
THE POETRONICA SCROLLS

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Contents:

Two guys from Sierra Leone eat a sandwich while a telephone rings itself into hysterics and a kid with a case of hives (thank a bowl full of strawberries and don't ask what peanut butter does to this kid) does a dance around their table with his top teeth missing and then there is the Coca-Cola truck parked outside in the slow lane but if you care about any of this you don't have enough going on.

Half-Off After Taxes

Lady Rowena Peachstone--
Third heir to the Harold Augustus Peachstone Foundation
And related savings and residuals--
Tells her clique via every current venue
Both in print and in sound:

“I’ve planned a wonderful dinner tonight with my Bichon Frise.
After an evening of peach cocktails and peach schnapps liqueur
We shall awaken to sweet vanilla risotto
With poached peaches and chocolate
Followed by
Peach salad covered in balsamic vinaigrette.
We shall conclude partially nude with
Fulchino Vineyard peach wine at midday
While sharing a bidet.
Nice way to unwind after working all week!”

She turns from her trumpets and toilet and dictation machine
And finds her dog has a bone-handled knife in her back.
She seems listless, lifeless, or a combination thereof.
Lady Rowena Peachstone returns to her morning toil.

“Slight change of plans,” she breathes.
“Lady Frou-Frou seems to be feeling the pits.”

Leisure Time for the Dispossessed¹

Rebecca
She is painting nails with
Disappearing ink
Robert writes love letters
In the blood of innocents
Eddie draws pictures of the Führer
Over maps of Israel and Jordan
Mother projects Bible scripture
Over walls painted Band-aid colour
The girl on the twenty-third floor
Is screaming mock protest in Portuguese
While her man smokes Hollywood cigarettes
And Chinese noodles and boiled crab flesh
Invoke hunger through air vents and cracked ceiling
And the ground way down below
Yields to this building of a hundred rented homes
Like a lonely child
To an enemy soldier

¹ Published in *Misfit's Miscellany*, *Poetswest*, *Randomly Accessed Poetics*, *Out of Our* (which is featured in *City Lights* and other fine book stores) and *Gloom Cupboard*.

C'est ca que j'm

The weary world of mankind crawls along the ground like an old dog, dragging its rusty chain. Reuben sits at a McDonald's table in a Wal-Mart store in an industrial park, looking at the penny illustrated on the free newspaper, the penny first minted in 1793 and worth untold millions. Reuben used to find them by the child-size fistful in his great-uncle's bedroom, and in cubbyholes painted shut but pried open with a butter knife, large-gauge trains and track, banjo ukuleles and love letters in tiny envelopes with brown ink from a war front in 1862. A door in the kitchen closet—tiny and unnoticeable in the wainscoting—led to a crawl space behind the hearth where runaway slaves slept on straw—and at night, spiders and shadows and the smear of headlights on 1950's green window blinds.

On the hamburger wrapper, a red-wigged god vaults over a trademark symbol and slam-dunks a paper cup into a wastepaper basket. Reuben hopes Ronald remembered to remove the plastic lid. Both fast food and retail chains drown themselves in primary colours like peacocks vying for your affection. Reuben asks himself, *do we buy more because of this display of red, yellow and blue?*

When he was ten years old, Reuben would sit on the stacks of magazines in front of the A&P while mom pushed her cart around the aisles, serenaded by 101 Strings as they spun decades-old pop songs into cotton candy swirls. This was ten years after Sears had given up on pushing white, elbow-length gloves with pearl buttons on womankind. Men weighed more then, women weighed more then, people smelled less like body spray and more like sweat, fart, and polyester. Reuben could recall these awkward adults sitting around more often, and talking and joking more easily than today.

They also smoked themselves into oblivion. They were superseded by brand-name endorsed models slumming off the catwalk, eyes glued to glowing slabs of plastic covered in shiny windows, like posh asylum escapees with the hypnotic pocket watches they stole still in their greedy paws.

Today, in a last-ditch effort to seem approachable, the store manager is sorting push carts of recovery—the blender found in the pantry freezer case, the contraceptive box minus contraceptives found in the pets department—and the blue-eyed soul woohooing from the sound system is a ghost star from 1982.

Reuben looks at the skinny moms in Michelin Man-shaped parkas, reminding their children in high, thin voices about making good choices. He looks at his dry, chapped, fat hands and laughs. The clumsy, smelly dinosaurs with their banjo ukes and tinny music all died out, but they left one good egg.

And All Of Us Are Babies

Nina, I am waiting for your jazz heart
But you will not need my earnest hand
There on the promised river of waters of life
There on the keys plinking positivity

Oh, you don't need chivalry

Delivery in six to eight weeks
Stiff Germanic waltzes cheek-to-cheek
But Jehovah says through Jesus to tell you
He cares for you
He care for you

We are waiting for your tremulous song
We are standing by the roadside, darling, and
Waiting

No Words

Mourning Cry Mistorin was a confidence girl
Kept her pain and memories clapped shut in a compact
Left her purse and car keys in a mothballed train car
To shoulder her remorse of losing anything dear

She was a vapour

Wore a shadow for a long, black dress
Bruise on her shoulder for a brooch
Knives for heels in her wound-up film reel
Open sky and moonlight for a synagogue

Wandering into hail wind's window

Tongue Tastes Better Dead

The undertaker from Edinburgh
He turns to talk to me and knees me in the groin
With litany of shaman satanic Celtic dog
Ma

He says that
*The stupid Americans hang the DJ because
They are stupid always stupid
The stupid Irish drink their own pee from bottles
They bomb their kids in busses and schools
The stupid Americans love the stupid Irish
Because they have no capacity for history*

I tell him that
*An old, black goat
Has no business kicking sheep*

Nightjar²

The Nightjar's eyes are ravenous
For car wrecks and sideshows
Or
The spectacle of writhing trees
With gold leaves
Pulling their short roots from the ground
To drown themselves in merlot in posh cafes
Well past closing time
Bark going blotchy and falling off
Bugs of every description eating them alive

The nightjar sticks a quarter into a coin-op TV
Down at the bus terminal
He watches the black and white puppetry
Of a porcupine playing a game of hazard
With a pelican
While throwing dice for both

The porcupine says
His best teachers taught outside the confinement of schools
He recalls an old RKO musical dancer
A retired social studies professor
And an Irish grandmother
They all gave him lessons of lasting value
Unlike those rompishly caustical snobs
At St. Mary's he says
They were a miserable lot
They drained a youngster's heart of life
And tied his brains in knots

² Published in *Whisper, Red Fez and The Tower Journal*

567903ASDW³

I painted a portrait of an angry squirrel on pastry cloth
And stretched it over a tepee frame
Which I stationed in my neighbour Anne's backyard
And mounted a telescope at the top
So Anne and I could eat honey and strawberry sandwiches
And follow the stars.

We call it our aurora sky station and
We keep a legal notebook with the nightly observations
And various sketches in crayon
Which we intend to donate to hide under sofa cushions
At Value Village so that some kid will be sitting on this old sofa
His parents bought for twenty-eight dollars
On account of the hole in the back and shout,
"Hey, Mom! Look at these astronomical coordinates!"
And then our infamy will be secure.

Both Anne and I feel resentment
Regarding the way that Marge the checkout lady at Save Easy
Treats us and she gets all nasty and everything
When we come in with coupons
And so we call her the angry squirrel.

So that's why we turned her into a mascot,
And tried to make her something that fits in somehow.
Someday when she isn't angry we will whisper in her ear
About the aurora sky station
And ask her to come home with us
So that she can help with the cocoa,
Which you need to keep warm when watching the stars in winter.
She can be Angry Squirrel, Director of Warmth.
Her secret ID will be 567903ASDW.
I wrote it on my tube socks with a laundry marker so I won't forget.

³ Published in *Whisper, Toad, Turbulence, Vox Poetica, The Toronto Quarterly* and *The Tower Journal*

Freud Chicken⁴

Play the overpaid shrink like a pawn shop sax
Sell him your mellow song
Tell him you see acutely what was wrong
And how you made adjustments in your attitude
And that the medication works great

Then get him to sign you out of here
And then take a long trip to nowhere
So that you can reacquaint yourself
With talking ducks and evil food blenders
And Greek choruses on the radio
And sunsets that spell THE END just for you

Because troubling though it may be
It beats the pink and beige walls of a six-by-eight room

⁴ Published in *Whisper, Red Fez* and *The Tower Journal*

Folk Process

It's a little piece of pretence
Torn short at the trouser cuffs
It's a scruff neck covered in blood
From where the mocking bird pecked a hole
In the throat of the barking dog
It's an art form that lies dark lies
To tell truths about the guilty
It's a tongue roll spread thin
From the sins of your mother to you and to me
And it confesses confusion from a Babylonian pain
And it dries out there in the last heat of summer

Lost

I had a friend who was sixty years older than me
She said she had always been troubled in the head
Her husband used to drive her
To the beginning of a forest trail
She would walk through the snow for hours
And follow the foot prints of rabbits
It made me think of this German artist
Who explained pictures to a dead rabbit
And how in explaining it to my wife
She called me crazy
I guess that artists and crazy people are the same
We look for lost parts of ourselves
On paths meant for rabbits

Dust Devils and Storm Clouds

Schoolmarms take my five year old baby doll
Surround her like wolves
Write lies into her record book
Fill her ears with curses
Cast spells
And make her promise not to tell
She's still a pretty china doll
But her glass eyes stare
Frozen in inquiry

Death Is the Enemy and Your Mother is Runner's Up

*Don't see Susie Lake no more
Since she quit her job at the party store*

Today, I'm going to take some black ink
And a razor
Cut you out of my history book
Replace your portrait with an angel
Flying low in the shadows of tomorrow

*She told me the best things in life are free
As we hitchhiked alongside the 103*

While the chicken extinguished the burning food blender
A cowboy with a cleft pallet
And a cauliflower for a left ear
Explained his feelings to his boots

*You see, he said softly, Your love for me
Has helped me see things inside myself that
I've never seen before....
Things like.., said the boots
The cowboy considered
My intestines he said
Mmm-hmm, came the rejoinder
And my trachea, said the cowboy
Yesssss, said the boots
And my spleen, he concluded
Never seen a spleen before....*

And sorrow was her baby

Midsummer's Photo Op

I was teenage paparazzi
Walking down seaside streets
Shooting storefront windows like a sniper
Shooting black and white snapshots at waist-level
Of passersby
With a keychain camera
Some storeowners were on to me
Same with the street side regulars
They'd quip jokes and I'd advance to the twelfth frame
Then off to shoot black and white mood shots
Of historical buildings stolen from Italian immigrants
Or bulk heads and tug boats by the dock
Maybe an outdoor stage play-in-progress
The film went off in prepaid envelopes
Then boomeranged back in 8X10 glossies
I would search for treasures in the sand-like grain
Clues were recorded on memo paper
Like a Debussy score in an accounts book.

