

the struggle ever renew'd

by Lance Manion

There is nothing quite like the exhilaration of heading out on a crisp October night to do some trick or treating with your kids. Their palpable anticipation is like a live wire running directly from their eyes to my heart, making it flutter as we put the finishing touches on our costumes and head out to visit friends and neighbors. I am dressed as the Grim Reaper, my older son as Walt Whitman and my youngest as a clumsy research assistant from the Wistar Institute of Anatomy and Biology.

Why a clumsy research assistant from the Wistar Institute of Anatomy and Biology you ask? Give me one second to slip in the first Walt Whitman quote and I'll explain.

*There was a child went forth every day;
And the first object he look'd upon, that object he became;
And that object became part of him for the day, or a certain part of
the day, or for many years, or stretching cycles of years.*

The Wistar Institute of Anatomy and Biology was where Walk Whitman's brain was taken to be researched after his passing. That is until one day a careless researcher dropped it. It broke into numerous pieces and was summarily scooped up and thrown in the trash. No fanfare. Just tossed in the garbage.

My oldest son, Walt, calling me My Captain since donning his disguise, he thought of that himself, and his little brother, clutching their plastic pumpkins, strode through our front door and into the beckoning night. You'll excuse me if I say things a bit poetic, seeing him dressed as Walt gets my literary juices flowing.

At the first door the clumsy research assistant from the Wistar Institute of Anatomy and Biology rings the bell and when the door opens Mr. Whitman says " O me! O life!... of the questions of these recurring!" instead of "Trick or treat" just as we'd practiced. Delighted neighbors squeal their approval and produce handfuls of

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candy to reward them for their cleverness. Death, in the form of myself, gives a nodding approval from the shadows and shepherds the pair to the next house.

*Whoever you are, I fear you are walking the walks of dreams,
I fear these supposed realities are to melt from under your feet and
hands;*

This production is repeated dozens of times until their pumpkins are overflowing with all things sticky and sugary. We all sense that the end of the evening is neigh as we decide to visit one last abode before returning to our own, there to spill our bounty on the floor and divide the candy into various piles to be consumed or traded or discarded. Such is our revelry that I put aside the fact that this last house contains an individual that I loathe. A man whom I've had quarrels with in the past.

A door bell is pressed. A " O me! O life!... of the questions of these recurring!" is cheerfully offered up. The man looks down on my sons momentarily then puts down his bowl of candy and departs, to return momentarily holding a package of sandwich meat. He carefully places a slice of bologna into each of the plastic pumpkins and then closes the door a little too forcefully in the faces of my offspring.

Not allowing this to spoil our fun I remove the slimy offenders and make light of it as we depart. I cheerfully walk Walt and my clumsy research assistant home. I was going to say clumsy research assistant from the Wistar Institute of Anatomy and Biology but I feared that you might be a little sick of reading all that so I went with the shorter version out of courtesy. Of course, having explained it you've now read more than you would have originally been required to to begin with so any good will I might have garnered due to my thoughtfulness has now evaporated.

After the requisite amount of giggling and tomfoolery I put my two happy children to bed. Despite the enormous amount of sugar no doubt coursing through their system they drop off to sleep

quickly after a prolonged evening of physical activity and I'm free to once again don my costume.

I return to my bologna-dispensing neighbors house. Except this time I have hopped over the back fence and entered through rear door. When he sees a dark figure clutching a scythe standing in his kitchen he knows instantly and with no uncertainty that he's about to die.

I hear secret convulsive sobs from young men, at anguish with themselves, remorseful after deeds done;

There is no need to tell you how I dispatched him, only that I did. After some minutes rummaging through his garage, to find a saw, and his cabinets, to find an ice cream scooper, I have his skull off and I'm scraping out his brain like the innards of a pumpkin ... careful to throw it out with the same indifference shown by the staff at the Wistar Institute of Anatomy and Biology.

That the hands of the sisters Death and Night, incessantly softly wash again, and ever again, this soil'd world:

What a sight awaits the next visitors to his house. Him seated at his door within arms-reach of his tub of candy, a single candle flickering inside his empty head, the light making its way out of the two empty sockets where his eyes used to be. How long will it be until they recover from their initial fright and realize that it's not an elaborate prop but the remains of a fellow human being?

I return home to shower and remove any evidence of my visit. Upon checking on my sons again I see that, despite its apparent itchiness, my eldest has once against slipped on his big grey Walt Whitman beard. I smile broadly and kiss them both on their foreheads.

You have to love All Hallows' Eve.

