



Ascension, an Ode

John Henry Carrozza

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By John Henry Carrozza

My mind was heavy,
As the spatula in my hand was not,
And through the dense steam of boiling cabbage
I beheld a face, a smile, and a serenity,
Pulling me apart and leaving me suspended
Thoughtfully, in a gaseous state -
A fog that desired only to seep into her pores
And to fill her lungs
And to dwell peacefully in her caverns,
Swirling to the rhythm of her pulsing blood,
The ticking of her biological clock,
And tingling in her fingertips
As she drifts off to sleep.

"Parchesi!" I cried, and was swallowed by the open mouths which gaped upon the faces of the players in the bingo hall. Several of the faces were the same as those which the week before had witnessed my victory when the emcee announced "B-9!" and I declared "You sunk my battleship!" like on the television, only to have my prize denied because my card, due to an

egregious misprint, lacked a "G" column. This week, I chose my card more judiciously, however, and was rewarded a dinner for two at an elegant Victorian restaurant, which I ate on Friday and Saturday nights, respectively - although, the second night I failed to leave a tip. I walked home that evening in a foggy mist which left pinholes of moisture on my coat and hat, and when I got home, I remembered that I had driven to the restaurant, but was tired and so slipped into bed and fell asleep six hours later. Hail Mary.

I had left the window open, because the fan was on, and it created a generous draft, which gave me a cold, and so a cat had climbed in and was asleep in my favorite chair when I awoke. This was alright, since I only sit there in the afternoons, but when I read the clock that said two A.M. I sat there anyway, and the cat, being annoyed, leapt to the floor and began clawing at the leg of the chair, only it turned out to be my leg, and so it hurt a bit. Then I noticed a man standing behind the sofa wearing a headset and holding a sign that said "Go Back to Bed," so I did, and when I awoke my house had been stolen - except for the hope chest at my feet, which was empty. Full Of Grace.

The cat was purring beneath a towering mushroom, or was it a toadstool, and I realized that I was hungry. Since I had no kitchen, I began to nibble the grass around me. Grazing relaxed me, I discovered, and eventually I was asleep again, and when I awoke for the third time that morning it was

night, and I was lying on a hill beside a stone that read "R.I.P.," and I thought of Van Winkle, but my hair had not grown at all, so I dismissed the premise and began to walk toward the west. The Lord Is With Thee.

Before long, I approached the mausoleum - a brick structure of an ancient architectural style, and I entered through a hole in a vegetated wall. The place was full of cats, and they began to follow me about, their numbers amassing with my every echoing step. Soon, I was treading the length of a Hypostyle Hall, where light filtered in from above, stirring no dust. As I glanced around, I became aware that the columns were carved into a female shape, and upon a closer gaze I knew that I was seeing her face again, as I always do, and I wanted to press my lips to hers, but the figure was too high and I could not reach her shoulders, so I wrapped my arms around her waist and pressed my face to her cold, stony skin, and I thought that I could hear the churning of her heart, only distant, as a train beyond the soft horizon. Blessed Are Thee Among Women.

And then, I was standing alone in a Herculean lecture hall, my students a gallery of attentive feline creatures, each posed in mid-bath, fur slicked, forepaw extended beneath a daintly extended tongue, eyes transfixed upon the stage. Then, like a script I had never studied, I began to recite - the words pushing their way from my throat, past my moving lips, and rippling across the crowd:

"Wind rakes up the coals beneath a shady ash
And flutter, flutter they mumble over tea,
Like a burned-out conversation echoing from long ago,
When the sun still set at six o' clock
And our 'Adieu' became 'I do,'
But only in our minds and perhaps within our hearts,
As the whistle finally drowned our sighs,
Then 'chug' and fainter 'chug...'
Til only barking dogs and clouds remained,
If only just to fade
While the Autumn evening fell apart
Before my glass-like eyes, at last
leaving me suspended, borne aloft that very tree
Which now is burning in the hearth,
At least that part of which is me, and so
Leaflike, I turn to thee to bid
Such tidings as I may,
Before the crackling Yule is split
And swallowed midst the flame."
And Blessed Is The Fruit Of Thy Womb.

"Jesus," said the man.

"Can you be more specific?"

"Jesus of Nazareth," he replied.

"That's correct!" And the sirens blew into the room as a dollar value was flashed upon the screen and the announcer was straining to say "... bonus round ... fabulous prizes ..."

Fumbling about with an appendage of some sort, I located the remote, and the screen was erased by a blackness and a tiny white dot that slowly faded, and I sat there until it was gone, and then I stood up and stretched, wondering where had the time gone and had I forgotten the milk simultaneously, at which point I stumbled into the kitchen and invaded the Frigidaire. After determining that there was no milk to be found, I closed the door slowly, trying to catch the light at the instant it went out, but I could not, so I finished the crossword puzzle and thought about that face until I wanted to scream, but dared not, for my throat was sore from the cold. Somewhere in New York City, I thought, is a deli that is run by a gentile, and someday he will be very rich and make a good husband, but not today. Holy Mary.

"Electra, is that you?"

"No."

"Then who is at the door?"

"It is only your conscience. Please let me in."

"But, how should I know that it is you, and not the Devil in disguise?"

"Because the Devil always knocks twice."

"Oh," and she opened the door.

Mother Of God.

The mind is like a cathedral unto itself, and you are a worshiper in it, sitting on a hard wooden pew, clutching a rosary and wondering what is behind curtain number three. Silence is your friend, and you speak only to mutter the penance you have been given, and somehow you think it will help, so you grind your teeth and wait ... But, no one ever comes - not me, not the one from the dream. Not even the cats can see you now, in the dark aisle, and in the corner of your eye a lamb stumbles by, awkwardly jumping a fence and returning to the queue. You think it will never end, so you start to cry, and your cheeks turn to roses and your headband to thorns, and soon it is over and you hurry from the shadows where He waits, and the smoke from the candles rises to the cross on the battered wall. Pray For Us Sinners.

As the lights were raised and the room came into focus, I was once more alone in the auditorium - only one cat remained in its seat, but this

was asleep, and so it I did not regard. Heavy I felt as I walked off the stage, and my head swam several laps around the pool and then said to my body: "Come on in, the water's warm," and so I dived into sleep and could not lift the veil of darkness or even see its face as I became aware of a misguided sheep and a certain face which I knew would never fade, or at least not all at once. Now And At The Hour Of Our Death.

Amen.