5-1-2009

Piso Mojado

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KNOW SHADOW

Michael Tucker

I, your inverted self—
The converse of your mirror—
Become a gale to sail our ship;
Relent, and do not fear.

In my throat a howling wolf:
A creature of the midnight sky.
The moon, circumscribed in pale,
Dotes upon my widened eye.

I mount my pursuits with swift and ease
And what I want I take.
Unaffected by volcano’s fire,
Unmoved by tornado’s wake.

With a hero’s pride I stand up tall,
With Caesar’s confidence I boast.
Alone I am and will remain—
Perhaps I’m better as your ghost.

Nancy finished her presentation. And a fine presentation it was. She would have undoubtedly given hers much earlier but, regrettably, she was absent from Tuesday night’s class. It seemed that one of her many offspring had been ill earlier in the week and she was forced to stay home and tend to him or her or it. (Ok that was mean and uncalled for. Apparently anxiety sometimes turns me into a jerk.) Prior to class she had supplied our teacher a lengthy and very detailed explanation for her no-show. From the look on his face it appeared that the comprehensive justification was much more than what was required. From the looks of it, she may have been concerned that the participation component of her grade might be adversely affected by her absence.

“Any questions?” She finished up with a smile, scanned the faces of her fellow students, optimistically looking for someone to inquire about her impeccably prepared and passionately presented research. And there was a pause. And there were no takers.

“Thank you Nancy. That was very well done.” Nancy floated back to her seat on the cloud of approval she had just received from the instructor. “Well, it looks like we are down to our last presenter.”

There was an extended pause.

Yeah, kind of like that. I think that the teacher was affording me the opportunity to “volunteer” to deliver my presentation, thus avoiding the slightly uncomfortable situation of him forcing me to do it.

“Maybe he won’t notice me,” I thought to myself. “Maybe if I don’t move he will forget about me. Maybe he’ll just keep the class moving right along, you know, not skipping a beat. Lots to do!” No such luck.

“Mr. Brock, why don’t you come on up and dazzle us with your presentation. It’s now or never.”

“Please please please let it be never” I pleaded to my
self. ‘Never’ seemed like such a good choice at the time.

Looking back on it, perhaps it was a bit of a red light. A flashing red so to speak. Someone who thought that he really wanted to be a teacher yet was so scared silly to get up in front of a group of relative strangers. (Not to be confused with a group of strange relatives.) I suppose that I just hoped that I would eventually be able to unshackle myself from the ball and chain of my anxiety.

Anyway, back to the class. I arose from my chair undoubtedly with some weak attempt at humor to veil my obvious discomfort. The fourteen-step walk to the front of the class seemed like an eternity. I may have tripped on the floor. Tripping on just the floor is never a good sign.

Once at the front of the room with seventeen distinct sets of eyes bearing down on me I began my report. Really simple actually. I had researched articles concerning the efficacy of uniforms in public schools. The presentation was to be a breeze consisting of a brief summary of my sources and a list of the six most important pros and cons that I had found. Finished up with the requisite “anyone have any questions?” and then I would be able to return to my seat, safe, sound and unsoiled.

“I did my research on uniforms and dress codes in public schools. The debate of course, is whether they are effective.” So far it was going swimmingly. And then it happened. It was if someone had flicked the switch and it all started: dry mouth, shooting heart rate, raging blood pressure, an inability to swallow. It felt like my tongue had suddenly doubled in its girth. I wondered if a yellow jacket had been waiting inside my can of Coke and had stung me during my last sip. And then came the monumental sweating. I made the mistake of lifting my eyes from my notes and peered helplessly out at my audience: my peers, the future educators of this great nation of ours. I surveyed them all sitting buttressed by their extreme confidence and hubris. I examined each of their expressions as they smugly watched me slip deeper and deeper into my meltdown. I quickly glanced back at my notes and vainly attempted to collect myself.

I tried to coach myself through it, “One more from my list of pros and then onto my cons and then I’m done.”

Suddenly, I was back in tenth grade in the middle of my debate class. I was in a heated, and more importantly, a graded debate about Nicaragua. I was intending to say “peasant farmer” but what came out was “feasant parmer.” Not good. Game over, done deal. Class dismissed amongst a din of laughter and commotion. Hello C-.

“And my sixth and final example of the success of uniforms can be seen in private parts.”

“Private parts? Private parts? What the hell is private parts?” I asked myself frantically.

“I mean students in private schools not students’ private parts.”

I had just said “private parts” again.

I stopped, frozen in my words. My classmates were looking at me with a combination of sympathy and worry. I noticed my textbook and notebook sitting on my desk top. I saw my brand new book bag that was resting on the floor beside my chair.

“I could just leave” I thought for moment, “just walk over and pick up my stuff and head out that door. Or better yet, I could just leave it all sitting there waiting for the next chump to come along. I certainly wouldn’t be needing all that crap anymore. I would just tell everyone that I had tried but in the end, or in this case the beginning, it was just not for me.

I took a deep breath and tried to compose myself. Halfway through con number three I noticed that my hand was inside my sweater rubbing, possibly soothing my stomach and chest. Weird! My list of cons would have to suddenly be truncated.

I just stopped. Stopped the rubbing, stopped the stuttering, stopped the agony.

“And that is pretty much it.” I offered even though it was clearly the case that there was intended to be more. “Does anyone have any questions?” I asked, knowing that no one would be cruel enough to keep me up there suffering any longer. They were all undoubtedly thinking, “this guy’s a mess.”

And then it happened. Just as I was about to make my first step back to safety it happened. Casey, sitting right there...
in the front row raised his hand.

I just ever so slightly shook my head and said myself, “what a dick.”

With a conceited arrogance that rivaled Donald Trump he said, “Yeah, I’ve got a question.” He paused for a moment and slowly took a drink of his 100% organic Coffee People coffee beverage. The sound of him sipping his now-tepid beverage through the tiny little slit on the ‘to go’ lid seemed almost deafening. I watched and waited. As the drink slowly descended from his mouth I noticed the warning so graciously printed on the brim of the cup, “caution: contents may be hot.” I surmised that it probably also offered that warning in Spanish, “cuidado: piso mojado”.

“Wait, that doesn’t make any sense. I think ‘piso’ means floor and I have absolutely no idea what ‘mojado’ means.” At that point, aside from the untimely realization that my Spanish had gone down the crapper, I wished that the warning read something like, “caution: contents are extremely toxic.” Again, no such luck.

I listened, I answered, and most importantly, I kept my hand on the outside of my sweater. I then returned to my seat. The seat located safely in the back of the classroom. The seat that warmly welcomed me just as my mother had done after I struggled through my first day of kindergarten. I shuffled some papers, I restacked my books, and I carefully deposited my note cards into the outermost pocket of my brand new shiny red book bag. All the while thinking, “One hurdle cleared. Barely, but cleared nonetheless. There can’t be more than 10,000 to go.”

And, “How the hell am I going to make it through this?”