

Undeadhead

Charles Harper Webb

Dr. Dad's Formula seemed heaven-sent until
those babies decomposed. His *Anti-Fear Aperitif*
was just as bad: sixty percent couldn't stop shrieking.

Mom spent her days searching for lost causes.
Her best fund-raiser raised a hundred dollars
fifteen feet. She snuggled up Dad's Windsor

on me; still, his tie mopped the concrete.
How could I ever fill his shoes? Or pull them
past his bloated toes? His corpse looked casual

in the street. The bullet holes seemed soothing.
The gouged eyes implied, "No more
glaucoma tests and focus groups. Hurray!"

The candidates seem to be waving, but are only
trying to protect their heads. On two points,
they agree: 1) Zombies can't Zumba.

2) They like jokes of a worm and rodent kind.
"Hong Kong's Queen Victoria statue looks Chinese.
London's Confucius sports a bowler hat,"

Alderman Max Ordeur groans from underneath
the bronzed alder he lugs everywhere. It weighs
a ton—a long one—so he rarely packs a lunch.

"Keeps me slim, hunched over, and in the news,"
he states. I wish someone would do an exposé of me,
or let me guest-star with Dad on the Joe

Nosferatu Show. Too bad I called the host
a *vamping campfire*, not a *groovy undeadhead*.
Each day the rain on my parade looks more like blood.

Frogman

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At first, the *Island Mahi-Mahi* tastes okay.

But as my cousin Ty, in town for a Sci-Fi/Horror Fair,
waves his ten arms at every shambling ghoul,
every Klingon centurion who goose-steps by,
my mango sauce wears off like Novocain.

Conversation ricochets from the Alzheimer's
of Ty's mom, to the death of mine (skeletal,
raving), to the Holocaust. Germans who hid
a Jewish child, Ty says, were forced to watch
the child hang, then *their* children—torn

out of their arms—before their own time came.

Yet German families still hid Jews.
I'm hiding fish-remains under a lettuce leaf
when a frogman trudges by, weeping, a bride's
corpse in his arms. Who hasn't heard

about the idiot Scuba teacher who dragged two
honeymooners a hundred feet deep into Molokini
Crater, where at a pressure of five atmospheres,
when air's compressed to one fifth its on-land volume,
the wife freaked? Her husband fought to hold her,

but she dropped her weight belt, thrashed out
of his grip—who knows where the teacher was?—
and blasted to the surface as all the air in her
expanded, popping her lungs like balloons.
I too have let things slip, though I tried to hold tight.

I can deride my grief, or hide it under a (big) leaf,
or strap on frog-feet and lug it in my arms
from Fair to Fair; but I can never set it down,
I'm thinking as I realize dinner tastes like what it is:
a dead thing dragged out of the sea.

My Flaming Hair

Charles Harper Webb

Aunt Jihad tried to blow it out last Thanksgiving,
for fear I'd ash her rug. She was charred
"beyond recognition"; so I thought I had real
thanks to give this year. But Cousin Rank kept

saying, "Can I set my sack down next to you?"
Cousin Rude kept braying, "Nurse, my bag
is full," and, "You know why they call it *taint*?"
As Dad carved the pizza, Sister Murraine demanded

"a side of gizzard" with "pope's nose over rice."
Mom laughed like Beavis & Butthead. Dad sighed,
"They slicked us all with Heavy Metal slime."
"Metal catharsis kept me from gelding you," I lied.

Oedipus' name flew like a bloody ax. "Sophocles
bites," Jihad snarled behind her hockey mask—"Hey,
what's burning? Put that out . . !" "Why must I choose
between tiramisery or chocolate chump ice cream?"

yodeled Murraine. "You need a husband," Mom keened,
filling her plate. "You're getting old." "Only
in dog years," I barked, which got me sent to the dog house/
coat closet, where I pilled everybody's best cashmere

while, sobbing and thumping, Murraine club-footed by.
The boyfriend Mom had grabbed for her
dangled by his heels above a crate of kraits.
"Say, You can't make me one more time," Mom dared.

"What's the most important thing in the world?"
Dad roared on the intercom. "Family," we hymned
as my heart hissed through its prolapsed mitral valve,
"Drive back the darkness with your hair."