

The Bursar (Apologies to Edgar Allen Poe)

Diane Mellinger

In my dream at midnight dreary, where I wandered weak and weary
O'er these stately Woodstock sidewalks famous from forgotten lore-
While I plodded, (really napping,) suddenly I started tapping,
Found myself then gently rapping, rapping at this chapel door
"Just a visitor," I uttered, "tapping at the chapel door-
Only me and nothing more."

Ah, distinctly I remember it was in a bleak November.
This dream filled me with fantastic terrors never felt before;
So that now, to still the beating of my heart, I stood repeating
"Just a visitor entreating entrance at this chapel door-
An old choir director knocking at the chapel door-
This it is and nothing more."

Presently my soul grew stronger; hesitating then no longer,
"Sir," said I, "or Madam, truly your forgiveness I implore;
Energy was sapping, and so gently I came tapping,
And then faintly I came rapping, rapping at this chapel door.
Not surprised you scarcely heard me" – then I opened wide the door.
Darkness there and nothing more.

Deep into that dimness peering, long I stood there gasping, fearing,
What I saw was sad and rotten, disarray from door to door,
But the silence was unbroken, and the stillness gave no token,
And the only word there spoken was my whispered word, "Hello?"
This I whispered, and an echo murmured back the word, "Hello?"
Merely this and nothing more.

Feeling brave I stepped to enter, walking forward to the center,
Turned and saw our dear Ann Wynia, treasurer in days of yore;
In her hand she held an apple, seated in the darkened chapel
Over by the back east window, near the downstairs far rear door-
Sitting on a faded cushion, over by that exit door-
Perched, she sat, and nothing more.

Then this treasurer beguiling turned my sad face into smiling
By the grave and stern decorum of the countenance she wore,
"Though this place be dark and frightening, please," I said, "Ann, be enlightening!
Tell me of the tragic story, wreaking havoc evermore!
What has happened to this chapel once so lovingly cared for?"
Quoth Ann Wynia, "Nevermore."

Then the bursar, sitting lonely on the faded pew spoke only
That one word, as if her soul in that one word she did implant
Nothing further then she uttered – not a feather downward fluttered
Till I scarcely more than muttered "Worry not if speak you can't.
I will leave you to your silence. Peace and quiet I must grant."
Then Ann Wynia rose to rant.

"Let me tell you," Ann then started
"Congregants have long departed
Who's to blame them? Look around!
Everything has fallen down!

Though the heat vents groan and choke
No warmth will come
It smells like smoke
And deathly things of creepy nature
Ugly nasty, noxious vapors
Faint remnants of past hash dinners
Or long decaying bingo winners.

The bell, made true by Paul Revere
Is silent, maybe cracked I fear
Oh the bell, bell, bell
What a tale its terror tells of Despair
But that's a poem not meant for here.

Out in front the weeds grow thicker
Crabgrass, knot weed, burdock, prickles
The permafrost garden is now overgrown
Where leaves, long unraked, have finally blown.
The organ made by Hutchings and Plaisted
Has suffered most deeply, and is utterly wasted
Pipes are full of nuts and seeds
Plugging air holes in the reeds.

No song is heard, not voice or ditty
No concerts played, it's such a pity
The children here left down the street
I miss their pitterpat of feet.
Leon? You ask, and the Holy Ghost?
They caught the last train for the coast,
The day the chapel died.

The paint on the walls it is cracked and it's peeling
Fissures reach clear through the bulk of the ceiling
The gazebo – it floated off nigh late last spring
Given that flooding's a regular thing.

Joanne left for pastures much richer and greener
Her absence left everyone surly and meaner.
The copier it went kerfloey
Oozing out some liquids gooey
The phones unanswered,
Long stopped ringing
The postman only bills is bringing.

The clock is stuck at half past ten
Sunday morn won't come again

The choir dispersed
To the edge of the earth
The altos to China
Sopranos to Perth
The basses and tenors had long since departed
Shaking the group to the core of its worth.

No dancers, no speakers, no Spirit of Life
The ants in the kitchen are woefully rife.
The church elevator is canted and breach
And the cab between floors is just out of reach.

I recognize you," Ann said to me ---
"You look a lot older but much more carefree
You were around back when things were still good
When everything functioned the way that it should
When people supported our place and our work
A haven to go in this world so berserk
Those were the days when we valued our chapel
Shiny and healthy, robust like my apple.
Fierce social justice and climate defender
Woodstock community thought us such splendor.
Now we are rotting and wasted away
That's the sad truth at the end of the day
A phrase so important, I oft think upon:
You don't realize what you've got till it's gone."

And that was the end of Ann's passionate shout
She turned and sat down like her spark had gone out.

In my dream at midnight dreary, where I wandered weak and weary
O'er these stately Woodstock sidewalks famous from my memories great
When I plodded, (really napping,) and I suddenly was tapping,
Followed then by gently rapping, rapping at this chapel gate
What had happened here I wondered, right behind the chapel gate
Wake me from this nightmare's fate!

And Ann Wynia, never flitting, still is sitting, STILL is sitting
On the pew with faded cushion, just beside the back wall edge
"Is there no hope for North Chapel?" I did yell "Ann, must we grapple?"
She looked down and bit her apple, by the eastern window ledge
And I chuckled at her answer that she offered near the ledge
Quoth Ann Wynia one word, "Pledge."