

POSSIBLE CROCODILES

Poems by Barry Marks



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Grateful acknowledgement is made to the editors of the following publications in which several of these poems first appeared: *Legal Studies Forum*, *Birmingham Arts Journal*, *Right Hand Pointing* (online) and the anthologies *Poems from the Big Table* and *Einstein at the Odeon Café* (www.churndashpress.com).

Library of Congress Control Number: 2010922636

ISBN-13: 978-0-9841005-2-1

ISBN-10: 0-9841005-2-0

Published by Brick Road Poetry Press

P. O. Box 751

Columbus, GA 31902-0751

www.brickroadpoetrypress.com

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Teaching the Angels to Dance

The wings, that's the worst problem.
Their wings scrape the carpet and trip
cherubim and seraphim alike until,

with a snort that somehow
hangs musical in the air,
they shoot to the ceiling for a breather.

"Listen to the beat," I plead, but
drum and bass seem to pass through them.
They are lost in melody.
Michael closes his eyes and
unconsciously takes off;
he bumps his head on the chandelier,
settles back to the floor,
blushing, shrugs an apology.

Raphael stumbles into the china cabinet,
Tzaphkiel and Tzadkiel collide,
Metatron practically somersaults over the sofa,
and none of them able to translate their innate grace,
their light-drenched, aerodynamic beauty,
into the simplest of steps.
I joke that perhaps I should find them a pin,
but that falls flat before empty, beatific smiles.

Only Death seems to get it right,
the perfect partner, following my lead,
her dark eyes glowing,
her balance flawless as
she twirls and spins so light on her feet,
she makes me feel like Fred Astaire -

until Gabriel cuts in
with a whisper that this is one dance
I should probably sit out.

The Lion Sleeps (Better) Tonight

Lion got into therapy because he had issues, mostly aggression control but also feelings of inadequacy since the day he learned that tigers were larger. He's doing ok, but I'm afraid shark's marriage went aground despite years of counseling. His wife complains that he's still a cold fish.

Giraffe won't speak,
rhino refuses to wear her glasses
and strikes out blindly at everyone,
zebra can't work, and boa still
approaches every hunt as a potential
crushing defeat, but

elephant is doing fine in the twelve-step program he started the morning after he gambled away one of his tusks, and I am pleased to report that mandrill has been sober for seven months.

Every day he recites the serenity prayer, goes to his meetings ("Hello, I'm Mandrill. . ."), stays away from fermented bananas and has even stopped worrying about the size and color of his behind.

So I guess there's hope for us all.

I Stop to Ponder the Stentorian Colors of the Day

The railing down from the deck
to the garbage cans was wobbly, and
since you left, I've certainly had
time on my hands,
so I unretired my rusty box saw,
found an old two-by-four
and some three penny nails
and got to work.

A dog was barking, yelling his name
at the dog next door,
Big Dog Who Swims! Big Dog Who Swims!
To which his neighbor barked back,
Dog Who Hates Cats! and
some nearby mutt yapped,
Mama's Favorite! Mama's Favorite!

A cardinal was shouting,
Beauty! A mockingbird said
the same, of course.

A chameleon shot out of the hedge,
stopped by my foot and, turning from green
to almost-brown, sneered,
You can't see me, then skittered off.

The sky was whispering until
I looked up, and it screamed,
Forever!
to which the grass responded,
Joy is fragile!

And the saw
sang in my hands
and the wood?
Come on, now. An old two-by-four
with a bent nail in its heart?
Everyone knows dead wood
has nothing to say.

I Am Convinced That There Are Colors I Cannot See

One of these days someone will say to me,
“Doesn’t the sky look *slor* tonight?”
and I will say, “Huh?”

I will then discover that there are hues
between blue and red and that
for fifty-some years, my blue slacks
have clashed with the *slor* stripes
on what I thought was a white shirt.

Of course, the person who will tell me these things
will be my wife.
Who is very honest now that we are married.
Who is long-suffering for what I lack.
Who almost has me convinced that I am autistic.

I say it’s just that I am a guy.
A sensitive guy by most accounts.
But apparently there is something,
some emotional *slor*,
I just don’t get.

Which is why I will always be Louie.
Left on the tarmac with Rick
while Ilsa and what’s-his-name fly off.
Clever, cynical, lonely
and probably wearing socks that,
like his relationships,
are hopelessly mismatched.

Look at That Girl

I need to go
on a diet
and lose twenty years

Empathy for Hitler

*- Because my wife said I would write better poetry
if I could put myself in someone else's skin and really,
really, really feel what they feel*

And now the workday is over
and I am clearing the dishes.
The children are watching a movie about a man
who enters a dense forest, a sword in his hand.
And I am that man as I put
each spaghetti-encrusted fork on its plate.
My heart pounds and I adjust my helmet.
I am about to stride into the forest
when suddenly I am the forest.
I am dark, deep, numb with age,
indifferent to the lives within me.

When I turn and carry the dishes to the sink,
glancing at my daughter's painting
of a crouching panther, I feel the hairs on my back rise
and the hunger grow within me.
I can scarcely contain my need to leap through the window
and go on a delicious, tense prowl.
Mrs. Cochran's Westies are in serious jeopardy.
If only you would call.

I turn on the faucet, set the temperature,
measure out the soap. If only you would call, soon,
I might stop myself from being the water.
From doing my work on the sauce
and pasta and ground beef,
then hurling myself down the drain.
Please call because if you do not,
I will flow down, then through the sewer,
past the rats and possible crocodiles,
and then, without you as my focus,
I will become the sea.

Oh Lordy, Lord, my Darling
we can't have that!
I will roil and rise and
heave up my back against the stars
and spread out all the way to China.

China?
Oh, please call.
It is very boring here.
And I am afraid.

Why I Write

The most annoying thing is the way
they sneak up on you when you least expect.
On a crowded, sweaty bus

“Poem”

over there, behind the fat lady
or the guy in the polyester . . .

**“Poem, hey, over here,
Poem”**

So you try to turn away,
but it follows you and
at the grocery, among the fish sticks

“Poem!”

At work, in the middle (**“Poem”**) of a
rush (**“Poem!”**) project (**“POEM!”**)
And just before sleep

“poemmmm.”

Or making love that should be
chapter and verse enough

“Poem!”

(“Not now, for heaven's sake!”)

“Poem! Poem! Poem!”

And for all of it, the word, the word that keeps
puppy-jumping into your consciousness,
insistent, self-certain, joyously seductive,
sprawls herself naked upon the page,
sated, spent and small
and not what you thought she'd be at all.

And then, even as the page is crumpled
and cast out
with the cigarette butts
and beer cans,
a sly, sweet,
red delicious voice
calls

**“Pssst.
Over here.
In the garbage.**

Poem.”

About the Author

Barry Marks is a Birmingham attorney whose poetry, fiction, articles and essays have been published in nearly 100 journals, magazines and periodicals over the last 30 years. Mr. Marks was 1998 Alabama State Poetry Society Poet of the Year and his chapbook, *There is Nothing Oppressive as a Good Man*, won the Society's 2003 Morris Chapbook Competition. A member of the Big Table Poets, his work is featured in that group's anthologies, *Poems from the Big Table* and *Einstein at the Odeon Cafe*. He is a past president of the Alabama State Poetry Society and a former Board member of the Alabama Writer's Conclave.