

# Soliloquies and Interludes of the Interior Zombies

*by* Gary Hardaway

## **First Soliloquy of the Interior Zombie**

Beware proximity. The odor's not  
my fault, but if you come too close,  
you'll think of death and dog shit, mixed.  
Subtly, in a stench I have to bear  
each day. My nostrils haven't yet  
grown used to it. My outward shape's  
as normal and pinkish as your own.  
My inner shape must be  
a ruin of organs, dead or dying.  
But do come close enough for me to hear.

I'm not an exterior zombie, like  
the ones in books and video  
who shuffle along in groupthink,  
moaning for brains  
that always seem to be  
the pretty ones holed up inside  
a farmhouse decrepit as the hoard  
approaching, dropping bits of body parts,  
but never detected by the smell  
so much decomposition certainly  
would generate. I guess the writers  
have but sight and sound to horrify.

Decay like mine is all interior  
and inaccessible as infection.  
First, that's what I thought was wrong-

infection in the sinuses, or something  
festering in the lungs or bronchia.  
The antibiotics didn't help.  
My stench persisted. Now,  
I just accept the thing I am.  
I feed its hunger for despair  
and sorrow, bitter disappointment, rage,  
and panic. Not the collective stuff  
of news- it's individual dismay  
that keeps this shell intact. Any fool  
could keep his outward shape  
were news the nutrient.  
Interior zombies must be stealthy things  
to get the beauty of it- human anguish- hot.

### **Second Soliloquy of the Interior Zombie**

I search for heartbreak everywhere.  
In part, to feed my hunger and sustain  
the look of health I need to work,  
but also in the hope of noticing,  
by sight or smell, another of my kind.

I haunt decrepit bars and pawnshops,  
cash my checks at CashAmericas,  
borrow against my old Corolla's title,  
then pay it off, at TitleMax.  
I fake small medical emergencies  
at CareNow and NextCare.  
Parkland and Baylor wouldn't let  
me play my game in their ERs.

My day job as loan officer helps  
my maintenance but not my search

for another who hovers, unobtrusively,  
and listens. Maybe I'm unique. Perhaps  
I'll never find a friend or mentor,  
a protégé or partner. I'll keep watching,  
though, nose to air, for someone or something,  
also dead inside, and coolly aloof-  
yet patient and solicitous- as I.

### **First Soliloquy of the Second Interior Zombie**

I eat the sorrows and calamities  
I find around me. Skin that once was tan  
and envied pales with every meal  
I take of pain that others cry and whimper.  
Every story leaves a spot of brown.  
My freckles multiply in perfect circles  
evenly spaced across my body, each  
new mark adjusting all the others in  
a pattern. What have I become? A page  
from someone's horrifying book?

The sour smell that marked my transformation  
won't subside. My friends must wonder  
why I keep my distance now. They call  
less often. They're too polite to ask me why  
I shun them, why I never lunch or club  
with them these days. They leave me, one by one.

My own suffering leaves no marks. My skin  
grows pale. So pale, it's almost luminescent  
now. My hair, once wavy, chestnut brown,  
hangs straight and darkens. It's become  
a fine but lustrous anthracite. I'm Goth,  
but clueless why. I never asked for this.

It's not a fashion choice. It's just what I've become- this pale and spotted text of pain.

### **Second Soliloquy of the Second Interior Zombie**

Before the change, my tastes were safely mainstream- Pop inflected country, dancey pop, melodic alternative rock. The mixes in my kindergarten classroom ranged from Disney songs to upbeat show tunes, happy Beatles, Motown classics. Suddenly, I found Baroque, romantics early, middle and late, and early moderns before they lost both song and dance. My children were surprised at first but soon were humming Bach cantatas and requesting favorites from Rachmaninoff and Purcell. Learning improved. Behavior, too. Even Justin, whose religious dad refused the recommended Ritalin, would calm when dinosaurs enacted Rite of Spring.

As parents watched my skin grow paler, hair go raven, and demeanor change from pert to smiling calm, they started to complain. The seasoned leader of the kindergarten team observed my work more often. She remarked " Puccini arias? For five Year olds? An interesting choice. But not what our McKinney parents think is best." My principal arrived to watch the day we drew to Rimsky-Korsakov and Brahms. Scheherazade did not enchant. She jotted notes and smiled her faint professional smile. Next day, she asked me in to chat. She told

me parents were concerned. I'd either joined a cult or coven, started drugs or worse. They'd talked to members of the board at church and in the supermarkets. Change was needed, now. My classroom should be "relevant." My contract wouldn't be renewed and could I please collect my things this afternoon? Paid leave of absence through the end of May.

I could but didn't want to fight. I'll miss the kids and how they grow each day. I am accustomed to estrangement. It's my closest friend. I'm frugal and resourceful, though, and I'll get by. I started working, nights and weekends, seven weeks ago. I saw the ad- I can't remember where, but wrote it down: Apprentice needed. Must apply in person. Call first, though- you'll need some clear direction. Resolution Bar and Grill. East Dallas. 214- 328- 2169. Direct, but enigmatic, too. I started work the Saturday I called. Despite succinct, impeccable directions, A to B, I almost missed it. It's in "A shadow place that time forgot", as Bob, my master barkeep, aptly puts it. Time and city services, too. A beautifully lost and timeless place, the Resolution Bar. And Grill. And random-find museum, loft, piano stage and studio. Eclectic only starts to cover it. A place apart, outside, beyond, and back again.

### **Third Soliloquy of the Interior Zombie**

In search of bars with bitter stories  
In the neighborhoods surrounding Baylor  
Dallas, I'd turned from street to darker street.  
A door appeared and light outlined a man.  
I wasn't lost. The figure waved and lit  
a cigarette. Its burning end was all  
the light left after the door swung closed again.  
Except my headlights. But the dark just ate  
whatever they could throw. I parked against  
the curb and walked towards the cigarette  
to ask the smoker where I was.

“Hello,  
I'm Bob. You're lost. You need a beer? Or are  
you more a Scotch man? Poets start in fifteen  
minutes. You've got time to get a drink  
and find a seat.”

“I'm lost, indeed. Is this  
a club or restaurant? I need to get  
my bearings. Scotch is good.” He shook my hand.  
An architecture showed itself. The lintels,  
columns, bricks and glass emerged as if  
from hiding. Resolution Bar and Grill  
appeared above the door.

“I asked for Revolution.  
They were out of V's, I guess.  
The seventies were just a blur. I didn't see  
it 'til I'd paid and they were gone. I'm glad  
they screwed it up. The wrong name seems to fit  
this better. Single malt or blend?”

Inside,  
the bar was books from russet-toned  
terrazzo to the pressed tin ceiling sprayed  
A semi-gloss sky blue. The lighting kissed

The books, all shapes and sizes, neat and clean.

I saw her tending bar. Her face was like  
the moon framed by blue-black sky.

“This man  
is lost, Elizabeth, and needs a scotch.”

“Elizabeth's my middle name. My dad  
still calls me Jessica. I'm on the fence  
myself. I'll answer, either way. Glenmorangie  
or Dewers?”

“I'm really cheap. A nameless blend  
is fine.”

“It's two bucks either way. I'll pour  
Glenmorangie. With ice or neat? We keep  
Things simple here at Resolution Bar.”

“With ice. I'm Michael, by the way, though Mom  
still calls me Mike. I fell off on the Michael  
side myself this year.”

A slender man  
in starched white chef's clothes swung the door  
I guessed led to the grill and joined us.

“This  
is Bill, the grill in Resolution Bar  
and Grill.”

She set my scotch and napkin down.  
Bill nodded, lifted the counter leaf and walked  
toward the dozen patrons joining Bob  
around a tiny stage. Stage left, a grand  
piano. Right, a podium and mic.

“It's time, Elizabeth. You read tonight.”

She frowned and grabbed a yellow pad  
then followed Bill toward the stage. I left  
a five and joined the rest with glass in hand.

“ Elizabeth, our brave apprentice, joins

the usuals tonight. Be kind, or drinks  
will be six bucks tomorrow, retroactive  
on the unpaid tabs I'm holding. Cheers.”  
He then began to read a poem by Yeats  
I still remember hearing read aloud  
in senior English class at Jesuit,  
*To a Friend Whose Work Has Come to Nothing*,  
with a faint, effective, Irish brogue.  
Three poets followed with their newest work.  
Polite applause from every table set  
with pens and pads. I did the math.  
At three drinks each, two bucks a drink, I came  
to bankruptcy at least ten years ago.  
But now, Elizabeth (and Jessica)  
arranged her pad and cleared her throat.  
“ I never read a poem, not assigned,  
before this year and certainly never tried  
to write one. It has been an interesting year.  
I'll read the only two I've ever written, now.  
Remember, six buck drinks tomorrow if  
you laugh or boo. I hope I will improve  
before we read next week. I've caught your bug,  
though, and I have no choice but write again.”

### ***The Unfamiliar***

*The cat has lost her white  
and lustrous fluffy fur  
and in its place she finds  
a short straight charcoal coat.  
She doesn't have clue  
why this has happened.  
She didn't choose to change  
but did.*



*Her brothers now regard her-  
and her mother, too-  
as something odd.  
They will not groom  
nor tumblechase her down the hall  
in short, dark hair  
nor lie down near her for a nap.  
They are not cruel  
just estranged.*

*She hides among the shoes and boots  
inside the master walk-in closet.  
She comes out shyly  
only when the hunger  
or the litter box compel her.*

### ***All Within a Middle Name***

*She was Ashley once  
but now is Katherine.  
Ashley was a lovely girl,  
involved but not engaged  
despite the sparkling ring.  
Katherine is engaged  
but not involved.  
Her hands are bare  
except for tiny brown tattoos  
you'd miss without a practiced eye.  
Ashley's bright tattoo  
fluttered just below her shoulder.  
Katherine has a moth.  
Ashley's face was loved by sun  
and bronzed with even, healthful tones.  
Katherine's loves the moon.*

*Ashley was beloved by all.  
Katherine is suspected.  
Katherine never chose the change.  
The change chose her.*

A silence, first, and then I stood and clapped.  
In ones and twos, the others rose as well.  
She smiled at me as if to say "You know me."  
Bob congratulated her, then shouted  
"Open bar! Next Saturday's piano night.  
Perhaps by then Elizabeth will learn  
to play so we can listen instead of stare,  
awaiting magic fingers on the keys."  
Elizabeth then led me on a tour  
Of Resolution Bar and Grill's Museum  
of the Random Find, Piano Stage  
and Studio, and pointed out the stairs  
that lead to Grand Reception Mezzanine  
and Lobby of the Resolution Lofts-  
apartments occupied by Bob and Bill  
and tenants yet unnamed, lost and needing home.  
"I've heard that all of this was bought or built  
to launder money from an accidental  
drug deal back in 1970.  
You'll help me get the story out of Bob.  
It's bound to have a tragic twist at heart."  
She stroked the ring of spots around my wrist.  
"I'll bet that these each have a story, too."

