

HARBOR OF GRACE

Jnana Hodson



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in memoriam, Charles T. Subock Jr., 1951-2002

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Conjuring drops of blood

carousing from West Virginia to Maine his voracious appetites were Vikings
charring from within until he alone survived to drape himself in Jesus, sweetly the
embrace of suspenders and buttons supplanting belt and zipper, nothing half-
hearted even in a chaste new marriage with her covering under a bonnet as they
neighbored Amish, lent a hand with the milking, lifted a cast-iron stove solo while
laughing, before we could help but love is something other than strength and
muscle that may simply insulate some unspoken wounding

One to the other

from exposure and combustion or discharge the black casing between the room and its inhabitants and the smoking, devouring fire a daily miracle obligates respect you don't touch without reckoning if you're to live through a northern winter

Two by two or four

when he accused Squirrel of being inconsistent, dwelling like Lot in the city whose own wife had already turned to stone in the desert of this unfathomable sojourn, Squirrel replied more than two disciples were called from the shore and the uniform didn't quite fit his practice, even monks have a head cook and an abbot, even Ezra had a remnant to blow into flickering, even Quakers relocated as kindred bands, even our own elders look askance at our intensity

Yes, enter the Squirrel

in their fairy tale, the prince was a squirrel where she really wanted a Ken driving a convertible across the moat where the princess, of course, would never sail from a treetop where it was all make-believe, anyway, to take seriously he wasn't really a prince or even a daddy, yet Squirrel nature was growing and in the storytelling, the parts he finds most accurate are the animals : Three Little Pigs, Big Bad Wolf, a Frog or a Beast maybe tell the kiddies of Coyote or Bear or Monkey-God but the girls are another matter

Far and away

a marriage breaks from within and without – his, mine – why should the church differ? the hedge he needed, he said, before it came down and then, quickly, sadly, he could no longer straddle the Old Ways so the rumbling may be falling rock and ice or the motorcycle he's riding full-bore through flaming demons in his flight toward full sun and hurricane with his heart pressing over the calm eye : still, we dream of him, parting the sea

Strait and narrow

there is much to admire in the unembellished line when true, so Squirrel, who would drive a crooked furrow in a place where only the best horses may be proud without sinning, also strayed much as a black bear past midnight after the spring lambing, maybe he could have built a dairy herd milked in a white-walled shed, given the right partner, who would not weep over bank statements where the only green would be choked with weeds or his life fenced in, a private Eden stacked with moldy bales within rubber boots when shoveling his way back behind him

Against the grain

the scoutmaster was right, Squirrel's not handy that way with wrenches or wiring or even bent nails, much less some ballgame or ice skates, no wonder the world was wide open to the embroidery of his mind when he had nothing to hold on to these things that shape one's direction as much as any opportunity : today's American farmer is a mechanic, electrician, carpenter, accountant, designer before the crops and herds matter

Somewhere in the vein

the herd, impatient lumpen clouds, hooves in the mud demand milking at dawn and sunset, remains to farm somewhere in the background, to pull into its lane, not just corn or hay but livestock with sweaty black nostrils and broad tongues turning toward the dog : how could anyone leave this plaintive bellowing in a stream of cheese and butter even if he's forgotten how to drive a tractor and has never plowed, anyway : his grandpa quit this for the city

A companion's withdrawal and flight

as rejection spurs anger torching friendship they would both start over, elsewhere, one shrouded in guilt of a massive black-and-white uprising countered the way ice breaks off a glacier in summertime to careen down-mountain while Squirrel, as the other, recognized his own vulnerability to backsliding, the Way is a tightrope you can fall from on either side and should the cord become too rigid, away you go, seeing too much slackness is also a problem, yet hardness, then, also cracks or shatters all the same until crossing desert, you strike the rock, O faithful one, for water

Of flesh and temptation

now as Squirrel still slips into barn-door pants and banded-collar shirts, even his meditation blanket from decades earlier, grateful for all who have shaped his practice in each of its unique revolutions, he ponders righteousness and compassion, how the secret yearnings that draw one to the circle may also turn one away crushed by waves of unworthiness or inflated by some delusion or lust or disappointment in human shortfalls

Threnody

still, sometimes, when what you believe to be right appears unattainable, you can no longer deny you are flesh and temptation is more substantial than any shadow on your bed, then accuse the world of transgressions all you want, when you close into darkness you will stumble, no matter the tattoos or scars you've acquired

About the Author

Winding down a four-decade career as a daily newspaper editor, Jnana Hodson is also the author of two published novels, *Subway Hitchhikers* and *Ashram*. His poetry and fiction have appeared in literary journals on four continents. He now lives with a wife who's an avid gardener in the Seacoast Region of New Hampshire. He blogs at Jnana's Red Barn (jnanahodson.net).