

Awen

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Buying The Roman Empire

By Margaret Saine

Buy the Washington Bridge?
You can't, it's a famous joke.
But you once could buy
the Roman Empire, it was done.
The one who did it, Julianus Severus Didius
from the Pretorian Guards, in 193 AD
after they had murdered his predecessor
Pertinax, anything but pertinacious.
The Guards drank away
the price in one raucous night.

Julianus was not a non-entity
– he'd been quaestor, aedile, praetor,
then as a prefect he served in Mainz,
in Gallia Belgica and Bythinia
and was now Proconsul in Africa--but
he could not hold the Empire for more
than nine weeks. In that time he made
the drones, the Praetorian Guard
drill on the Campus Martius
and be trained in construction work.
They hated it and him. And the Senate
sentenced Julianus to death.

His last words were: "But what evil
have I done? Whom have I killed?"
No matter. He was replaced
by Septimius Severus
more Severus than he.

.....

Sentence

By Bruce-Grove

The impact of eight days
is not the impact three months –
Nor forty one years.

Life Goes On

By David C. Kopaska-Merkel

You used to wear clothes:
little black dress,
comfortable jeans,
shoes;
no point now, though, is there?

You are so cold,
out only at night,
dates always end badly for someone.
You look in on your parents as they sleep;
they look so sad, so old.

Your daughter still cries herself to sleep.

After you visit her foster parents,
late one night,
she needs a new set.
The next will treat her better,
if they know what's good for them.

You wash in the river;
nothing itches,
of course,
but you were brought up
to value cleanliness.

I long to take you in my arms,
tell you it's going to be alright,
but it isn't, is it?

You take those who deserve it,
mostly:
anyone who'd assault a naked woman alone,
anyone you see mistreating a dog,
but you get so thirsty,
and the young men look so fine,
well, no one could blame you.

After all,
countless bruised and battered girls,
living with fear or shame,
and those whose lives have been cut short;
you're just evening the score.

.....

Twist and Bust

By Ed Blundell

Love and the cards, both games of chance,
Two gambling players holding hands,
Trying for tricks and scoring points,
Winning or losing on a turn.
Playing for kicks and just for fun
Staking all on a single card.
Hearts and diamonds, shuffle the pack.
I was playing find the lady,
She was dealing from the bottom,
The only game she played was snap.

.....

Send us your letters of comment!

Tuned in

By John Jones

Around and around it went, chasing its tail, the dog spun, and Jason Lamborne laughed at the video on the computer. When it finished, the next video appeared and it featured two pensioners arguing at a bus-stop which led into a fight. Jason shook his head, amused. Sometimes pensioners can be so immature, he thought.

The next video featured a busker in a paved shopping area, singing away whilst a clearly drunk individual swayed and shifted, dancing, stepping to music that did not match what the busker was playing.

Jason worked in a call-centre, which basically meant cold-calling people to try and get them to part with their money, asking whether or not people have been involved in an accident at all and that they can make a claim.

He was on his half-hour lunch break, and had only been here a week, so didn't really know anybody. Not that he cared about that. It was not the type of job that warranted commitment, and he guessed that the other workers felt the same way. It wasn't a good job, more convenient to earn money whilst hoping something better would come along. You would get your loyal 'employee of the month' jobsworths, trying to please their superiors, and this place had them, but Jason didn't care. He had had a few successes so far, but nothing special. Most people as soon as he rang and found out what he was after, just put the phone down.

"Good evening sir," he would say happily, "How are you today?" Even that put people's defences up.

Click, silence.

Or, the recipient would say something along the lines of: "What, you want my bank details?...Okay here we go, grab a pen write this down... g.o.f.u.c. ..." and it would be Jason that hung up.

Or, sometimes people would use him to have a rant.

"You know it's people like you that run this country down..." Again, Jason would hang up.

Then, he would strike oil where the person swallowed everything he said. Okay, here are my bank details. Then, Jason would receive a bonus for every customer he found. He wondered if he shouldn't use his spare time here to look for jobs instead of watching videos.

The next one, on random auto-play featured a man in some sort of prison cell, lying on an uncomfortable looking bed, doing nothing. He looked to be from the Mediterranean area, perhaps Greek or Italian. What's so amusing about this? Jason thought. There was a door to the left on the back wall, and to the right the man just lay there. The walls were bare and cream coloured. Jason watched as the man looked up, as though he'd been awoken by light shining in through the monitor. He got to his feet and slowly made his way towards the screen.

"Hello," he said, "Can you see me? Can you hear me? Hello..." he waved, and spoke with a Spanish lilt.

Jason decided to wave back.

"Hello," he said, not expecting a reply, yet, he got one.

"Hello," said the man, "I can see you. You have dark red hair. You're wearing a blue shirt and you look to be in your late twenties. You look like you're in some sort of office."

Jason just stared.

"Wait, you can see me?" he said.

"Yes," the man replied. "My name is Raoul."

"I'm Jason, but how can you see me through the screen? These computers are old, they don't have webcams."

"I can see you through here. Anyway, could you please do me a favour?" He pointed at the door.

"I need you to come, let me out. I'm locked in here."

"Where are you? You could be anywhere."

"I'm much closer than you think," said the man. "Anyway, you'll probably have a new smart-phone or something

like that. Could you get this video up on it? and I will guide you."

Jason just stared for a few moments, then nodded.

"Okay, it's my break anyway." He grabbed for his phone in his jacket which he had slung over the chair. The man told him how to get the video up and soon he was watching him on the small screen. He turned off the computer and stood up.

"Hi," Raoul said, waving. "Show me the room."

"I can't, people will think I'm filming them."

"Please, I really need to get out of here, and I only need to see where to guide you."

"I could leave the building and then you could tell me where to go."

"Okay," said Raoul, disappointed. Jason put on his jacket and walked out into the corridor.

"Alright, I'm leaving. Better than an afternoon of cold-calling anyway." He made his way to the stairs.

"Stop!" the man shouted and pointed to little effect as Jason looked at the screen.

"I just saw a door, a room. Could you go in there please." Jason saw he was by the managers room.

"This is one of my bosses rooms. I'm not going in there."

"Are they in?" Jason saw through the windows that he was, engrossed in a conversation at his desk on the telephone.

"Next room," said Raoul. "Is there a room next to it?"

"That's another of my bosses. I'm not..."

"Are they in?" Jason saw through the window-blinds that the room was empty.

"No, she'll be on her break."

"Could you go in please. I have something really important to tell you."

"What? tell me here."

"Please," he could see on the screen the man looked desperate. His face was reddened with eyes wide and hands clasped, pleading.

Jason sighed. "Alright, this better be quick. I don't want to have to make an excuse as to why I was in her office." He opened the door and stepped inside.

Only to be grabbed by the lapels and thrust into the room. He fell to the ground and turned to see Raoul standing by the door. He also saw he was in the room in the video.

"Sorry my friend. This room. It's... alive, and requires a spirit or soul to use as a kind of... battery. Somebody needs to replace me, and if you can convince somebody to come and let you out, then you'll be free." He pointed to the far wall where there was a small monitor showing the same screen as the mobile phone.

"You're live on the internet, and when someone watches, you'll see them on there. Trouble is, the video is hard to find. So you better hope that somebody finds it and watches you. Farewell."

Jason heard the door slam. The man was gone. He got up and rushed to the metal door, only to find it impossible to open. He found his phone which had spun under the bed, and looked at himself on the screen, and found he could do nothing else. Couldn't dial out, couldn't return to the main screen, and in a burst of frustration he hurled the phone at the floor where it broke into three pieces.

He leaned against a wall. It felt strange, almost as if it was skin.

Yet, he knew he was trapped, and went to the bed and sat down. There was nothing he could do but wait for someone to tune in.

Ends

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Find more poetry at
<https://viewfromatlantis.wordpress.com/>

Purloined Haiku

By Margaret Saine

The sections in italics are those purloined from the poets' original words. The third, of course, isn't really purloined, being a poem of my own rewritten in haiku.

Purloined Haiku

after William Carlos Williams

no news from *poems*
so *men die miserably*
lacking what's in them

let *words, slow and quick*
sharp to strike, quiet to wait
render us *sleepless*

poor soul I carry
off *in the cage of the ribs*
is *chirping shrilly*

for there is still no
answer why we humans live:
poetry's looking

the world is always
a place that was formerly
quite *unsuspected*

no poetry? we
should be lost without its wings
to fly off upon

Purloined Haiku

after Pablo Neruda

when you love travel
each city mountain river
gives you a new life

flowers, butterflies
I call the *patient rockets*
of Mother Nature

Liberty Atoms 13

By Christopher Barnes

A tarnished egg
Pranged the feathered nest
In the wired concrete sculpture
As downpour squirmed twilight.
Maisie's cat-fit boiled.
Her ruined necklace
Ensnaring a legend.
She flung that basket of pennies
On the hearth mat.
At the touchdown:
"Even Ilona looked solemn".

Quote: Iris Murdoch, *The Nice And The Good*

Purloined Haiku

after Margaret Saine

silence in *the way*
this particular world is
thoughts floating ahead

my feet are stirring
in a desire to flee
a tearing away

life... another room
blowing here and there in a
whirl of human steps

light not always a
gift, bulb not always shining
until luminous

I write to forget
I travel to get away
travel to get home

travel a *lost home*
and found dark rain clouds down east
sunny clouds out west

horizons meeting
and parting are beckoning
farther and further

From *A Book of Travel*

The Periodic Table

By Paul Murphy

The alchemical intrigues
Of a behind parted
In the clandestine rooms
Of the Europa Hotel, Belfast.

The new selfie snapshot,
Of annoyed entropy, ghosts
Of your middle period
Stood between rose and blue.

The original chemical sessions
On the sofa, tell-tale symptoms
That evaded depiction.
Reading the 18th Brumaire

Of Louis Napoleon by the
Alchemical intrigue in the chamber
Rooms of the Europa Hotel,
Belfast, among the rubble.

Banners of the Communards,
Vague legendary snapshots
Of chemical creativity, the soft
Landings of adroit cosmonauts.

Carcass Literature coming soon...

Whispers (For Patti Smith)

By SchiZ

The conversation of leaves flying in the air
Sounds like the rumoured whispers of yesterday
As they continue to break my weaken heart
The wind will not battle for my honour
While the whispers coast through the clouds
They give me the kiss of death
Forcing me to fight for the release of their hold
I will take the poison
For I rather commune with death
Than be embraced by a prison of ghosts
As I kneel in front of their crucifixes
I kiss the scars on their foreheads
And die.

Cold as Stone

By Matthew Wilson

I didn't like the statue in that garden
Of course she said it was in tribute
A replica of my lost school friend
To remember and mourn over.

I do not like the woman with snake hair
Mother said I must not think wickedly of others
That she is just as heartbroken over this
My friend who went next door for Halloween,

Medusa's smile is of a wicked delight
As she gives flowers to the boy's mother
A punk who threw rocks at her window
Who she claimed to despise last week.

I don't like the statue in that garden
The look of horror seems too real to replicate
There seems more than simple stone
But mom will not listen to my lies.

Your Name?

By Nick Armbrister

And they gave their war machines pet names
As if calling them such would make them
More appealing to the crews amid such acts
Of despicable life taking and maiming and nihilism
An armoured car called Sheila, a bomber named Zara,
A rifle named Charlene, a battleship named Daisy...
The soldiers, sailors and airmen were well adept
Using their toys in the art of war and battle
After all it was their job and they were an investment
Their country paid a lot to train them and develop their weapons systems
And this needed to be used in a war near you
To bring national prestige, power, profit and more
Peace sells but there are no takers except the dead...

Nocturnal lover
Her kiss so sweet, sensuous
Obedient slave
Abandons morality
Snatches victims to feed her

By DJ Tyrer
Originally published in **Scifaikuest**

Bird Nest

By Harris Coverley

For Richard Brautigan

There is a bird nest
High up in that tree
Obscuring the light through its branches
Forming a hazy shadow of twigs

Who knows how long it has been there
Or whether any bird still uses it
It could have been there since the beginning of time
Watching us all with jade eyes
Or mourning the death of a loved one

Now!

By Bruce-Grove

The Zen Master
has no immortal guardian-
Now!

The bridge
has crumbled empty into dust-
Now!

Reason
falls on deaf ears forever-
Now!

The harp has been silenced finally
and the call to arms can never be heeded again.

It
is over-
Now!

Last of the Swords

By Matthew Wilson

Always listen to a Buccaneer's story
Old men with grey hair and spent treasure
Who turned their sails into the wind
Who fought for glory and past pleasure.

For the price of a beer they sing old tales
Drawing extinct monsters on old charts
Sketching lost cities of long dead kings
Whose queens he stole their hearts.

Old pirates have no living friends
Only losers who fell upon old rope
The price of all slow pirates of the sea
Who lost their treasure and all hope.

Always listen to a Buccaneer's story
Sitting in a smoky tavern bar
For they remember a world of magic
And times of ships before the car.

Poetry required for future issues of **Awen and Bard**.

The Colour of Darkness

By Aeronwy Dafies

Caves should be black, thought Ffraid, the colour of darkness. It made sense: caves are dark. But, the cave in which she stood was a creamy white, the colour of Caerphilly cheese, when her torch beam chased the shadows away.

The hills behind her house, which was on the edge of the village, were riddled with caves. That brought cheese to mind, too: Swiss cheese. Her parents had always told her never to go into the caves, saying, "They're dangerous. You could get lost or fall and hurt yourself and we might never find you."

But, the warnings had never stopped Ffraid from being fascinated with the thought of that mysterious, subterranean world, and she had always vowed, secretly to herself, that one day she would explore them.

Her parents had given her a torch for her birthday, two days earlier, and that had been her inspiration to go into the caves and explore. It was that torch she was shining about as she critically examined the cave and found it wanting.

Some of the caves were mines burrowed long before in the hunt for the Earth's bounty; others, such as this one, were natural, shaped by the flow of water over the centuries, smoothing the stone as if it were wood turned on a lathe.

Ffraid chose an exit and picked her way across the cave. The floor was smooth and damp, a little slippery. Then, she found herself in a sort of passageway that twisted and turned like a worm making its way through the earth. It went downwards ever so slightly and there was a little trickle of water flowing along its floor.

Once you had chased the shadows away, and Ffraid had never much been scared of the dark, there was nothing at all scary about the caves. It was cool and quiet and peaceful in them; she quite liked it.

Then, the passage opened out into another cave. The trickle of water ran into it and joined with others flowing in from niches in the striated walls or dropping down from the ceiling to form a shallow pool in a bowl-shaped depression from which a wider stream flowed out through a vague archway in the far wall. Stalactites followed the droplets in their descent from the ceiling, stretching towards the floor or the stalagmites that grew up to meet them, sometimes joining them to form spindly columns that reflected the torch beam with a waxy sheen.

The next cave had a shaft of light at its centre. There was a hole in its roof through which the sun shone. Ffraid turned her torch off and saw that the shaft was bright enough to illuminate the entire cave with a soft glow, like a fairy grotto.

The shaft stabbed down into a pool of water that looked like molten gold. About it and jutting jaggedly from it were rocks, which, she realised, must have fallen from the roof.

She went over to the pool and looked down into it. There was no treasure in it. She had half-imagined there might be: in a storybook there would be a hidden treasure chest or perhaps a pile of golden coins.

There was something in the pool. Something white. As she studied it, she realised it was the skull of a sheep and, behind it, a scattering of bones.

Ffraid was familiar with the remains of sheep. There were plenty of them on the hillsides about her home and, every now and then, she would find the skull of one gazing forlornly out of the long grass.

The sheep must, she realised, have fallen through the hole into the pool. At last, she grasped a little of her parents'

concern. She shivered. Suddenly, the caves didn't seem quite so welcoming. In fact, she found them just a little frightening.

Ffraid decided to turn back.

She returned to the opening she had entered by and flicked the switch on her torch. It didn't turn on.

She tried it again. Nothing. She shook it. Still nothing. That wasn't right. It was new – a birthday present! Birthday presents weren't meant to break like that when new. It wasn't fair!

Then, realisation displaced annoyance: she had no light!

Ffraid was still in the cave with the shaft of light, so she could still see. But, if she stepped out of it, she would be in complete darkness.

She looked up at the hole in the roof of the cave: there was no way she would be able to climb out that way. She wondered if she could call for help, but knew she was too far from the village to be heard. Would anyone be out in the fields? Probably not. Still...

She shouted for help, again and again, but none came.

She was going to have to go back through the caves – through the darkness – if she were to get out of there.

She looked at the dark opening with a twinge of fear.

Ffraid chewed her lip as she tried to visualise the route she had taken. It had been fairly straight and easy. She could do it.

Ffraid took a deep breath and stepped into the void. Feeling to either side she shuffled her way forwards. After a short distance, it opened out into a wider space. This was the cave with the stalactites. There was, she remembered, just the one exit. All she had to do was follow the wall to reach it.

In the darkness and going up, the passageway was difficult going and she slipped and fell more than once, before deciding to crawl up it.

Then, she reached the cave that had put her in mind of cheese. The way out was in the opposite wall: all she had to do was go straight across.

Suddenly, her feet slipped from under her and she fell and slid in a chaos of movement. There was a crash. She felt about and touched broken pieces of plastic: her torch had shattered and would never light her way again.

Ffraid sat up with a groan. She ached. She would be bruised.

Where was she? She rubbed her head. She had rolled to her left, which meant the way out was a little to her right and ahead of her.

She crawled the rest of the way to the wall of the cave, then stood and felt for the exit. There it was. She stepped through and carefully felt her way along the passage.

Only, she realised after a while, it wasn't taking her up. Surely this passage should go up? She was certain it should. Was she wrong? Should she turn around?

Suddenly, the floor seemed to disappear from beneath her feet and she found herself falling. Falling.

Falling.

Falling.

Ffraid screamed as she slammed into rock and something in her leg went snap!

She lay there for some time. Her leg hurt. Everything hurt. She sobbed. She was scared. She wanted her Mam. She couldn't stand and, even if she had been able, had no idea where she was or where to go.

Suddenly, she wished she had listened to her parents stayed out of the cave.

Ends

Ice and Fire

By Harris Coverley

In the winter months
I pull the duvet down below my chest
To let the cold air chill the skin
Underneath those dozen hairs
Before hauling it back up
Shivering in my foolery
Grinning stupidly

My feet are wedges of lamb
Straight from the butcher's shop
My knuckles are dice from Alaska
My nose is the point on a mountain top
My nipples are railing spikes
And each toe flexes in the frost
Nary cracked by the sheets

The flesh is weak
And I relish in that weakness
I imagine your own arm against mine
Your body weighted, spooned inwards
That pocket of warm air forming
Scarred skin upon soft skin
Weak flesh upon loved flesh

And I can grip the edge of the duvet
Those dice having been played and counted
And I can take solace in a dream
Of ice and fire

Footprints in Time

By Ed Blundell

I see your footprints in the sand
From where you walked across the beach,
Watching the waves come curling in,
Beneath a blue and peerless sky.
Your perfect toes, a woman's foot,
I feel like Crusoe must have felt.
How many thousand years slipped by,
Like sands of time slide through the glass,
Since that far prehistoric day
When you were travelling on the shore.
Then there is nothing more to tell,
We don't know why you came or where
You went to or what happened next.
Just footprints from a distant age,
Preserved for all eternity,
The toes that pressed into the mud
Now frozen into fossil stone,
Leaving a small step for mankind.

Dove

By Bruce-Grove

She makes the sunrise – bloodshot
and the touch of spring dew.
She makes the starlight – bright
and the winter's frost.
She makes the heavens – wide
and a fair Paloma!

The Dead

By Sally Plumb

The dead,
debris of war
scarred earth,
tread carefully
with their shadows
broken.
Bled, naked souls,
caked blood
silent remains
in agonies field.
Shielded by sorry
clouds loud thunder,
think no more
of victory,
but wander,
ghostly apparitions
alone,
each, in their own
solitude.

Reformation Of Saint Hippopotamus

By Paul Murphy

Greek vowels beneath azure water
Diving onto a permanent mosaic.
Crisp water seeps into our time
Bubbles rise from tiny exotic fishes.

Saint Hippopotamus bathes among
The untried heat seekers, multifold
Stars dance on the Latinate tapestry.
Making the next clean glass seeth.

Observe the plangent island time
Perched on the rump of Saint Hippo.
As he blesses the elusive goat Chaos
That dives into the pea-green river

Before the sands, before the sea.

Soldier

By Sally Plumb

I come to you
as a woman
of the night.
Stealthy as a cat,
I hunt your perfection,
perfumed,
and on the nights breeze.

You come to me
on a spirit
of morning
I kiss your lips
with love of speaking.
Your. body is the soul
of adoration,
and Thor's myth
is gentle in your eyes.

I kneel before you.

Now, Peace

By Nick Armbrister

Peace across the skies, across the
continent, for now. Across all those
people, all those faces, all those minds
and lives. Many millions died for that
peace, now only fragmented memories
gone forever, forgotten by this generation
but remembered by God and Satan. All
the blood has dried into the cracked earth
and the guns are silent as we trust our old
enemies, no more war. New enemies
arise, old friends turned in a game of
loaded dice, destined to lose, sometimes.
Now peace, when war?

Battlefield

By Sally Plumb

I have been to you....
seen your face
through the thick veil
of battle,
heard cannons roar
their hate, and seen
Fate tremble
in Thor's enormous hands.

Your deep, dark eyes,
stoic with tears
penetrate wars destruction,
and I understand
revenge.

Transfiguration Of Saint Rhinoceros

By Paul Murphy

Before the Law, before the god Sleep
Or Panic is the epitome of joy.
Supported or obstructed by columns
That protrude onto flimsy vistas

Sky beyond into bleak waters
Just as the soul is drowning
The body putrefies or withers away
Leaving Law of Ages perched

On your sleeping figure
Replete with this adjunct:
"I'll say what I like," muttered
Saint Rhinoceros to his horn.

Love, perfect desire
So often sought, seldom found
Achieve perfection

By DS Davidson

Awen will return in May.