

Reminder

*If your banker breaks, you snap; if your apothecary
by mistake sends you poison in your pills, you die.*

—Ishmael in Moby-Dick by Herman Melville [Chapter 72]

Even here in the U.S., where Whitman,
Emerson and Thoreau wrote of individuality
and we are told to pull ourselves up
by our bootstraps, it is true:
if the housing bubble bursts, your home
is worth less than your twenty-year mortgage.
If the stock market declines, your retirement fund bleeds.

You may be the safest driver in the state,
but if the teen in the Toyota texts or drinks
and drives, you end up under carved stone.
The drive-by shooter with bad aim may miss
the Gangster Disciple and hit your daughter instead.

If your young son runs to the park
with friends, plays with the gun
Uncle Joe bought him in the Walmart toy department,
and a man in a blue uniform assumes
it's loaded with lead even if it doesn't look real,
you have to pick a casket and plan a funeral.

Someone assassinates an archduke in Austria,
Japan bombs a U.S. naval base,
North Korea sends troops across the 38th parallel,
Iraq invades Kuwait, planes flatten the World Trade Center—
if you pause and think it through, you know Queequeg was right,
It's a mutual, joint-stock world, in all meridians.

Ishmael Reflects on the Try-Works Fire

Beginning with a line from Moby-Dick

Look not too long in the face of the fire—
those forking flames are a devilish sight.
The blaze hypnotizes as it grows higher;
it blinds your eyes to the sun's true light.

I'll never believe what I've been taught
by my frowning mother, that all men fell
and my soul is damned—in the flames I'm caught.
She said, "go to church, or you'll go to hell."

Instead of the fire with guilt and dread,
turn to the wisdom of Solomon's book
or the Man of Sorrows, the life he led—
he spread compassion with his gentle look.

How different would be my mother's face
if her theology reflected grace.

Melville in Love

One version of a life, after Michael Shelden

Can love ever be wrong, he wonders,
as he wanders the Berkshire hills
with Sarah, her dark eyes melancholy
and seductive. How can it be wrong
to lean against a boulder reading
poetry to each other or rhapsodizing
on the beauty of the lake?

Can it be wrong to climb Mt. Greylock
with friends, picnic on the flat top,
drinking champagne, rum and port,
nibbling brandied cherries by the campfire
before taking Sarah's hand and disappearing
into darkness where brush and trees
seem designed to provide privacy?

He wonders again as he gallops through the country,
racing his horse against Sarah's Quake
until they call a truce, dismount by a stream
where the horses drink while he picks
black-eyed Susans for Sarah's loosened hair

as her husband minds the business in Manhattan
and his wife Elizabeth struggles through another pregnancy—
how can a relationship which brings such joy be wrong?



Wilda Morris, Workshop Chair of Poets and Patrons, has published poems in numerous anthologies, webzines, and print publications. Her first book was *Szechwan Shrimp and Fortune Cookies: Poems from a Chinese Restaurant*. *Pequod Poems: Gamming with Moby-Dick*, is scheduled for publication in 2019. Her blog, wildamorris.blogspot.com, features a monthly poetry contest for other poets.

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