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MARCUS BALES

The Feet

Retail salesmen on their feet,
Painful feet;
Oh what a world of anguish comes from reinforced concrete.
How they bitch and moan and squabble
In the break room in the back
Though no grunt nor groan nor sob'll
Pass their lips as off they hobble,
As you see them straighten, striding to attack,
With their smiles smiles smiles
As they walk their weary miles
Through a million I'm just looking's from the customers they greet
On their feet, feet, feet, feet, feet, feet, feet,
On their archless, bunioned, corned, and callused feet.

See the salesmen on their feet –
Well-shod feet –
With orthotics, gels, and cushions, some that cool and some that heat.
See the salesmen as they're feigning
That their pain will go away;
Watch the smile that's slowly waning
As the customer's explaining
That the item is just perfect but it can't be bought today.
Oh how silently they curse
As the client packs her purse
And repeats that she'll be back because the salesman's been so sweet
On their feet, feet, feet, feet, feet, feet, feet,
Their eleven-hour work-day aching feet.

Then they walk with lagging feet
Laggard feet:
The manager has called them to his comfortable retreat
Where they'll find that he is docking
Them, the thing all salesmen dread,
When delivery went knocking

They had found the client balking
At the timing or condition or they've changed their minds instead;
And the manager is yelling
At such goddamned over-selling
And to get it back together or be put out on the street
On their feet, feet, feet, feet, feet, feet, feet,
On their over-promising under-performing feet.

Once at home they soak their feet
Swollen feet
Then put them on the hassock while they find the strength to eat
From the meal they bought while sitting
In the drive-thru in their car –
And they do not mind admitting
That they know it isn't fitting
But they just can't stand to stand; another stride's a stride too far;
They don't even walk upstairs
They just fall asleep in chairs
While they dream they've got a job where they are working from a seat
Not their feet, feet, feet, feet, feet, feet, feet,
Not their not-yet-rested unrecovered feet.

They will not admit defeat
About their feet;
They massage and wash and shoe them whether plus-size or petite.
As they limp about preparing
For another working day
With their rheumatism flaring
You can hear them softly swearing
While they get their heads around another entry to the fray.
When they get out on the floor
You can't even tell they're sore
They're so friendly, smiling, chatting, reassuring, and discreet
On their feet, feet, feet, feet, feet, feet, feet,
On their you would never know it hurts them feet.

Back on the Tour

An architectural tour was how we met.
We ooh-ed and ah-ed and craned our necks to see.
But I got all the beauty I could get
By watching her pretend to not watch me.

The tour had left us in the theater.
We walked out on the empty stage and stood.
Our breathing seemed to echo through the hall.
She grinned at me, and I grinned back at her.
She sang a phrase, and heavens! she was good.
I did less well, but still, not bad at all.
She sang her favorite songs, and I sang mine,
Until we found a love song we both knew.
We started off and we were doing fine
Until we got about three-quarters through
And realized at the end the actors kissed.

We stood there, just a step too far apart
And when we should have stepped together stepped
Away, and faltered over words we'd missed,
And stopped. And then it seemed too late to start
Again with just the little bit we'd kept.
And so we walked off stage, and went to find
The group we'd worked so hard to get behind.
We ooh'ed and ah'ed again, back on the tour,
Only sure we'd never quite be sure.

Ode at a Poetry Reading

My head aches as some frowzy mum explains
In psychiatric detail how her drugs
Have freed her and yet kept her in her chains,
And after every poem gamely plugs
Her book. I sort of envy her her lot
As, all too sober, I remain aware
I have no fashionable brain disease,
And think no odious thought
Except my lack of sympathy for her despair
Among such colleagues victimized as these.

Give me a draft of verse that makes it seem
They've read more than a medicine bottle label,
And has more than a narcissistic dream
To be about – but I don't think they're able.
Give me a stanza full of the need Keats
Or Shelley had to write a brilliant line,
Or Byron's wit, for poetry is hope
And not free verse deceits
Whose artlessness pretends that all is fine
Descending down this well-intentioned slope.

They ought to read. And then read more. Find out
What those up at the lectern haven't known,
A fret and fever passionate about
The way clay, motion, hands, and will have thrown
A well-wrought urn, instead of some unshaped
Unpolished mud that's only set apart,
The moderns and postmodernists exclaim,
Because it has escaped
The question whether it is really art
By anyone who happens to sign their name.

Let's get away from here or else I'll hurt
Somebody's feelings – or else let's find a drink
So if I have to listen to this blurt

At least perhaps I'll manage not to think
Too meanly while they tenderize the night
By bludgeoning it with language as they whine
That poverty is bad, injustice worse,
And might does not make right,
As if they were the first to ever divine
That power won't like truth in prose or verse.

The stage is bright enough I barely see
The glass in front of me, but ah! I smell
Of piquant liquor cooling in the scree
Of ice cubes clicking softly. Now the swell
Of voices starts to murmur where it blared
To my annoyance only a swallow ago
And fade as sip by sip the still-warm night
Blurs by, and I've declared
One swallow may not a summer make, still though
The first one can make many things more right.

Darkly I listen, and sometimes now and then
I note with half an ear some phrase's breath
That wanders over close to meter again
Then sighs, and dies its leaden prose's death;
Now, more than ever, alcohol seems rich
In promise as they pour out from their pain
Their endless woes, a flowing golden shower
Over the mic by which
They amplify their voices and, in vain,
Attempt to amplify poetic power.

Free verse was born as prose, and prose it stays;
No hungry generations make it more.
These voices here this passing night don't raise
The bar at all among the free verse corps.
It's just the same old therapy for free
That AA offers all who will confess
Their powerlessness over their addiction –
The same except that we
All wave the magic charm that makes our mess

Seem less our own by claiming that it's fiction.

Fiction! Ah, the word is like a spell
That we can use to write of witch or elf
Or spouse or child or boss or what the hell
We please, pretending that it's not our self.
But now the host announces how he's pleased
With such a turnout, and asks we tell our friends
The reading schedule – the depth to which he's sunk –
And so we're gently eased
Outside, our memories fleeting as it ends,
Or is that only me – who's slightly drunk?

Old Fighter Pilot

He's an old fighter pilot,
and he lived a life hotter than most,
though you can't tell by looking
and he'd be the last one to boast –
unless he's been drinking,
and he hasn't been sober in days;
but standing there so
drunk that two each of everything sways
he'll bet you and beat you
at your game or his, loser pays.

He's an old fighter pilot,
and he lived a life hotter than most,
though he seems sort of harmless there
staring like he's seen a ghost –
cause mostly he has,
and the ghosts that he sees are his friends,
some of them better than him,
and their too-early ends;
and he sees their heroics more clearly
through a single malt lens.

He's an old fighter pilot,
and he lived a life hotter than most –
when he thinks of the women, he smiles,
and mutters a toast,
reviewing the range and array
of shape, color, and size –
though each of them second
to aircraft whose memories he flies –
and he jacks a quick double
to cough, and then wipe at his eyes.

He's an old fighter pilot,
and he lived a life hotter than most,
though you can see clearly

he's stretching a glide toward the coast:
he's zeroing distance
and auguring in through a haze;
but standing there so
drunk that two each of everything sways
he'll still bet and beat you
at your game or his – loser pays.

CHARLIE SOUTHERLAND

Whippoorwill

He finds a favorite tree,
red oak, and sits beneath
it with his tea and collie
who chews a treat. A sheath
of leaves lets frogs redound.
The pals wait for the 'wills
to congregate around
the hills, his darkling hills...

Sleep with the moon. Sleep
in the grass. Dream in the dark.
Sail on the sea. Reap
with the doves. Laugh at the lark.
Heal in the down – soft the wind
lulls. Dance while you mend.

KIM BRIDGFORD

The Past

The past is what you're looking at:
Sepia, historical, and lost.
Emotions mold and shatter it.

You built this house and shuttered it,
And yet, inside, there was a cost.
The past is what you're looking at.

You thought it didn't matter that
There was a time you weren't your best.
Emotions mold and shatter it.

Are you defending how you acted?
That you weren't different from the rest?
The past is what you're looking at

(The worst, you hope, has been redacted).
While, still, you hope your life is blessed,
Emotions mold and shatter it.

The charm of cruelty is to bear it:
But you've sold out like Dr. Faust.
The past is what you're looking at,
Emotions' mold. Now shatter it.

DAVID COOKE

In Search of Lost Time

From the north of France to Mayo's a stretch,
but in the way that often one thing leads
to another I got there reading Proust –
or, if I'm honest, by failing again
to read him beyond his hero's bedtime.

Buttoned up, fretful, a delicate child,
he had never dammed a stream with sods
or pulled up a ladder into the hay
where he had his lair and listened to rain
clattering down onto a hayshed roof.

Accumulating his endless pages
– an invalid and a scribbler, cooped up
in his cork-lined room – it wasn't the smell
of bread, baked in a pot in the embers,
that took Proust back to his earliest years

but a madeleine soaking in a cup
of weak tea. Free-falling into the past,
he never mentions creamery butter,
eggs with shells streaked in dirt, or the sizzle
and spit of sausages seasoned in smoke.

Lights out plunged him into creaks and shadows
and, on the nights he missed his mother's kiss,
an agony of sleeplessness. Voices
climbed the stairwell. In a three room cottage
I awakened when the *craic* was mighty.

CHRIS O'CARROLL

Symmetry

How does a snowflake manage its six-segment symmetry,
Three axes with the patterns replicated on all three?
No doubt some frozen messengers fan out from south to north,
From southeast to northwest, northeast to southwest, and so forth,

Hollering, "Heads up! Watch us branching this way; do likewise!"
But how does each dendritic arm reflect as it complies,
Instructs its water molecules how best to crystallize
While tumbling geometric order through disordered skies?

Perhaps one thinks, "I could go asymmetrical and rogue,
Ignoring what the other arms say ought to be the vogue,"
Then reconsiders, musing that it might be kind of nice
To build a mathematically balanced wisp of ice.

Maybe the flake's six spokes have worked out ways to synchronize
Construction on adjacent sites of microscopic size,
Some outré protocols, beyond what humans can surmise,
To cloak chaos in uniform, ephemeral disguise.

ANN KEITH

The Song of the Lyre

Every bud, every blossom that swings
To the ripple of wind, every droplet,
That separately trembles and clings
At dawn to the strands of the cobweb
Or falls from the flickering wings
That rustle the leaves of the forest,
Every reed of the riverbed sings.
And the moon and the stars and the planets,
That move in their patterns and orbits,
Are lost in the webbing of voices,
Are lapped in the music that rings
And throbs through the fabric of things,
The shimmering song of the seven
Ceaselessly echoing strings,
The seven
Strings of the infinite lyre

For the voices and colours are seven.
Through snowflake and dewdrop they shine,
Reflecting the bands of the rainbow –
And the rainbow reflects the divine.

The colors of light and the voices
Are seven. The world is a prism.
And out of the coral and crystal
Is mirrored the snow and the star.

The arc of the rainbow that bridges
The earth and the sky is the image
And cosmical pattern all things
Above and below it that are.

CHARLIE KEYS BOHEM

Untitled 1

In a high kitchen,
So high,
So high,
With walls that reach up to,
The sky,
The sky,

Windowpane towers,
Of glass,
Of glass,
Through which lie the broad leaves,
And grass,
And grass,

Who in the house shall
I see?
I see?
But those who came looking,
For me,
For me.

Never forget it,
My friends,
My friends,
Though sundered, our world knows,
No end,
No end.

Untitled 2

If you have any sense, stand still,
For this is where you're heading,
A world unburned by bitter pill,
A world there's no sense dreading,
Of whirling wine and violin and men who play piano,
Of silver tine and myelin, discussed in high soprano,
Of guarded jokes and shielded wit and trays laid out for shirking,
Spinning spokes and candles lit wherever you're off working,

Who's the king, or knight, or rook, and just what's this a game of?
Where chess is played with sun-bleached books you'd better know the names
of,
And when you sink below the wine, the charm and lettuce crunch,
When you've drunk your own sweet time and finally like brunch,

You'll feel a drop inside your gut, and wonder where you're standing,
You're on the runway once again, but this time, friend, you're landing.

The War Unending

If you're found beneath a roof,
Against your own volition,
Inside a great translucent sphere,
Obstructing coalition,
Held at bay from anyone,
You deem it worth befriending,
Locks are picked,
And doors are kicked,
To fight the war unending,
Privacy, the treasured jewel,
If treasure you're denied,
Is just beyond the foot thick wall,
But stone can be defied,
By imposed invalidity,
If they'd watch your heartstrings rending,
Your own eyes see,
Where you should be,
And see the war unending.
If your visor's anchored down,
You'll never be prepared.
Perhaps you know as much,
But you still find yourself ensnared,
If your wrists and ankles chafe,
A thousand blades are lending,
Bonds are cut,
And no door's shut,
When you fight the war unending,

Fear is not the enemy,
But those who best can wield,
Hope that you can stem its tide,
Behind your makeshift shield,
By circumstance, if you are crushed,
Beneath the hail they're sending,
Your hands may slip,
But keep your grip,

And grip the war unending.
If your stone frame chips beneath a mold,
Built long ago for clay,
And you float, just barely, knowing,
That they're like you far away,
If you discern your own,
Your own is worth defending,
Just pray your armor's thick enough,
To fight the war unending.
If you once ever had a love,
A wall was placed before,
A human can outthink a brick,
And cut himself a door.
Though no one side can ever win,
Your victory's impending.
She waits for me,
She waits for me,
Beyond the war unending.

CONTRIBUTORS

Not much is known about **Marcus Bales** except he lives in Cleveland, Ohio, and his poems have not appeared in *Poetry* or *The New Yorker*.

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David Cooke was born in the UK but his family comes from the West of Ireland. He won a Gregory Award in 1977. His retrospective collection, *In the Distance*, was published in 2011 by Night Publishing. A new collection, *Work Horses*, was published by Ward Wood in 2012. His poems, translations and reviews have appeared widely in the UK, Ireland and beyond in journals such as *Agenda*, *Ambit*, *The Bow Wow Shop*, *The Cortland Review*, *The Interpreter's House*, *The Irish Press*, *The London Magazine*, *Magma*, *The Morning Star*, *New Walk*, *The North*, *Poetry Ireland Review*, *Poetry Salzburg Review*, *The Reader*, *The Rotary Dial*, *The SHOp* and *Stand*. He has two collections forthcoming: *A Murmuration* (Two Rivers Press, 2015) and *After Hours* (Cultured Llama Press 2017).

Chris O'Carroll is a writer and an actor. In addition to his previous appearances in *The Rotary Dial*, he has published poems in *Folly*, *Measure*, *Light*, *Lighten Up Online*, and *Umbrella*, among other print and online journals, and in the anthologies *The Best of the Barefoot Muse* and *20 Years at the Cantab Lounge*.

Ann Keith's poems have appeared in various magazines (*Orbis*, *Eureka*, *Byline*, *Acumen* and over eighty others) as well as in a number of anthologies.

Charlie Keys Bohem is a high school senior living in Los Angeles, California. He has had stories published in *Popcorn Fiction*, *Two Sentence Stories* and *Flash Fiction Magazine*, and has work forthcoming in *Cleaver*, *Thickjam* and *Yellow Mama*. He hopes to be the first creatively published neuropsychopharmacologist!