Jesus. Fair enough. But I forget Him when I'm sinning and even before and a lot of times afterwards. After Sunday School class this morning she held me back and asked if she could pray

with me, so what the Hell, I thought, why not, and got down on my knees while she stood over me with her palm on top of my buzz-cut, summers are hot here, just like she was Mrs. God. O Lord, she said to her husband, I mean God, Gale doesn't want to sin anymore and doesn't want to see Hell when he dies — which isn't so, I'd like to see it, I just don't want to spend eternity there — so please make him stainless. Like steel, maybe? So she said Amen and I said ditto and then she set me free for one more week. I guess I'm damned if I can figure her but if I was a few years older she'd make a fine wife for me — she's already touched me, at least on my head. I'm tempted to kiss her if it happens again, if I can reach her, she'll have to lean over. I don't know whether that's God or Satan. Maybe it's just me and if she kisses back then it's Adam and Eve all over. I wonder if God will throw us out of class, like we'll know too much for our own good.

Levity

I love God and want to see Him but not enough to die to do so but I've got no choice is what I'm told at Sunday School and church so I'd better get ready, it's never too soon they tell me because you never know when your jig will be up and there you

are in Heaven and standing before God hoping that He'll judge you fit for staying in Heaven instead of going to Hell and burning forever and then He raises His head from the Book of Life and renders the verdict, already I can hear Him saying I'm sorry, Gale, but you've been a terrible sinner and right then I'll jump in with some confusion for Him, Well, if I don't sin well enough to suit you then send me back to Earth, I'll try harder — if I can make Him laugh or smile even then maybe I'll have a shot at hangin' On High forever, court jester is what I'd be in olden days and why not for the King of Kings and His King, too, Jesus and God the Father that is, so after church today I told my Sunday School teacher all about what I'll say to Almighty God, God Almighty that is, but she made me kneel with her in prayer that He would forgive me my levity and I don't even know what that means but I said Amen with her when she was done kind of working with God against me and then she let me go home but told me not to be so frivolous again so I said Yes ma'am and left. Since then she's lost me.

Jesus Wept

At Sunday School they want me to pray and pray to Jesus that He'll come into my heart and be my Lord-and-Savior which would

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be hokay with me, I don't really care as long as I don't go to Hell and burn and burn a little more for my sins or for any other reason and they say that that's why I'm not saved, either I don't care or when I do I'm only lukewarm, that's from the Bible somewhere, I don't know exactly where but sometimes I wonder if God Almighty does, I wouldn't but then Jesus might not either, He was more down to earth than God, I guess, and when I die I'll get to see them both and maybe the Holy Ghost as well, at least until God boots me down to Hell when He can't find my name in the Book of Life so I'll be down there burning and burning but at least I'll have had a glimpse of the Man Himself, God that is, and Jesus, too, He'll be sitting right next to the Father, that would be God, or maybe since Miss Hooker teaches us that God and Jesus are one and the same then I won't see both, maybe when I look at Jesus I see God so I'm confused, no wonder I can't get saved or at least will go to Hell but no one alive has ever seen either one so I'll be in the Bad Place being punished but at worst I can say that I met God and Jesus and even the Holy Ghost and know what they look like in their secret identities and Heavenly hideout, the memory might make Hell easier to love and — damn! — I nearly forgot that I'll meet Satan, too, I guess that he'll be my Lord-and-Savior for Eternity. After class today Miss

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Hooker nailed me for falling asleep halfway through class but I just told her I don't have to come to Sunday School at all, ma'am, and then walked out maybe like Lazarus if he hadn't been as dead as he was and for so long but was angry and for that matter steamed that someone resurrected him just when he was getting used to things and I'm not coming back next Sunday nor nevermore unless I wake up lonely enough to start all over again, be reborn with my ignorance and stupidity and nothing to do but it's for a good cause.

Twist

The purpose of life is to die, I say to Miss Hooker, my Sunday School teacher, after class this morning. Have I got that right?, I ask, because I want to understand. I'm only ten years old so I know just about all there is to know about nothing and what Miss Hooker said today was that we'd better get ready, The end of the world is nigh but then she says that almost every Sunday but I'm still here and for all I know by the grace of God like she swears but anyway I've got to get saved because if I'm not and it's time for the Rapture I may not get to go, go live with Jesus I guess she means and that would be in Heaven and the purpose of living is to get ready to die, die in the

right way that is, such that you go to Heaven and not Hell and after class last week I asked Miss Hooker if it means that there's eternal life even in fire and she said, Yes, if you can call that life and of course it's death but death with a twist, you suffer forever and forever and that sounds kind of cool, I mean maybe less boring than what goes down in Heaven, singing and praying and playing the harp or is it a mouth harp, Hell, I can blow one already, "Wildwood Flower" and "The Old Rugged Cross" and "Folsom Prison Blues" and "The Battle of New Orleans," nothing new under the sun with those, and the more Miss Hooker went on about boiling oil and sliding down a razor blade into a tub of alcohol the better I liked it and told her so so she told me to run home and after class today like *I said* I said to her. I asked her nicely, You mean that I was born to die and she said Yes, in a manner of speaking so I asked Well, what manner exactly and she said Gale, let's get on our knees and take it to the Lord in prayer and beg forgiveness and all that sort of thing and so we did but it was nice and cool there on the linoleum and it's brand spanking new, damned if I didn't fall asleep and Miss Hooker's Amen raised me up. How do you feel now, Gale, she asked. Like I wish you were dead beside me, I said. ❖

“Dressing For Eternity - Our business begins when you end”

by B. Rosson Davis

All Zipped Up

Slowly, Lila zips up the fly of the young man lying in front of her. He doesn't blink, his blue eyes are wide open. She feels the zipper tab . . . like a miniature metal keyhole. She loves the sound of a zipper zipping! But, *wait. The zipper gets stuck! Geeze . . . did he jerk?*

Nope! That didn't happen.
Not a chance.

He's dead. Dead as a mouse in a trap. *Oh, look. His pants are mouse-gray, and, his lips, too!* He's dead all right, and that is that. She loves the smell of embalming fluid in the morning!

Lila tugs the zipper to the top. It's rusty, and, he's, well . . . a bit bloated. What a job! Dressing the dead. It leaves a lot to the imagination— should she be asked, “What do you do for a living?” “I dress the dead— *for a living.*” No kidding!

Death, like Life, is indeed a rich pageant! As a “dresser”, Lila coiffs the corpse's hair, affixes toupées, trims and files fingernails, rouges the cheeks, a bit. As the dresser for the “Final Act”, she meets with relish this daily undertaking at Fernholm's Funeral Parlor. *Parlor? Hells bells! We're not in Tombstone anymore, or on*

the Deadwood set. “Parlor”, that word bothers her. Out-dated, she thinks. This isn't a Hollywood Western, or gothic Victorian mansion. Norman Bates is nowhere in sight! If not. . . parlor? Funeral what? Funeral Home? That's not the right word either. Nobody lives here, really— It's more like. . . a “Mort-el” of sorts. Besides, “home” connotes “old folks”, orphans, “unwed mothers”, “wayward girls” — those words are out-dated, too. It's the 21st century, call it a “Funeral Service”, and, there's always, *Mortuary, Funeral Arrangements, or Cremation Services.*

She *dresses the dead*, plain and simple— the deceased no longer able to dress themselves. Her job is silent, a solemn service, except when she plays Janis Joplin CDs and gyrates around the stiffs on steel-tables, corpses lain out in peaceful poses, some done, others still *undone*, not yet “prepared” for their “final appearance”. Death loves company . . . and an audience.

Lila relishes her work. Making the dead look good. She has “dressed the dead” since graduating from the local university where she majored in Philosophy. It's a solemn task. . .

But, hey, she actually likes the smell of embalming fluid. She's considered being a mystery guest on a *revival* of that TV show “What's My Line?” Her Answer: “*I'm a corpse reviver, actually, a “corpse-dresser.”* (A “Corpse Reviver” is the name of a Cocktail!) No one would ever guess she specializes in “Fashions de la Morte”. She likes the fact the dead never give her a hard time, except when they ooze, or don't fit in their clothes.

Her stomach growls, she didn't eat her daily banana, having forgotten to buy a bunch at the grocery last night, despite the “snow accumulation” weather forecast. Everyone shops like it's the end of the world, prepared to get. . . “*snowed in*”. *Isn't that romantic?* She thinks. Not for her, stranded, home alone, without the potassium boost of bananas, or a passionate man.

She looks at the next client, he's older . . . *What's his name?* She checks his file. . . Ah. Mr. Homer Huffington. *Sounds like a Paddington Bear, a British author, or barrister.* Judging from the quality of his pants, fabric and zipper, he wasn't any of those. *Yikes! He is quite hairy!* Her stomach growls, again. Wow! He

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sports a tattoo: “Tonto”. Amazing! . . . So, she’ll call him “hairy & Tonto”! She had a bad dream last night. She wonders if the dead . . . dream, after they stop breathing. Nails grow after death. The brain’s chemistry takes a while to shut down, too. Maybe the brain has post-mortem mini-dreams? Can offspring inherit dreams of their grandparents? Do dreams inhabit DNA? Can dreams be passed down, like a trait or syndrome? Maybe that’s why some people have recurring dreams, or nightmares? Can one dream in “serial-format”, 21st-century digital, multi-platform-formatted dreams?

Who can say . . . when you *really* cease to be? *Hamlet?* Maybe.

From the look of Huffington (rather puffy), he looks to be a “cruiser”, as she calls it, (not a *bruiser*, that’s *another* category of corpse). A cruiser is a “bar regular”, the local bar being the dead-man’s former nightly haunt after work, or where he goes to dwell on the past, or, on his girlfriend, wife, or the new-squeeze who dumped him. . . . *Those who escape into drink are dead anyway.* C’est la vie!

Well. . . Now he has nowhere to go . . . forever. Death sort of simplifies everything, Homer. Especially when one isn’t famous, rich, or a murderer. Death’s “end-game” gets us all in the end. There Huffington is . . . lain out

on the steel table, cold as its surface. His skin dull, face powdered, eyes closed, his life but a dream. Tired of breathing, or scheming, he is no more. . . She rolls him over and tucks in his shirt. *Why must people look good for a coffin? Ab. . . the Wake. But, this is going to be a closed-casket affair!* Well . . . who knows whom Huffington might hook up with . . . after the Wake, on his way to heaven, or hell. She sighs.

Chalk it up— another “score” for the Living— those who exert control over the Dead via the Funeral. Forget the “Dead Man’s wishes”. The widow, the mistress, or the kids will have *their* say. This end-of-life ritual is theirs. The dead don’t really have a say anymore. . . or, any sway, for that matter. The Living control the Dead, even their *after-life* . . . Hmmmm, is there such a thing? One hopes, but wait! Death will have his due. Nature will her way. . . Nails and hair still grow. (Life after death, in the grave.) Nature, Life, always wins in the end. . . like weeds take over, saplings grow after a forest fire, like babies conceived from torrid love-affairs. Life wins out. Life breeds Life. Life regenerates. Life reinvents itself. Something to ponder . . . *Do the dead reinvent themselves, too?* Heavens! Where?

Her stomach growls, again. She stares at Huffington, imagining him eating Oxtail Stew, suck-

ing those gelatinous, succulent bones that look like corseted thumb-bones. Or, maybe, he preferred San Francisco-style Chioppino, sucking Dungeness crab legs, drooling the tomato-wine-garlic sauce down his chin, onto his tie as he sucks and sighs. Oh. . . the noise of indulgence! It brings to mind the tavern-eating scene in the British, Tony Richarson-directed film, “Tom Jones”, starring Albert Finney— sucking up oysters with a harlot! Cheeky decadence!

Suddenly Lila feels dizzy. All that sucking makes her . . . horny. But, she kicked her man out over a month ago, and all her ex-lovers have moved out-of-state, or are now *re-married*. She hasn’t gone out on a “date” (*another misapplied word*) with a man since. . . she can’t remember. But, hey, here she is, surrounded by “stiffs”—yet, she sees no future in necrophilia. It leaves her cold. Ah, men.

Once in her bed, she relies on Proust. She escapes (nightly) into the Dickensian novel, “*The Crimson Petal and the White*”. A tome of a novel, it’s a 21st-century-take on Victorian London— with all its filth, sex, fashion, morals, morés, accents, whore-houses, prostitutes, and “bed-swallers”. Talk about “*up-ward mobility*”— this throbbing novel excels at the Pygmalion story revisited, re-vitalized. But, in this tale the heroine is not a Cockney

flower-girl, but a cocky, sexy, skinny, nubile prostitute, swept off the “trolley trolley” by a wealthy man, who becomes his well-kept, “propertied prostitute” turned-governess.

She looks over, on the nightstand “*Tom Jones*” (the novel) awaits being read. She recalls handsome Tom (the hero) dining in the tavern with the seductive harlot (unbeknownst to Tom, his mother!) in the tavern. Figs and succulent-bone-sucking! Hot stuff!

A huge shudder quakes through “the dresser’s” body. Lila sighs, sits down on a stool. *The dead are hard work, good thing they don’t talk.* She gazes over at the next table, a “biker-dude” laid-out cold. This one exudes a recent road-kill aura. He sports a *vulture* tattoo, too. Recently deceased, biker-dude, like the rest of her current company, looks like a craggy character out of a Quentin Tarantino movie! There he is, in all his biker-glory, draped in chains, a wee ear-ring poking out from his left lobe, bloody leather vest, a bit worse for wear. He’s the real thing. *Hell’s Angel?* Maybe not.

Now, Lila imagines her next lover . . . Who will he be? A vampire-hairdresser? A baker? A biker! A baseball player? A Professor? An Actor? A Doctor? (*Mother would love that!*) Hmmmm . . . A mechanic? Oh no! I know! *A plumber!*

Face it. She knows when she’s bored . . . bored into fantasy,

lured by this chorus of silent suitors-soon-to-be-suited-up, surrounding her now, too stiff, too gone, to care about sex, love, or money . . . *We all end up this way,* she reminds herself. *You can’t take it with you. . .*

But, maybe, just maybe, technology could move us into “a life after death”— if we were programmed properly for it— at birth . . . A “Q-chip”, perhaps. Rewire the brain. Perhaps, cue-cards with post-mortem instructions— Rewind. Remodel. Rejuvenate.

She snaps out of her day-dream, makes a pact with herself: *I will not go into another bar to meet a man.* She is bored with boredom, and her boredom with bars, and men in bars!

She stares into the lab mirror. Tonight she looks “wan”, as in, *Why so pale and wan, fair lover?* But she’s nobody’s lover, not even the mortuary-owner, Mr. Magoo, her nickname for the Swedish Funeral Director-owner, Mr. Fernholm. He’s well over-the-hill, looks rather pasty himself. Besides, he left the “parlor” hours ago. She could transform herself into a “pretty woman” but, she won’t. She assures herself, her lips are still full, breasts ample (authentic), *40 is still “young”, right?* She is proud of her *real* boobs, not the implant variety!

Before her, the daily array of “stiffs”—soon to be stuffed into burial clothes— “Last Fashions”,

lasting fashion-statements, garments for crossing the River Styx. Beware the “boatman”, that sexy beast in Guccis, who totes a big staff! (*Or, is that a paddle?*)

Lila wonders . . . *Has anyone been placed into a coffin nude? “Au natural”, waiting for the worm, or the Devil. . . ?* Laid-out nude on tufted silk interior, sealed in a coffin, buried in the raw. Sort of— *Nude with benefits.* The worms will rejoice over not having to munch through cotton or wool, chew vinyl, or digest micro-fiber. Formal burial garments, suits and ties, can be such a hassle! (*Worm’s POV*)

Suddenly she slaps her forehead. *Now there’s a business idea! And . . . I’ve already got the laid-out clientele!* Her brain is pitching it to investors . . . a new business, a new Reality TV Series, new fashion industry: “Designing for the Dead”, “Dead Man’s Fashions”, “Burial Garb”, “Coffin Clothiers”, “Clothes to Die For”, “Disintegrating Styles”, “Dead Ringers!”— Puns are such fun when one is buried in ideas! She’ll make a fortune— the only designer with a *death-defying label!* A coffin-clientele! A *de rigueur*-style well-suited for dead-beats, and dead-ringers! *Ah ha!* “Rigor Mortis”— That’s it! Her *new designer label!*

She’ll find humor in all this yet— All this “*after-life-attire*” *creeps up on you. . .* and . . . think of the *shoes* for the corpse at the

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wake, those “*post-part-them* parties”! (celebration-of-life). OMG! *What kind of shoes do you wear in heaven?* Blue Nikes? Crocs? *What kind of soles for Hell?* Everblast Black?

Imelda M. would rise from her grave... Oh, wait. (*She’s not dead yet.*) Who cares. *Shoes make the man, the woman, or, the corpse!* And there’s no need for a matching handbag! Who knew *dressing for death* could be so simple. Purse, or no purse?

She looks up, the glee on her face slowly fading, as she exclaims, “*Merde!*” There, in the mirror in front of her, dressed in flowing black polyester (Halloween-cheap synthetic fabric), skeleton-skull-vacant face, sickle in his boney hand, floats the Grim Reaper! (aka Death) Leering at her! “Too bad, Sweetie. You’re dead.” His boney fingers skim her chest.

“But, but... I’m not dead. Not yet. No way, in my polyester lab coat and... scuffed flats! I’ve got to change!”

“No time.”

“Can’t this wait?”

“Time’s up!”

“Then strip me! Bury me nude!” She flings her flats at him. Death catches them, throws the shoes over his skeletal shoulder. Lunging at her, he snags her clothes, tugs at the lab coat, attempts to strip her to the flesh— (not to the bone . . . that’s later). His horrific laugh fills the lab. The

last thing she hears? *Her zipper. . . un-zipping.*

“F _ _ k! The zipper’s stuck!” grumbles the Grim Reaper.

She smiles. *Who knew Death could be so ironic! Provocative!*

• • •

Last words from the Dresser: “It’s not over, ‘til it’s over.”

Spoiler Alert: Death doesn’t get the girl (our frustrated “fashionista de los muertos”) at least not

in this story. Nope. Lila, still-kicking, still dreaming, escapes the Grim Reaper to discover further adventures in her ditzy skin-trade of “corpse-dressing”. She’s thinking about “blogging”- her blog— *Adventures of a Corpse-Dresser.* ❖

“Gods and Goddesses”

by Pawel Markiewicz

Achilles disarms the ballad.
Adonis draws composition.
Athena entices the beat.
Artemis lures creation.

Augeas writes the meek epic.
Chronos seduces the light ode.
Centaur beguiles dreamy lyric.
Demeter gratifies the rime.

Erato charms the poetry.
Dionysus allures an ode.
Eris fascinates poesy.
Euterpe magnetizes rhyme.

Hector describes a tender rune.
Hebe enchants Ovidian verse.

"Glossary of Budget Terms for the Grassroots Art Grant Application"

a vaguely tongue-in-cheek prose poem by The Blotter's Somewhat Resentful Editorial Staff

Project Expenses

A. Personnel

Payments for salaries, wages, fees and benefits specifically identified with the project for administrative, artistic and technical/production staff. My God – would that we had some, I could stop trying to be so clever. So very clever.

B. Outside Fees and Services

Payments to firms or persons for the services of individuals who are not normally considered employees of the grantee but consultants or the employees of other organizations, whose services are specifically identified with the project. Artistic personnel who are serving in non-employee/non-staff capacities should be described here. You're kidding, right? Artists, I have found, don't like being called consultants or personnel, much less as non-employees or non-staff. I would describe them, therefore, as pets. Feed them. Walk them. *Brush them!*

C. Space Rental

Payments specifically identified with the project for rental of office, rehearsal, theater, hall, gallery and other spaces. Closets. Chimpanzee cages. Roman baths. Don't lie. You know what we mean.

D. Travel

All costs directly related to the travel of an individual or individuals specifically identified with the project. Include fares, hotel, and other lodging expenses, meals, taxis, gratuities, per diem payments, toll charges, mileage, allowances on personal vehicles, car rental costs, etc. Do not include reception or entertainment costs, by damn. That means things like hookers, hookahs, howdahs, *bowdy-doo's*, doo-dads, doo-dahs, and doo-does. Spap-oop is doo-dads backwards and upside-down, did you know that? And, of course, shipping costs should be listed under Remaining Operating Expenses. They should be but knowing you they won't be.

E. Marketing

All costs for marketing/publicity/promotion specifically identified with the project. Do not include payments to individuals or firms or infirm individuals that belong under Personnel or Outside Fees and Services. Include costs of newspaper, radio and television advertising, printing and mailing of brochures,

flyers and posters, you old bastards. You young bastards include costs of Facebook, Instagram, Tickety-fucking-Tock and other much cooler marketing collateral. Fundraising costs should also be listed under Remaining Operating Expenses and filed under B dash S for *backside-smooching*.

F. Remaining Operating Expenses

All expenses not entered in other categories and specifically identified with the project. Include stuff we're trying to hide. Include scripts and scores, lumber and nails, electricity, telephone and telegraph, storage, postage, interest charges, photographic supplies, publication purchases, sets and props, equipment rental, insurance fees, trucking, shipping and hauling expenses not entered under Travel, subgrants, sub-subgrants, sub-grantgrants and other fundraising foolishment. Tee-hee. Wait, did we just include scripts and scores in the same category as lumber? For crying out loud - who thinks this stuff up? Are they freakin' high?

G. Total Cash Expenses

The total of all items A-F above, ya *genius*.

Project Income

A. Admissions

Revenue derived from the sale of admissions, tickets, subscriptions, memberships, etc. for events attributable or prorated to the project. What does prorated even mean? Fred Jenkins from Altoona, Pennsylvania: for \$500, can you tell us what prorated means? Please use "prorated" in a sentence. Now illustrate that sentence with personal anecdotes.

B. Contracted Services Revenue

Revenue derived from fees earned through sales of services (other than this grant). Include charges for workshops or other services to other community organizations, government contracts for specific services, performance or residency fees, tuition, contract killings, illegal surgeries, etc. Just artistic monkey-business as usual.

C. Other Revenue

Revenue derived from sources other than those listed in other lines. Include catalog sales, advertising space in programs, gift shop income, website demolition, concessions, parking, illicit investment income,

etc. You know...like, *other*.

D. Private Support

Those funny, wonderful underpants that you wear. I love them. *Re-ally*, I do.

E. Government Support

Cash support derived from grants given for this project (other than this grant) by agencies of the federal government, state government, multi-state consortia of state agencies, city, county or other local government agencies, or a proportionate share of such grants allocated to this project. Say consortia five times fast, write it on a slip of paper and fold it up and pinch it between your cheek and gum. Please note that Council funds may not be used to match another Council grant. I hate it when you ask, so don't.

F. Applicant Cash

Include funds from the grantee's present resources that the grantee provided to the project. Also include funds from the grantee's present resources. Like, that the grantee provided. To the project. *Abem*.

G. Grant Amount

Amount received from the Grassroots Arts Program in support of this project. If this amount is less than zero, just randomly pick a number between that amount and \$1740 and put this new number here. This will be called "The Working Number" or "Our Magic Goal." Heh. Heh-heh.

H. Total Cash Income

The total of all items A-G must equal or exceed the Total Cash Expenses of the project. Hey, good luck with that!

The Dream Journal

real dreams, real weird

Please send excerpts from your own dream journals. If nothing else, we'd love to read them.
We won't publish your whole name.

Food in dreams is not very good. But kisses are. Why is that? If it is a mouth thing, I find it inconsistent. Why is running a poor sensation of reality, but falling is very intense? Holding someone in your arms quite satisfying, but touching their hair not?

I have these questions, and others, and it feels to me like dreaming is a poorly programmed Matrix. When you yell or scream to other people to come rescue you, it is poorly edited audio – too quiet, not at all what you were trying to do. When someone else yells? It's louder than is actually humanly possible. Amplified to the illogical extreme. Other people's hand-strength (when gripping you on the arm, for example) is phenomenal. Your own, when trying to catch a falling baby or a blowing-away umbrella. As pitiful as a toddler's.

I am aware that this is fully our subconscious giving us a goose in the nether regions, but come on. Why can't I have a good glass of orange juice, or rescue my little sister from a shark attack when she falls overboard? How come I can fly (without visible means of support) but I can't successfully keep my pants up during a book report I'm not prepared for in seventh grade? And speaking of that, why can I remember the complete lyrics to every song on the inaugural Doors album, but not the subject of my book report? What is wrong with my subconscious? Why does it want to f**k with me so?

Eleanor - cyberspace

Continued from page 3

ture, music, nature and philosophy – same. Stubborn – same. Attentive – different. Hospitable and welcoming – same. Not easy to give in to anger and frustration – different. Surely some of these traits are part of the package deal of my wife and me – we, too are similar and different. But because I was the home caregiver, I was the parent my girls saw more, heard more from, learned actively and passively from.

I enjoy seeing the results of their growing up. I appreciate our differences. They teach me a lot of things. And they are artists, gardeners, philosophers, readers. Like to cook. Try new recipes. Read recreationally. I love this, because I have heard a statistic that most people never read a book again after they get out of school. And what is up with that?

Garry - chief@blotterrag.com

Contributors:

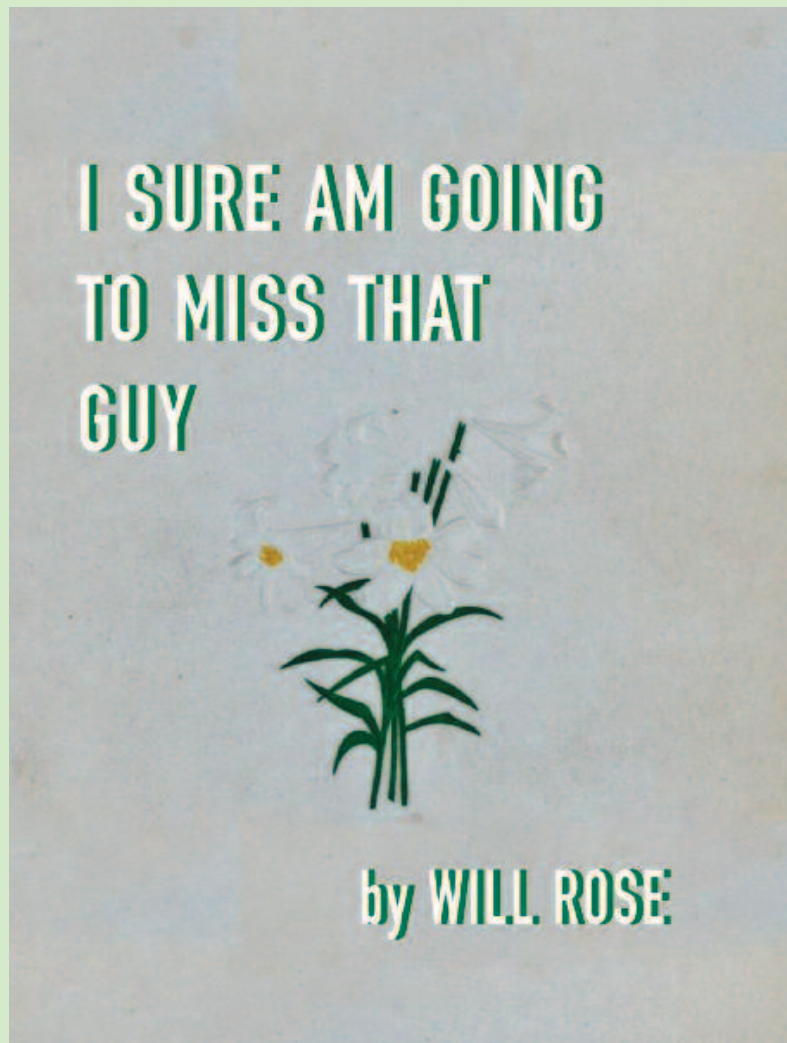
Gale Acuff, professor of English in Zababdeh, Palestine, writes, “I have had hundreds of poems and flash published in a dozen countries and have authored three books of poetry. My poems have appeared in *cc&d* (Oct. 2011), *Ascent*, *Reed*, *Arkansas Review*, *Poem*, *Slant*, *Aethlon*, *Florida Review*, *South Carolina Review*, *Carolina Quarterly*, *Roanoke Danse Macabre*, *Ohio Journal*, *Sou'wester*, *South Dakota Review*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *New Texas*, *Midwest Quarterly*, *Poetry Midwest*, *Adirondack Review*, *Worcester Review*, *Adirondack Review*, *Connecticut River Review*, *Delmarva Review*, *Maryland Poetry Review*, *Maryland Literary Review*, *George Washington Review*, *Pennsylvania Literary Journal*, *Ann Arbor Review*, *Plainsongs*, *Chiron Review*, *George Washington Review*, *McNeese Review*, *Weber*, *War*, *Literature & the Arts*, *Poet Lore*, *Able Muse*, *The Font*, *Fine Lines*, *Teach.Write.*, *Oracle*, *Hamilton Stone Review*, *Sequential Art Narrative in Education*, *Cardiff Review*, *Tokyo Review*, *Indian Review*, *Muse India*, *Bombay Review*, *Westerly*, and many other journals. I have taught tertiary English courses in the US, PR China, and Palestine.”

Originally from San Francisco, CA, **B. Rosson Davis** lives and writes in Greensboro, NC. A magna cum laude graduate, B.A. in Theatre & Creative Writing, from San Francisco State University, Rosson Davis lived a year in Spain following graduation. She grew up in Kailua, Oahu, San Mateo, also living in Mt. View, Los Altos, Los Gatos, Napa Valley, and San Francisco. Her poetry is published in Literary journals and anthologies, among these: *Transfer*, *Choice*, *The Michigan Quarterly*, *Carolina Quarterly*, *The Southern Review*, *International Poetry Review*, *Ragnarok*, *Floating Island*, *Writers Choice & Vineland Poets*. An "emerging screenwriter", Rosson Davis' feature screenplay, “Sweetly Deadly”, a coming-of-age drama, ranked in the top 20 screenplays out of 7,251 competing in The Academy Nicholl Fellowships Screenplay Competition. “Charlemagne” and “Cocksure” (cheeky comedy) were Semi-Finalists. “The Boy and the Pomegranate”, Davis' short story, was recently published in HEMINGWAY Shorts Vol. 6. Her O. Henry Ending pieces: The Chili Queen, All That Glitters, How To Order a Hamburger in the South, appeared in *O. Henry Magazine*.

Paweł Markiewicz was born in Siemiatycze in Poland. He is poet who lives in Bielsk Podlaski and writes tender poems, haiku as well as long poem and flash.

A simple homily about belief,
understanding, spirituality,
sin, redemption, sacrifice,
and love.

You know, just your everyday
Easter People stuff.




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