

The Poetic Bar¹

by Edward K. Brown II

I

Ricket-rickety, ricket-rickety . . .

Riding west on the subway, towards the Center,
I notice the 'motionless faces staring sunder.

Rickety-rack, rickety-rack, SCREEE . . .

The doors slide open. I want to leave.
Can't, not my stop. Sit down fool!

Ricket-rickety, ricket-rickety . . .

Patience, almost there.

II

Daylight.

This street looks unfamiliar.

Quick!

Chestnut street's that a way.

GO!

Calm down, here it is.

Twenty minutes early, damn!
Well, go in there and grab a seat.

Fidget-fidgety, fidget-fidgety . . .

III

"Welcome. For those who do not know me, my name is Rick. We have a guest reading this evening, but if you wish to participate in the open reading, sign your name on the sheet. And you in the back—GRAB A BEER!"

IV

(Sip.)
 What the hell am I doing here?
 (Sip.)
 Probably more bad poetry.
 (Sip.)
 Who died and made you Critic?
 (Sip.)
 Me! Ha, ha.
 (Slip.)
 Shit. "GET A MOP OVER HERE!!!"

V

"I'd like to bring to you our guest reader. He's been on the circuit for a while. I think you are going to like him. Without anything further, Marvin."

"Thanks. As mentioned earlier, I have been writing for some time—and in writing there are many factors that complicate one's work. Life, for me anyway, is the same way. There are factors. And I take those factors and I log them in a collection I call *My Journal of Experience*. This poem is called 'The P Factor.'"

Paranoia—
 The streets are filled—
 All eyes, all I's.

Walk, do not run.
 You cannot hide.
 All eyes, all I's.

C'mon, c'mon—
 That's what you got to do.
 All eyes, all I's

The hustle and bustle—
 Need some muscle?
 Baby, I'm all eyes, all I's.

Life at the Center
 Ain't gettin' any better—
 Sad eyes, sad I's.

Grass roots getting trimmed—
 Public welfare slimmed—
 Hurt eyes, hurt I's.

Egos clashing—
 Tongue's lashing—
 All eyes, all I's.

Human confrontation—
Potential escalation—
Angry eyes, angry I's.

Taps, tapes,
Psychological rapes—
Romantic lies, all I's.

FBI
I be fucked—
Closed eyes, closed eyes.

Congressional hearings—
Judgmental bearings—
All ayes for ayes.

Catch 22's—
Singin' the Blues—
Be wise all I's
'Cause they can
Getcha, gotcha, good!

OOOHHH within these eyes,
"Oh say, can you see?"

VI

(Sip. GULP.)
Great, another militant poet.
Applaud, he might shoot you.
"BRAVO!"
Don't over do it!
(Sip.)

VII

"Marvin! All right! My thoughts exactly. Looking forward to reading some more from your collection of poetry in *Journal of Experience*. Right. When's that being published? I'll look for it—cool.

"But now we are going to begin the open reading. I see that no one has filled his or her name on the sheet, so come up as you wish, just introduce yourself first. Who's up?"

VIII

I'm not going to be the first one to throw myself to the lions.
I'll light up and play it low key.
That's it.

Don't look around!
That's it, poker face.
You got 'em.
Good, some one courageous.

IX

"My name is Janie. My poem, 'Tete-a-tete.'"

Dinner—
two—
touching feet.

Dancing—
two—
cheek to cheek.

Silhouettes—
two—
looking like one.

Cigarettes—
two—
shots of rum.

Yeah.

X

"That was Janie, Janie. Who's next?"

"The name is Fred, the Arbeiter.

The Arbeiter:

- one who's able to realize;
- one who does not rationalize;
- one who refuses to be exploited;
- one whose life is rooted.

The Arbeiter:

- of technical persuasion;
- of methodical precision;
- of humanely effect;
- of communal respect.

The Arbeiter:

- the staple of life whose product is the only lure;
- the staple of life who's the maker of the entrepreneur.

XI

"My name is Linda, and the poem I'd like to do is called, 'Drop Down the Drain.'"

Rain, rain, go away. Come back another day.
 These are the words, I say. For who knows the way.
 Man uses H₂O to help him grow.
 And he knows the reservoir is running low.
 This cycle repeats itself over and over again.
 He has not learned. He must have water on the brain!

Reign, reign, go away. Come back another day.
 These are the words, I say. For who knows the way.

Man's reign is the birth of a new nation.
 Every score begins a new generation.
 Full of knowledge, their minds become saturated—
 With the ideas from the clouds, their minds become dilated.
 Their minds need not be circumcised, but ethically advised,
 For they have realized that their morals have been fertilized,
 But lost in a puddle with dirt and malaise,
 They have no choice but to search and seize.
 For a people to people relation,
 For a person to person nation,
 For a land of preservation,
 We cannot be troubled with trite speculation.
 SO RAIN, REIGN, GO AWAY! COME BACK ANOTHER DAY!
 THESE ARE THE WORDS I SAY! FOR WHO KNOWS THE WAY?!

XII

Talk about angst, wow!
 (Sip.)

"Let's keep it moving. Next is a local favorite, Ron. Get up here Ron!"

"It's called, 'The Old Woman and the City.'"

A woman,
 Wearing sunglasses,
 Thrift-store clothing,
 And her old man's fishing cap,
 Made her way to the market.

The items—

tomatoes
 onion
 lettuce
 mayo
 mustard
 bread
 et cetera

With an angled elbow
 And her stretch-to-fit grocery bag,
 The woman vehemently refused
 The help from the 'lil 'Scout—
 Prideful innocence.

The sun—
 sweltering waves—
 fathomless degrees—

Licking her pastily painted lips,
 'Lemon waterice, please.'

The bait—
 the bite—
 a struggle for spite—
 too late—

With plastic remnants,
 The old woman could only say,
 'Bastard shark stole my tuna.'

XIII

"My name is Claude."

'Incidental Meeting'

On a lark,
 Oak trees,
 Near dark,
 Autumn breeze,
 At the park,
 Falling leaves.

XIV

"Okay, I'm going to call up an old army buddy to read. This is a bit of a surprise for me to even see him here. I didn't even know you wrote, man. Get your ass up here! Let's here it for Henry!"

'Oh Shallow Moon'

After the war, my life has shown few traits.
 I have dug the dirt, and finally my grave awaits.
 I have killed so many; have left so few.
 I fear the moment when I become you.
 I looked behind me and my shadow tells no time.
 I did not hate them, yet still my life is a crime.
 I look to the east only to find the west.
 Oh shallow moon, please put me to rest!

XV

Damn, where do these people come from?

(Drag.)

(Sip.)

(Drag.)

"Hey you. Yeah you—the one who has been nursing the beer. That's right--you! Have you something to offer this audience? No freeloaders here, pal. Let's hear it!"

"My, my name is Jack. I'm a poet here away from the Center. My poem is entitled,

'Paradoxical Continuum.'"

The Nature of Truth—
 saying it at the right place,
 but at the wrong time.

Nature of Being—
 the inappropriate place,
 appropriate time.

XVI

"Well said--asshole. In closing, I would like to recite the Bar's Anthem . . ."

Cries of the Self and of the Soul

We have shared a lot, but not enough.
 Our lives are different, which makes it tough.
 We have more in common than we actually know.
 Let us not hold back. Please let us grow.

I, the Self, am a malleable object.
 I, the Soul, so many neglect.
 We are separate in one, not all can find.
 Yet we are made for each other, sound body and mind.

Let us work together so we can become stronger.
Let us express our feelings we cannot hold any longer.
Let us temporarily forget the lives we lead.
Let us fully create the world we need.

So, let us share our Selves to learn more about love
And let us share our Souls to learn more from above.

"G'night all."

XVII

Bleeding hearts,
 Walking away—
Bleeding hearts,
 With nothing else to say—
I left the Center
 Went back to the Perimeter,
And tried to continue with my life—
 With my life.

Ricket-rickety, ricket-rickety . . .

¹ While this poem is inspired by the many open readings attending in Philadelphia, PA, all characters represented are fictional. Any character's likeness of living or dead persons is merely coincidental.