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Visit to Memory: An Allegory

James Franklin Lewis

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What resistance to war, what world outspread
 Belief in freedom shall he find in his bed
 When Private Hunter returns to our lands
 Holding his entrails in with his hands?

CAROL ELY HARPER

VISIT TO MEMORY: AN ALLEGORY

I

"We want to see the stiffs," they said.
 "We're going to enter here next fall
 As medics."

"I shall be glad to show the way,"
 He answered. "Come along with me.
 I shall be glad to show you where
 They hide out. You'll be glad to see them."

And so he led them wordlessly
 Along the waxed corridor,
 Down the marble-footed stairs,
 And across the wide hall. He opened,
 Opened the door of that place
 Into their face—the heavy stifle
 Of phenol and alcohol,
 Formaldehyde, and yet one more
 Bitter component, to attack
 The nasal root hairs at their sore.

One by one he levered corpses
 Up out of their pickle. Blackened
 Skin hung to axis; shrunken
 Fingers; penis mashed flat;
 Bulging hoop of pubic bone;
 Ballooning skulls motionless,
 Lifting their bristling mat of hair.

*O sacraments of accurate worship.
 O reeling and groggy moieties
 Of sanitation. Untruthful fruit
 Mishappened. Pagan missionaries
 Of the pauper's sacrifice.
 Stuck now in the same mire,
 Triturated in the same
 Grime of asepsis. Autoclaved
 Samples. O see, see, these cultured
 Embryos of age rerisen.
 What Easter! What Easter! What Easter!
 And he shook his mind. **

His guests were calm and scientific,
 Punching the corpses. "That one's solid.
 And a woman, too. Hope I get her
 When they deal these dummies out
 To us next month. Hmm. Look
 At that. I'd say she died of a tumor,
 Wouldn't you? Or maybe a—. No,
 It's not in the right place for a baby—"

*Burst out of the pit, my darling.
 Rise from the suction of the drain-trap,
 O tarnished dead spirit morgued
 In a warehouse; O polymedicated
 Festering slurp of once beauty.
 Rise out of the rotten wringer
 Of this fluid audit, darling.
 Come to my arms, to my arms, to my arms!
 And he shook his mind.*

His guests had gone and left him there
 Full of the sweet of dreams.
 A ballad wept in his graying hair,
 Great perfume now presides in the air,
 And the world is, what it seems.

II

He played with a small cord of red silk,
 Which was all, upon their new acquaintance,
 That could attach him to her, or engage.
 As art things take hold slowly on the mind,
 Or the health of a good home defeats the footsore
 Lust of discovery calling wild addresses,
 So the great fertilizing power of love
 At first, by only a little cord, is held
 To the inexhaustible flow in the bed of night;
 And the pearl sister, slim among thin glassings,
 Insulators, offers the burned perfumes
 Still savage in the midnight of her hair.
 Had he come that near?

Together, sidling closer, they had read
 Already the flyleaf of some ordinary
 Best-seller, when the sofa warmed,
 When suddenly the whole place kindled
 With perpetual fires. Bright and soon
 By radio-time they danced in the opening room,
 Hardly moved their feet, their bodies, eyes,
 But stood almost, with hands on other's hips,
 Held apart and aging at that length,
 Till the megacycle of coincidence
 Had bantered, and welded, and cancelled them
 together:
 In the anaconda of desire accoutred,
 They sank and drank from the lips' pneumatic cup.
 Now we shall delight and not depart.

O moment forever nothing.
 I'm where I want to be.

And for that reason,
 Spoken and shelved in eternity,
 They knew beyond knowledge, knew beyond need
 of hope,
 What rash credulity no one else could know
 Or could even believe in.

Greedy spirits bodilessly aware of flesh
And the powder-puff of ancient burned perfumes
In aphrodisiac cellars.
Now shall we gather up our hair?

She fed him coffee and doughnuts on the oilcloth
In the kitchen. And it was after midnight.
And it was anyhow a month later.
Maybe two months. Four. Even a year.
And the love-worn light of the old carbon bulb,
Which hung down from the ceiling, over the table,
Grew dimmer year by year. And the stone on her
finger
Ceased to be noticeable. So she gave it back.
And for months he knocked at the gnarl of her
black door
When he knew she had left the city. Eternity
Had ended. She would tell her beads of rosebuds
Elsewhere, in other summer. And he broke his toe
Kicking the blackened city walls and lumpy
Totals of cathedrals. Dizziness overcomes
His gift of seeds. Time shakes down
From the bleak fortress, professionalizes.

And he lives in stone corridors enjoying
The rattle of keys and importance, the damp
Odor of peace, the amorphous sound
Of recollection, the filmy-bellied
Metaphors of ice, the snuffed-out paintings
Of his one-man show.

And now on the sepulchral mounds and bridge of
evening,
He cannot take foothold any more, and of bigger
hours
Has no desire to know.

JAMES FRANKLIN LEWIS