

Bob and Mohammed

Not long ago my neighbors sold their place,
When—upward mobile—they said “Yes” to brace
For yet another move the CEO
Decreed. For upward mobiles on the go—
Who wish careers that stay within the stream,
And not fall back and lose their forward dream—
Such moves are choice, but hardly so if they
Would keep their edge and not decrease their pay.

Our hearts were torn, and yet we knew the net
Would keep our hungry hearts in touch and let
Us know how progress went at zooming pace,
Where once a year we see a person’s face
If lucky, but the e-mail’s always there
To let each other know how much we care.

Nonetheless, they moved, and we will too,
As well, if the big LA deal falls through.
That deal was shaky from the start, and I
Found right away the boredom when I’d fly

Three times a week to bolster up the sales
Or train the staff. Gads, Marty always fails
To see the breaking curve of market trends
That indicates how every client spends.

The house next door did not sit empty long,
As Melody had said (she's seldom wrong
About these things with her successful eye),
"Long before it's time to list or buy,
I tell the occupants what buyers feel
Increases value and cements a deal.
Some hardwood paneling, some small, new trees—
Along with painting all the guestrooms. These
Things increase value, since no children tore
Up anything that must be fixed before
The house will sell in a few years." Away
They go, as we will some approaching day.

Of all things, Melody arranged to show
The empty house next door—to my great woe—
To some Mohammed guy with one of those
White things around his head. From head to toes

He's Arab sure, though says he hardly knows
Why terrorists with hateful, evil blows
Would fly two friendly jets like bombs and slam
Them into New York City's pride. "I damn
All violent actions against innocent
Bystanders." So he talked at length and went
Along with those who on the TV say
The Koran is a peaceful book and way
Removed from terroristic war. I took
His word and said I'd like to read this book
Since I'm a Christian knowing little more
Than bits of history that have gone before.

The FBI came by his house one day
Last week. I later heard him grimly say
How harrowing it felt to have his skin
Breed hateful looks—behind veneer so thin
It scarce was there. I "never understood,"
Since I'm a white man, and most white men could
Not understand the boiling racial hate,
That subtly never seems to quite abate.
Despite the laws against it all around,

Its roots stay unaffected underground.

A candid moment came one day when he

Asked me about the slaves and history,

Like Custer, and the endless ravages

That stole the US from the savages.

Mohammed's tongue was so far in his cheek,

To dig it out would take more than a week.

But who can blame that razor cutting wit?

I should already now have thought of it,

For even if he hadn't dared to speak

His mind, but seem as if he's really meek,

How could he not have thought a thousand times

About these inconsistencies? He climbs

The highest mountain of his faith to give

To me confronting words and yet forgive

A past I wasn't there to know. But still

I have inherited it, and say, "Until

The day comes when the bombs are put away,

One thief will rob another every day."

Mohammed is a wise man, so he knew
What road my little riddle headed to.
Some tomahawk, or bow and arrow took
From neighboring Redman with an angry look,
Another Redman's land before the ships
From Europe ever came. So one foe strips
Another's freedom to enjoy its own—
Just like some law that I have to disown
Your freedom if I would keep mine. This chain
Of predatory power is insane,
But who can break it? Will it ever be,
That slaves and masters end in history?

We were in some tight stalemate, so I thought,
When I remembered how I had just bought
A Bible recently and in it read,
That Jesus would come back and raise the dead
Someday. I had not thought that much to care
About some afterlife with angels. I
Dare say this life's been quite enough to die
For—to suck all the pleasure out that pride
Can drain with lust and still look dignified.

But when my mother died, it broke my heart.
That pain just wouldn't go away, and part
Of me died too. I know this will sound crass,
But on a stock deal, I just lost my ass,
And thought of that gun on the nearby shelf,
And wondered how i'd feel to kill myself.

The horror of that thought gave me a freeze
So cold with fear that I cried, "My God, please!
There's got to be another way." I heard
Mohammed talking, but his every word
For those few moments had been lost on me
As I recalled my recent history.

I popped my paxil like the doctor said,
While wondering with just a bit of dread,
"I wonder if Mohammed knows how down
I've been. Man, this small, sleepy bedroom town
Can't keep a secret long. I bet he knows
Already." So I took a breath and said,
"These issues we're discussing make my head

Hurt, don't they you?" To which he gave a sigh
That said he'd let my comments all go by.
I felt a great relief as through my door
I slipped and took that Bible off the shelf
And left the gun. I thought I'd read myself
To sleep unless by chance some verse could throw
Some light on how to beat the awful woe
I sat up when I read that Christ had been
Made sin, and all his righteousness, He then
Gave me—for nothing I had done! The whole
Transaction came from him, and not a bit
Of work on my part did the least of it.

What?

No businessman would ever cut a deal
Where he did everything that's called to seal
An outcome, without some demand on me
To work and slave for any liberty
That lets me hold my head up with some pride.
With none of this in mind, he came and died
To offer gifts we always will receive

When all we do is reach out to believe.

My God! Then there's just one way to be saved,

And think of this, the Bible has been waved

By countless hands that took it many ways—

As tons of law we do that thereby pays

Our way to heaven when we die. But look!

That's not the message really in this book.

For bloody sacrifices led the way

In times of old, to point the way and say

That someday deity would qualify

It's son after a perfect life to die

To save us from our sins. Listen—why then

There's nothing you must do to enter in

But just confess your sins and take His grace.

He took away your works and in their place,

Put Jesus in your heart to live for you,

Instead of you, but then as you. I'm through

With trying, I no longer live, but He—

Yes Christ!—now lives His life by faith in me.

I could go on and on, but then no end

In sight—would make you groan to read and spend
Another hour to find out if all
Of this went on to cast a pall
Mohammed could not bear when we would talk
On days we'd take the dogs out for a walk.

I hoped my faith would cause no big jihad
Against the revelation that the God
Of Jesus had made known to me, for I
Now really loved Mohammed, and so my
Concern was whether he thought in his heart
In worshipping he had to do his part—
Or whether only grace from God could give
Him love enough to reach out and forgive
The FBI and hedonism in
The Western World of Satan and its sin.

He was aghast that I would dare to say,
That Jesus Christ stands as God's only way
To enter heaven. But then honestly
He told me that if he were perfectly
Candid, he would have to say as well,

That non-Islamic people go to hell.

So there we were, and each to hell would go

If not the other's faith embrace to know,

And let his own lose its distinctive edge.

But some there are that daily work to dredge

From each religion and find common parts—

That taken as a melting pot bring hearts

Together in an ecumenical

Hodge podge I consider fanciful

And far from democratic liberty.

The real intent that we are meant to see

In our republic is that we can each

Assert an "only way" without a breach.

But if some crazy lawmaker decides

That freedom for religion really rides

On laws that make it criminal to say

That hell's the outcome of another's way,

Then freedom's lost. For someone's feelings might

Be hurt—forbid it—that might start a fight

That ends by dulling every strong debate

On differences that make a nation great.

Republics such as this, though, cannot last.

For time will come when God will say, "The past

Is now the future of my King—My son—

Named Jesus Christ. For all that He has done,

He'll rule the earth that every bended knee

May bow and every tongue confess that He

And He alone is truth and saving light.

Until that fact becomes the world's sole light,

Without rebuttal or contending fight,

I hope this great republic will remain—

A nation that can count its highest gain

In laws not sending those to jail who say

That their historic faith's the only way.

In the meantime, I will pray to see

Mohammed turn to Christianity.

My only gun's a Bible and its word,

It is the only truth that must be heard.

But though Mohammed does not yet agree,

Our soldiers die to keep our liberty.

Brian L. Coatney

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