

## THE GUIDING GHOST

Everybody after a certain age has had contacts with the supernatural and at the right time and when they feel like it, they talk of it.

Perhaps it is because things have never gone very well with me, that I have always moved with the greatest ease in the beyond. I had prophetic dreams and warnings, took advantage of telepathy, and in my own home, except in times of financial difficulties, we have always kept a ghost.

On one occasion, shortly after falling asleep, I was awakened by three knocks on the wall of my room, followed by the tick of a pendulum not corresponding to any God abiding clock. From the beginning, I suspected the origin of the noise and precisely for this reason I took no notice, because to deal with spirits one has to feel very much like it.

But one day I had had enough of the keenness and persistence of my communicant and getting out of bed all of a sudden, I asked him:

'What's happening?'

'It's me.'

He was of course a spirit, full of complexes and prejudices, with an air of not keeping his feet on earth as spirits often do.

'I have come to ask you to be a middleman in an affair with which I was entrusted' he said.

'What an idea' I said, 'I don't understand what pleasure you can get from coming down here to meddle in mortal affairs'.

'We take orders'.

He had a soft voice which I rather liked and, as he honestly believed, as all spirits do, that he was indispensable, I condescended.

'And how can I be of service to you?'

'Look, there is a Commercial Traveller, whom I protect because he is a relation of mine. He wants to catch the ten o'clock express for a business journey the day after tomorrow. He must be warned not to catch it. The express will be derailed, and there are going to be many casualties.'

'Are you sure?'

'But of course, we do not fool around with such matters'.

'And why not warn him yourself?'

'I have tried, but it doesn't work. Each time I visit him he runs away, waking up the neighbours.'

I was now aware that this matter was serious.

'But it's not enough to warn only the Commercial Traveller. We must warn everyone'.

'I have not been given explicit instructions concerning other people. The last thing I would dream of doing would be to wreck things by using my own initiative.'

'But I was not tied down by any such rules, and it seemed to me my duty to prevent this catastrophe.'

Next day I gave the following note to the press, my intention being that it should be published in bold headlines, but no editor was bold enough to do it:

"A warning to all people: the express which will leave tomorrow at ten o'clock will be derailed. All people whose journey is not really necessary are advised not to catch that train, because one never knows how things of this sort will end".

They thought that it was premature to take sides with the ghost. What could I do? I could not rely on the police, because they were liable to ask awkward questions. There was only one thing to do: to go to the railway company and warn them. I saw one of the Directors and I told him:

'I have come to tell you that the ten o'clock express will be derailed.' He did not bat an eyelid. He looked at me and asked!

'Are you pretending to prophesy?'

'You can see for yourself'. I am mentioning it so that you can take the appropriate steps'.

'I can assure you we were not relying on you to inform us on such matters'.

'Did you know the news, then?'

'The ten o'clock express derails every night'.

'Is that so?'

'Yes, it's a kind of habit'.

'What about the passengers?'

'Very few people catch it'.

'But few as they may be, they deserve some type of guarantee'.

'We have them insured'.

Of course this closed the conversation in the Director's favour. I left the Company with a genuine indignation. On that same night at twelve o'clock, I summoned the ghost. When he showed himself, I said to him:

'What an absolute moron you are!'

The ghost looked at me disdainfully, pretended to smile and off he went.

## WAR FEAT

One day while waging war, I found myself separated from my men, left with no weapons, uncovered and feeling lonely as I had never felt before. I was feeling somewhat humiliated, as it was becoming obvious that my co-operation was not after all so vital. The battle was progressing with a row and with such a death toll that it made one shiver.

While I was seated beside a path, trying to reach a decision, a paratrooper dropped beside me. He was dressed queerly; under his coat he was carrying a machine gun and a folding bicycle, but of course everything had been camouflaged.

He came near me and asked with a foreign accent.

'Could you tell me if I am going the right way to the Town Hall of that Village?'

In that direction last week, there had been a village.

'Don't be an ass!'—I told him. 'Everyone can see that you are an enemy, and if you go that way they will get you'.

This put him off, and he made a noise with his fingers which showed the rage he was in.

'I was sure that something had been overlooked', he said. 'What's missing? What's wrong?'

'The uniform you are wearing is out of date. More than two years ago our General abolished it, giving us to understand that the time had changed. You are badly informed, I assure you.'

'We looked it up in the Encyclopedia,' he sadly informed me.

He sat down beside me, with his head in his hands, in order to think more clearly. I was looking at him and I suddenly told him:

'What we both ought to do is to fight. If I was armed like you I would inform you in a different way, . . . . .'

'No, he said, it would not count. The truth is that we are outside the battle zone, and the results we would get would not be recognised officially. What we ought to try to do is to get inside and there, if we are lucky, fight it out.'

We tried ten times to enter the battle, but a curtain of smoke and bullets stopped us. Trying to find a gap, we climbed a small hill overlooking the proceedings from where we could see that the war was getting on well and that there was everything that the Generals could ask for.

The enemy told me:

'Looked at from up her it's obvious that we must mind how we enter or we might get in the way' . . . .

I nodded my head.

' . . . . . and nevertheless, between you and we there is a question we must settle.'

I thought he was right, and in order to help him, I suggested:

'Why not fight it out with fists?'

'No, not that, we owe a due respect to the progress of civilization, for the prestige of your country and mine. It's hard,' he said, 'it's very hard indeed.'

Thinking it over I found a suggestion:

'I have it, we can toss for it. If you win, you can use my up to date uniform and take me prisoner; if I win, you will be the prisoner and your equipment will fall into our hands. Is it a deal?'

He agreed, we tossed up, and I won. That same afternoon I entered camp with my booty and when the General, beaming with satisfaction, asked me what I wanted for my reward, I told him that if he did not mind, I would keep the byke.

*Translated from the Catalan by NURIA PI Y SUNYER*

### Josep Pijoan

#### THE STICK

*The beach-bough flowered high on the tree.*

*I from the ground watched eagerly:*

*Mine, twig of the beach, you yet shall be,*

*I want a stick to last till I die!*

*I climbed, and the world swung bright for me,  
earth faded in blue and greenery.*

*O flowering bough, now say goodbye  
to this delightful horizon-glow!*

*We shall go wandering far and free,*

*by town and village we shall go*

*till the world and all its licks we know,*

*but these flowers forever have lost the sky,*

*As the axe-blows birds went wheeling, calling;*

*the flowers on the bough came falling, falling . . .*

*The love I bear will last till I die.*

*Translated by JACK LINDSAY*

### Joan Alcover

#### DESOLATION

*I am the remnant of a tree whose shade*

*once sheltered reapers in their rest at noon,  
but one by one the gales have lopped my boughs,  
and lightning clove my body, crest to soil,  
and the faint buds have crowned me green again,  
my gaping wounded stump which still remains:*

*I have seen my own boughs burning, like a smoke  
of ritual, offering all my best to heaven.*

*My shackled root sucks none but bitter life  
and feels the pressure of leaves and the sap mount  
nearer the turn of death, my only comfort.*

*There is no wound that was not once a bough,  
and if I were not, none would know my lack.*

*I only live to mourn the self which died.*

*Translated from the Catalan by KATHLEEN NOTT*

### J. V. Foix

#### POEM

*I ignore the fall of years and centuries*

*Race and blood and earth and hearth*

*I am the aura between the velvet of a thousand faces*

*The moan of the nights the black tramontana*

*I am the eldest of the rocks perpetually washed by the sea*

*The divine dew in the calyx of lakes*

*The flower and the leaf of celestial zephyrs*

*The blood of coals in the lips*

*The lusty skin of fruits The fresh bread of the mist*

*The honey of the springs The voice in the cellars*

*I am the magic full-moon of lacustrine archipelagos*

*The sperm of arrogant peaks in the enchanted island*

*The rain between patent-leather The mint of the oasis*

*The salt and the sand-paper*

*I am the lost whirlpool between the stars*

*The scattered seed between clouds of floss*

*Solar rubber and evening soot*

*Unbeaten bird in the virgin jungle*

*The vital member of wild animals*

*The tangent of your body The reef between infinities*

*I am the voluptuous arm in a sack of flour*

*The litographer of the skies The polar roundel*

*I am the virile equator the uncorrupt marsh*

*The aqueous tress of your heart*

*Cascade of lava in your heart's core*

*I am the negative copy of my image*

*Projected by the centuries in innumerable sequences*

*Upon the milky wall of your dreams.*

*Translated by J. L. GILI*

### J. M. Lopez-Pico

#### QUATRAIN

*Your life is a longing for agility,*

*To want to be gentle t'would be too strong.*

*Your life is a long and silent desire*

*It is the spectre of a dead flame.*

*Translated by CARLES PI Y SUNYER*