

the Liberator

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SPRING 2016 WRITING COMPETITION

TESTING THE LIMITLESS

April 22, 2016 · by The Liberator Magazine · in Spring 2016 Writing Competition, Uncategorized. ·

This piece was selected as a finalist for our Nonfiction Writing Competition, Spring 2016.

Written by: **Barry Maxwell**

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Testing the Limitless

There's no limit to my appetite
for waking in the morning sweat,
coming to on damp gravel and glass,
slouching from the Red-Eyed alley
and patting myself down like a cop,
checking from scalp to soles
that no one pissed on me in the night.

I slept fine, surprised in the morning
to find the same old mind, alive and intact.

There's no limit to my appetite
for nightmares, rising half-aware
of chuckling hipsters with unzipped pants.
"Take aim, damn you!" I yell in my sleep.
At least do it like you mean it.
Grow some balls in them skinny jeans.

PRINT ISSUES

- FALL 2015



~~ "The Language Issue" ~~

APRIL 2016

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- o Kristi Kamesch I sleep fine through the tests of dreams.
- o Madeleine Kenney
It's like this, I remind myself:
There's no limit to what you need,
but need something long enough and
one day you'll forget what it was you lacked.
- o Mubarrat Choudhury
It's better that way.
- o Samantha Bolf
- o Sarah Lynn Neal
There's no limit to the stream
of sidewalk well-wishers this morning,
awed by their own entitlement,
eyes dazed with happiness,
handing out back-pats of encouragement
when I'm acting kind of normal.
- o William Moessinger
- o Student Life
- o Uncategorized
- o Voices of Liberal Arts
It's like this, buddy:
The Happy Faces *won't dare* touch you.
They don't mean any harm, most times,
when they slide up the contrast
to make even darker the shadow you're in,
when they pose bright beside you
—for a selfie with the bum.
- o Event Coverage
- o Guest Articles
 - o Spring 2016 Writing Competition
- o Opinion
- o Print Issues
 - o The Language Issue

It tests me,
like pulling weeds in dry dirt,
to make sense of some people,
like sloshing cups too full of optimism
to contain themselves.
All cream and no coffee, I say.
Too full to know what empty is.

ARCHIVES

- o May 2016
- o April 2016
- o March 2016
- o February 2016
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- o December 2015
- o November 2015
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There's no limit to my appetite
for crazy. The roots break,
and the crop grows back fresh and sweet.
Can't get enough, it seems.
They try me, all right,
these weeds.
*"It does not matter how slow your pace,
as long as you do not stop."*

It tests me
when I hear the platitudes,
but I can only walk so far without a rest,
and sometimes I sit and bray
like a drunken old mule.

"Aim for the stars and you'll reach the moon!"

"Miracles happen if you let them!"

It tests me when I see *those* smiles.

You know the smile I mean, that [soulless, better you than me] smile of blessing when they find themselves unavoidably close.

I make it a point to speak: *Good morning, darlin'. Howdy, sir!*

It feels like I've got them [by the short and curlies] on my side for a second. Like I'm panhandling for politeness, and there's no way they can refuse.

Look, it's like this:

This one gal stops a quarter block down, pulls up a heel strap and lights a smoke at the crosswalk. I cough really loud and catch her eye. She trots back and offers up two American Spirits like they're a couple of jackpot Lotto tickets. I thank her kindly [for changing my life so deeply] and she holds out her lighter.

"No, honey. I've got a light."

"You know what?" Her face sparks like she's got the best [line of bullshit] idea ever. Optimism pops up like daisies behind her pupils.

"Miracles happen!" she says.

(It tests me.)

"Just tell yourself every morning: 'Miracles will happen, if only I let them.' Do it—you'll see. I do. Every morning in front of the mirror, and look at me!"

(Like pulling weeds in dry dirt.)

I wondered if she'd [shut the fuck up] understand if I returned the cigarettes.

She asked if I was homeless, and I told her no, just a hard night, and it tickled me to watch her daisies wilt. It was well worth the lie, but she probably would've given me a couple of bucks if I'd told her the truth. I should have told her I didn't have a mirror or a wall to hang one on, or told her she was pretty as a pup, that she had one of *those* smiles. She would've thanked me for confirming her assumptions.

(The roots break. The bullshit grows back fresh and aromatic.)

"Well," she says. "Anyway. Remember: every morning. Life is limitless!"

I lie again and tell her I'd give it a shot.

The [advice sucked, but the] cigarette was excellent.

I only smoked the one, and sold the other for seventy-five cents.

"Miracles happen if you let them!"

I've got my limits, and I've got my appetites, and maybe you'll find

out one day that there's no limit to how tired you get walking all night and how that feeling dips you in Valium and gravity turns on you so strong it sucks you down the cracks between the street and the curb like a greasy flowing planetary backwash seeping toward the creek, an unconscious *thing* slithering under a rock to hide from what bad shit might happen next, embarrassed and ashamed, hustling no matter how slow the pace, and "Fuck you, I'm homeless!" you'll bellow, like it's the one name some bully won't stop calling you, so what does it matter when the limit is there, right there in the label, and when that limit is reached, and that label applied, who gives a good goddamn what Daisy-eyes thinks when she sees you, smiling like a miracle when mercy only pisses you off? When you take it, but don't remember what it's for?

Do you *see*?

The roots break,
the anger grows back fresh and sturdy.
I'm still in the same damned mind—
It is limitless, and it tests me.

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