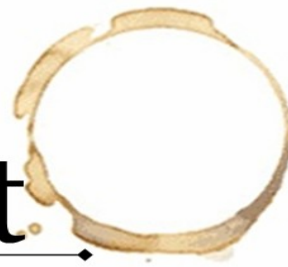


Twisted Thistle Productions Presents . . . **Loquacious Placemat**

www.loquaciousplacemat.weebly.com



Under My Keyboard

by Leah Ebdon

<http://swerdnic.blogspot.com/>

Eighty three miniature men,
hunchbacked and bow legged;
run around the silicone subways
push buttons, turn knobs.

They Generate vivid carnivorous
werewolves in tights and tutus
singing songs of lycanthropy
on the streets of Paris.

Stories of ancient mariners
eating peaches and cream
thinking of what they are missing.
The girls back home.

Murderers rip out the still-beating
hearts
of their mistress maids
then run out into the night
wearing nothing but a sweater.

Parents bury their children
on cold November mornings,
Something you should never ever
have to do.

They describe barely there
hearts, locked in fridges
to keep them from becoming
too warm to you, too alive.

They tell of lost souls
and forgotten furniture,

of children with tickets on their lapels
riding trains powered by fear.

They tell of unexpected lottery wins,
of the underdog rising,
of the great man falling,
and being picked up by his Nan.

They bring images of peace
in the heart of the jungle.
Of man realising he's not worth
as much as he thought.

They tell of you and me
and our home on the coast
with our 8 children, six dogs
and 40 years of happiness.

••••

On the March to Moscow

by T.R. Healy

"Sound off like you got a pair,"
Cochella, a tenor who once served in
the infantry, barked as he marched
the supernumeraries back and forth
across the parking lot of the ornate
opera house.

"They say that in the Army
The coffee's mighty fine
It looks like muddy water
And tastes like turpentine."

"Your left, your left, your left,

right, left," the tenor cried, striding
beside the motley group of men
whose shoes quickly became covered
in dust.

Owen Jacklin, an optician, had
not served in the military but he did
play trombone in his high school
marching band so he had little
trouble following the cadence.
Others were not as nimble, frequently
having to skip to get back in step.

"If I'd known we were going to be
doing this," a portly man behind
Jacklin grumbled breathlessly, "I
wouldn't have worn these damn
brogues to the rehearsal."

Jacklin, who had on tennis shoes,
smiled to himself for his prescience.

"I thought we were hired to play
soldiers," another super complained,
"not become soldiers for God's sake."

"Stay together now. You're not a
herd of cattle."

"Mooooo," someone whispered in
response.

Their shoulders back, their arms
straight with their thumbs in, they
marched along the chain-link fence,
through puddles of rainwater and
motor oil, shouting as fiercely as they
could. Dogs in the neighborhood
barked. Boys, riding by on bicycles,
laughed at them and made faces. The
men were hired to portray French
and Russian soldiers for a production
of *War and Peace*, composed by
Sergei Prokofiev, and the stage
director wanted to be sure they

marched like real soldiers when they
were on stage so they were told to
report to the parking lot to practice
moving in a military formation.

"Eyes front, gentlemen," the tenor
growled. "Imagine you're marching
straight to Moscow."

"It sure feels cold enough to be
there," a super muttered to Jacklin as
they tramped past the stage director's
arctic white Mercedes.

"Your left, your left, your left,
right, left."

*

Compared to most of the other
supernumeraries, Jacklin was a
veteran because this was his sixth
opera. He had never attended one
until the first time he worked as a
super, in a production of Beethoven's
Fidelio, which was nearly two and a
half years ago. Jazz, especially the
west coast style that was prominent
in the fifties, was the type of music he
enjoyed. He had never really been
interested in opera, probably never
would have been if Irina had not
recruited him one evening at the
supermarket.

"How tall are you, sir?" she asked
as he was sorting through some heads
of lettuce.

Startled, he turned around and
looked at the slender woman with the
flame-colored hair. "Excuse me?"

"You're over six feet, aren't you?"

He nodded. "Six foot two, to be
exact."

"I thought so."

"Why do you ask?"

She then made her sales pitch,
with a hand on his sleeve, insisting
that he was just the right height for
one of the prisoners in an upcoming
production of *Fidelio*. Smiling, he

declined the offer but she was as
persistent as an insurance salesman.
Describing supernumeraries as the
"eye candy" of opera, she admitted
that few were very attractive but he
was the exception. He wasn't sure
why, supposed he was just charmed
by her flattery, but he agreed to
become a supernumerary and for a
week of performances wore a black
leather vest and striped pantaloons.

To his surprise, he enjoyed the
experience so much he would have
done it even without the \$20 he
received for each performance. So
when Irina asked if he would be
interested in appearing in other
productions, he readily agreed
because he had become very fond of
her.

She was unlike any woman he had
ever met, doing whatever she pleased
whenever she pleased. She was the
one who initiated their first kiss,
taking his head in her hands as if they
had known one another for weeks
instead of minutes. He continued to
see her after the opera finished its
run, sometimes spent the night at her
cramped little apartment that was
around the corner from the opera
house.

They were together nearly four
months when he found in his mailbox
an empty brown envelope with her
return address printed in the corner.
He was stunned. Soon after her
father moved the family to the States,
he received an empty envelope from
his half brother in Prague, which she
said meant that he did not want to
have anything more to do with him.
Certainly they had exchanged some
harsh words during their time
together but nothing was ever said

serious enough to cause her to send him an empty envelope he believed. Immediately he called her for an explanation but she hung up on him and refused to respond to any of the letters and emails he sent to her. She acted as if they had never met. He was hurt, of course, but even more he was thoroughly confused by her sudden departure from his life. For a while, he was embarrassed to admit, he followed her when she went out with other men, walking sometimes only a few steps behind her, but she never gave any indication she noticed him. He felt almost invisible then, much as he did on stage as a supernumerary, just part of the background. Soon he stopped, realizing how foolish and pathetic he was acting, and tried to put her out of his mind. It was difficult, though, because she was someone he thought he would be with for a very long time.

*

His hair gleaming with make-believe blood, a stained bandage wrapped around his forehead, Jacklin marched across the smoky stage with the other supernumeraries while the chorus sang mournfully. In their hands were torches they had used to set Moscow on fire.

He had not seen Irina in months, understood she had moved out of town, but still he continued to audition for operas, hoping some day she would be in the audience again. Then, he knew, he must not make any mistake, must appear as authentic as possible, so he marched crisply every night as if she were there.

••••

Selections from *Ed's Wife and Other Creatures*

by Vanessa Gebbie
www.vanessagebbie.com

Fruit Fly

Ed has dropped a mushroom and a plum behind the fridge, for his wife.

"Suze? Any other fruit you'd like?"

She doesn't answer. Just hovers with her friends.

He watches closely, making sure she's OK, as her red eyes make him wonder what he's done wrong. He can't stand to see a female upset.

When the other fruit flies start making music, displaying, spreading their wings, vibrating them, Ed leaves the kitchen. He can't compete.

Cuttlefish

Ed's wife is normally a placid soul. Slow to anger. Ed finds this frustrating; sometimes it's good to argue. After all, making up is the best bit.

"Suze? For heaven's sake. Don't you ever get cross?"

He will even try to provoke her, just to get a reaction, sometimes.

But he's learning. Provoke her too much and it can take weeks to clear the air.

Lacewing

When Ed's wife has the sun behind her, she becomes quite transparent. That's fine, but Ed does think it takes the edge off her beauty.

"Suze? Come and sit next to me?"

He wants her to move out of the sun, to regain some solidity. After all, nothing is quite so beautiful once you can fathom how it works.

••••

Time Crunch

by Niall Boyce
<http://strange-powers.blogspot.com>

I am a victim of time.

Yes, we're *all* victims of time, but I'm different. Time's winged chariot mows us all down in the end. Only in my case, it goes back and forth multiple times to finish the job.

In short, I am one of the first unfortunates to feel the effects of the Time Crunch. Time, that not-quite-right Cinderella of the dimensions, has started acting more like its straightforward, spatial siblings.

That is why I no longer exist as a point in space, moving through time. I have become multiple points in space, all existing simultaneously.

It makes things very difficult. By way of illustration, I'll tell you the story of my death.

I arrived home from work one day to find Sarah, my wife, pacing the living room. I like to think I am - was - will be a sensitive man, and a good husband. So I decided to get to the bottom of things.

'What's wrong?' I asked.

Her face flushed with anger.

'You're having an affair!' she shouted.

'No I'm not!' I protested.

'Yes you are,' she replied, 'you're upstairs right now!'

I tiptoed up to the bedroom and opened the door gently.

There was a flurry of activity under the duvet, two naked bodies hastily scrambling to cover themselves.

'Oh for Heaven's sake!' I heard my

own voice shout from across the room.

I closed the door and retreated downstairs. Sarah was waiting there, looking murderous.

'I don't know anything about that.' I protested. 'For all we know, that might be years in the future!'

*

As I found myself pushed out into the street, with the front door slammed shut behind me, I reflected that this was probably not the best thing to have said. Moments later, the garage door rattled open, and I saw Sarah driving off in her Volkswagen.

I staggered along the pavement, in so much of a daze that I didn't recognize our neighbor, Julia, at first. She was similarly wrapped up in her own thoughts, and didn't even notice me. We collided with each other.

'Mark!' she exclaimed, 'I've just seen something awful!'

I sat her down on the curb, and asked her what she meant. She told me that on her way back from work, she had seen a car plough into a tree head-on. The two passengers had been killed instantly. She felt something strange, a sort of déjà vu, and approached the vehicle.

The two dead people were her and me.

*

In my defense, I can only say that in the face of death people do strange things. You've probably heard the stories about the frantic couplings that took place during the London Blitz. That, at least, is my explanation for how we ended up back in my house and in bed together. Perhaps another reason will occur to me at some point. You can never be sure.

Things were going just fine until Sarah discovered us. I hadn't expected this, as I had seen her driving off just a little while before.

Then I realized that this was Sarah from an hour ago.

I was thinking about what this meant when we were again interrupted, this time by the version of myself from an hour ago.

'Oh for Heaven's sake!' I shouted as he - as I - departed. 'Come on, let's get a hotel room!'

*

We had driven as far as the corner when Julia suddenly went pale.

'What's wrong?' I asked.

'I've just realized. This is the car we die in. This is how it happens. Stop the car!'

She reached across and grabbed the steering wheel.

You can guess the rest.

*

If there's one good thing to come out of this whole sorry affair, it's that death is no longer the end. I get to re-experience any moment in my life, whenever I like. Traveling between time points is as easy as walking down the road.

I have learned from history, and I am condemned to repeat it.

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