Raising the Dead

MRIs failed to detect any spirit. Sonography probed for an echo; dead seriousness responded as the red blood cell count hovered a nanobot above hopelessly dreary. Topnotch surgeons injected endorphins, went in there determined to come up with an optimistic sign. They explored coronal suture for a cracked smile, found only fissured frowns. Transcranial magnetic simulation homed-in the humor zone. Electric stimulation of both nuclei accumbens turned up zero. They tickled tarsi and phalanges with feathers, tapped ulnar ligaments for funny-bone twinge, didn’t get a semblance of mirth. Poking around the ribs for a giggle, MDs traced the nerve to a punch-line that could elicit a sidesplitter reflex. The features remained deadpan, so they elected to administer an enema. The total bill broke the World Bank of Records, yet the pulse didn’t blip. Desperate for a breath, the team conferred, unanimously agreed they had operated on the wrong patient.

Symptoms

I long to hold a strand of light, and a grave yawns like a hippo.

Bending to sniff a flower, I grow rigid as concrete.

I want to dream, instead see only the wrinkled flesh of my lust.

I go to honor the ones I love, and mud fouls my hands.

Tears of sorrow overflow, when I begin to laugh.

I stretch every ligament of wisdom toward a branch of knowledge,

unwind every convoluted journey of weathered understanding in the orbits of my nerves
to grasp an idea of life—and a blade of grass cuts me.

The final trace of hope vanishes, and a spirit flies out taunting . . . Let’s boogie!

Biographical Note: Bruce Lader (Bridgesbl@aol.com) is the author of five published volumes of poetry. Discovering Mortality (March Street Press, 2005) was a finalist for the 2006 Brockman-Campbell Book Award. His third full-length book, Fugitive Hope, is forthcoming from Cervena Barva Press. Winner of the 2010 Left Coast Eisteddfod Poetry Competition, his poems have appeared in Poetry, Roanoke Review, Poet Lore, Harpur Palate, Confrontation, New Millennium Writings, and other journals and anthologies. He has received a writer-in-residence fellowship from The Wurlitzer Foundation, and is the Director of Bridges Tutoring, an organization that educates multicultural students. Additional information can be found at www.brucelader.com