

crooked letter 25: Tis Sheila's Season to be in a Deeper than Deep Blue Funk

Some of y'all have heard tell of my atheist/mystic split before this particular crooked letter. But for those of my readers who are puzzled by this cheeky turn of phrase, I now will explain. Sometimes I believe in God/dess, most of the time I do not.

I have decided that reconciling this contradiction, spanning this schism, is too much to ask of this little lifetime of mine. Maybe I will work on it in my next life, but as I believe, more often than not, that this life is my only one, I imagine the contradiction will shun any un that might try to resolve it.

Time for what appears on first glance to be a tangent:

We have entered the season when the younglings dream of ripping into Mt. Presentest, dreidelng through eight miraculous Maccabbeen nights of oil soaked latkes, liberating the tree from those damn syncretinizing Christians or successfully remembering how to pronounce all those African words in time for candle lighting and libation pouring.

I have entered the season when I dream of sticking knitting needles through my eyeballs and stirring my brains vigorously. Tis the season to be jolly well down in the dumps.

I feel I must warn my readers that my depression is the star of a bad melodrama; its lines are crappy, its acting is bad and the gestures and emotions are all over the top.

End of this tangent seeming section.

At this time of year I long to believe. I hopelessly pray to any glimmer of a gleam of a glance of something bigger than myself for relief. I know this seasonal despair will end. Many of you know that it will end, having seen me here before. It will end and sometime in early January, I will stumble out ready to resume my life among the living. The flip side of this little bit of hope is that next December will probably be just as shitty as this one.

This year I wish for a whisper of faith. Science still has an infantile understanding of depression. Its technologies are little more than hocus pocus tricks. They are somewhat more than slight of hand, but not much. And my brain no longer suspends disbelief. There is no rabbit pulled out of my hat. Instead I follow the rabbit down the hole and fall and fall and fall.

I grasp at roots; I grasp at straws. I read a book on the history of prayer. I read books of prayer. I read books by Pagans and Christians, Buddhists and Jews. I read books by "Food Not Lawns" permaculture performance artists and "Crunchy Con" countercultural conservatives- the kind that dislike big business and want to save the environment but

sing the every sperm is sacred song, no tongue in cheek. I read the books of believers. Maybe I can absorb black inked faith as my fingers turn their pages.

I am failing, despite family, despite friends, despite the deep love of an amazing man, despite my art, despite my work, despite my connections and commitments. I am failing. I most likely will not be able to carry through on many commitments I have made. This is the blackest bile. My inability to focus or to work tangles up my finances once again. When this season passes, I will pick up my wreaked work and pick through the mess of my money and, with some bitterness, try to make right all the things that now are beginning to go wrong.

Moments like this; when despair tears at my chest, make me long for absolution. I want to believe that some friendly deity or angel or fairy is coming to help me bear this cross. I'd put my head in the lap of the Buddha, if I could find it.

Small bureaucratic battles to get paid to teach my art (a long story for another time), forgotten tasks, work done with half a heart and half assed, the thoughtless remarks of others, all of this weighs on me. It would be annoying, if I were well. But I am not well. It is devastating. I roll my eyes but must refer myself back to "depression as star of bad melodrama."

I want God to save me. S/he never does. Though sometimes wisps of faith sneak around the corner right in front of me. I observe the faith of others and find small comfort in brief proximity to belief.

I wrote many of these words at The Clock, a 24 hour diner. Next to me was a table full of elderly couples. They had come from Tuesday Night Square Dancing. Some of these couples, I gleaned from my eavesdropping, have been married 40 plus years, enough time as one woman said to learn every single button to push. Their conversation was banal, though at one point someone made a comment that if it wasn't out right racist was pretty dang close, and that started an annoying rattling on about how they, the people at the table, are not prejudiced. I cringed and felt sorry for the African American sitting right next to this table full of clueless old whities.

They talked about the overpriced food at the new Green Market in the Millhopper Shopping Center. They talked of this and that. Then the conversation turned to life and death. One old woman, the one who knew every button to push and swore she wasn't prejudiced, said, "I'm having a ball. You're only going to get to go this way one time, might as well go with gusto. I decided a long time ago, I was going to be dead a lot longer than I was going to be alive."

As I wrote about despair, sometimes with tears in my eyes, I found some small, strange bit of comfort listening in to the old farts talking about nothing in particular. I do not want their lives, but I want whatever it is that has keep them keeping on into their sixties and seventies. They were vigorous. They were content. I think it takes courage to live

well. It takes courage to enjoy life. I want their courage, though perhaps not their complacency.

I want to live long enough to be an annoying old fart with somewhat embarrassing to the younger generation opinions and anecdotes to be overheard by some solitary art freak at the next table over.

This is my prayer, a hope, a small thread to cast up into the heavens and out into the future. May I live long and well. May I sit contented at a table- one of the old farts- kibbitzing after dancing and before eating, and may I inspire some no longer young but nowhere near old someone to keep on keeping on.