Bulletproof

by Wolfgang Carstens

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by Wolfgang Carstens
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in a recent interview,

Lemmy Kilmister,
still smoking,
drinking,
and touring
at 70,

remarked
that he was
indestructible.

indestructible.

Lemmy,
i will carve
these letters
on your
tombstone

when you
finally hang up
your boots

and body surf
that ocean
of worms

back
into the
ether.

Gordon Downie,

i read your book
COKE MACHINE GLOW

then stopped by
your website

to say “hello.”

but your website
was down,

the newspapers
say you have brain Cancer

and
it dawns on me

you
are already
gone

and

it’s
too late

for
“hello.”

James

couldn't
do anything
without smoking
a cigarette.

he
couldn't wake up
without smoking
a cigarette.

he
couldn't go to sleep
without smoking
a cigarette.

he
couldn't take a shit,
go outside,
or eat a meal
without smoking
a cigarette.

in fact,
the only thing James did
without smoking
a cigarette,

was dying.

R.
I.
P.

James.

“reasons to quit”

the signs
were posted
everywhere:

the fridge,
the front door,
on the mirror
in the bathroom.

they all said
the same thing:

“Children.
Family.
Health.”

the
only thing
missing
was you.

r. i. p.
Tracy Lee.

you tried.

Baby,
you tried.

it's not that you're gone.

everybody has to go
at some point.

it's not that you were sick
or suffering,

and it's not that you chose
to hide the fact
that Death
was banging on your door.

what troubles me
is how i put you in the margin

and took for granted
what little time you had left.

if nothing else,
there was time enough

for goodbye.

my father spent

the last days
of his life
asking
to see
me

which
is ironic
because
i spent
the first years
of mine
asking
to see
him.

in the end
too much time
had passed

and i
no longer
cared.

i
already had
closure.

i
hope you found
yours,

Dad.

all Annie wanted

was
a framed picture
of the great grandchildren.

“and i don’t care
about the frame,”
she added.

i found it
at the back
of the closet,

wrapped
in Christmas paper,
dated 1998—

two years
before she passed away.

it’s July 2016

and still
i

weep.

i put my dog

down.

she
was old,

sick,

and
in pain.

when she slumped
in my arms,

all
i could think about
was how she whimpered
with joy

whenever
i pulled her leash
from the drawer.

damn.

i
should have
walked her

more often.

i turn 45

in
a few months.

sure,
i have Cancer,
lung disease,
and

i hobble around
like an old woman
with my cane.

still,
i never thought
i would make it
this far.

in other news,

i am only 20 years
from retirement

and then
i can start
enjoying
my life.

good god,

somebody
put me

out
of
my
misery.

“do you want me

to trim your eyebrows,”
the stylist asks,

as she brushes
the hair clippings
from my shoulders.

it reminds me
of my father,
and his father
before him—

both of whom
had bushy eyebrows,
with long rogue hairs
that stretched upwards
like weeds.

my father
and grandfather—
both dead.

as she removes the cape,
and assures me
i look “ten years
younger,”

it hits me
hard:

soon enough

even i

will be
a
memory.

forever

the optimist,

for
her 90th
birthday,

she asked

for
a
clock.

our bed

feels
so big tonight.

you
are not
here.

i
stretch myself
like a cat
across the mattress—

something
i haven't done
in 20 years.

but
i don't like it.

i
crawl
to the edge
of the bed

and,
like you,

spend
my first night

in
the
grave.

memento mori

let
the motherfucking
nightmare

continue.

i sit alone

in front
of my dying fire,

smoking cigarettes,

drinking beer,

listening
to yellow
leaves

drop
from the trees.

summer's gone

and night

is
coming
on.

i go fishing

with
my six-pack cooler,
stocked.

i am two beers in.

i grab my third.

the two empties
tip
and float

in the sad water.

i quickly check
my heart.

for
the first time

in
a long time

i
honestly
can't tell

whether
my cooler

is
half full

or

half
empty.

in the past five years,

i've been diagnosed
with Arthritis,
Gout,
and skin Cancer.

i can't raise
my left arm
above my head,
my lungs operate
at 37% capacity,

and i hobble around
with my cane
like an old woman.

my doctors
have already given me
an expiration date.

but tonight,

with a bottle of Patrón,
a full pack of cigarettes,
and a song in my heart,

i swear to fucking Christ
i ain't never gonna die.

in a drunken stupor,

clawing my way
across the floor
on my hands and knees
like a wounded animal,

i started thinking
about great exit lines—

something
worthy of a tombstone.

ultimately,
all i could come up with
was:

surely,
one more
won't kill
me.

i used to believe

i was bulletproof,

that if i just put blood
above my doorway,
Death would pass
me by.

i have never
broken a bone,
taken a ride
in an ambulance,
or spent a single night
in a hospital room.

i used to be the guy
when everyone around me
was dropping like flies,
who wouldn't get sick.

those days are gone.

now,
a simple cold
can leave me bedridden,

a flu,
like the one i have now,
can last for weeks,
sometimes months,

working its way
deep into my lungs.

today
marks my 45th year

and i am no longer
made of Kevlar.

the day is coming
when i will get sick
and not get any better.

happy birthday motherfucker!

your days
are
numbered.

you started walking

such a long
time ago,

and
it has been
such
a long journey.

you
were bound
to get lost.

we
all do.

i know it
seems hopeless,

and
i know there
isn't much time
left,

but
it is never
too late

to
try.

it's not rocket science.

all you have to do
is make every day
count

so when Death comes
to take you,

you have no unfinished business,
your loved ones know exactly
how you feel,
and your bucket list
is empty.

no regrets.

the end will arrive
soon enough.

i want my funeral

to be a party.

no dressing in black;
no veils;
no boo-fucking-hoo.

i want music,
dancing,
booze,
balloons,
and drugs.

put a bottle opener
on my casket;
pack it with ice
and turn it
into a beer cooler;

peel back my flesh
and turn my skull
into a hash bong.

just party motherfuckers!

celebrate the fact
that i'm dead
and you're not.

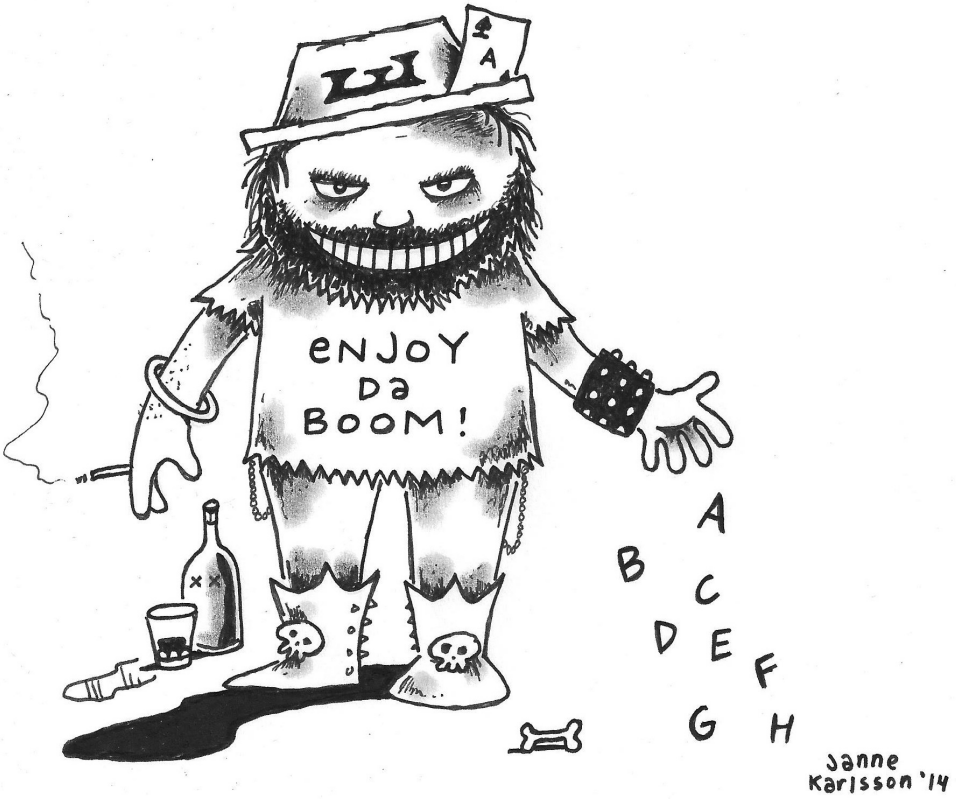
my ex-wives
have already RSVP'd.
they're picking out
new dresses
as we speak.

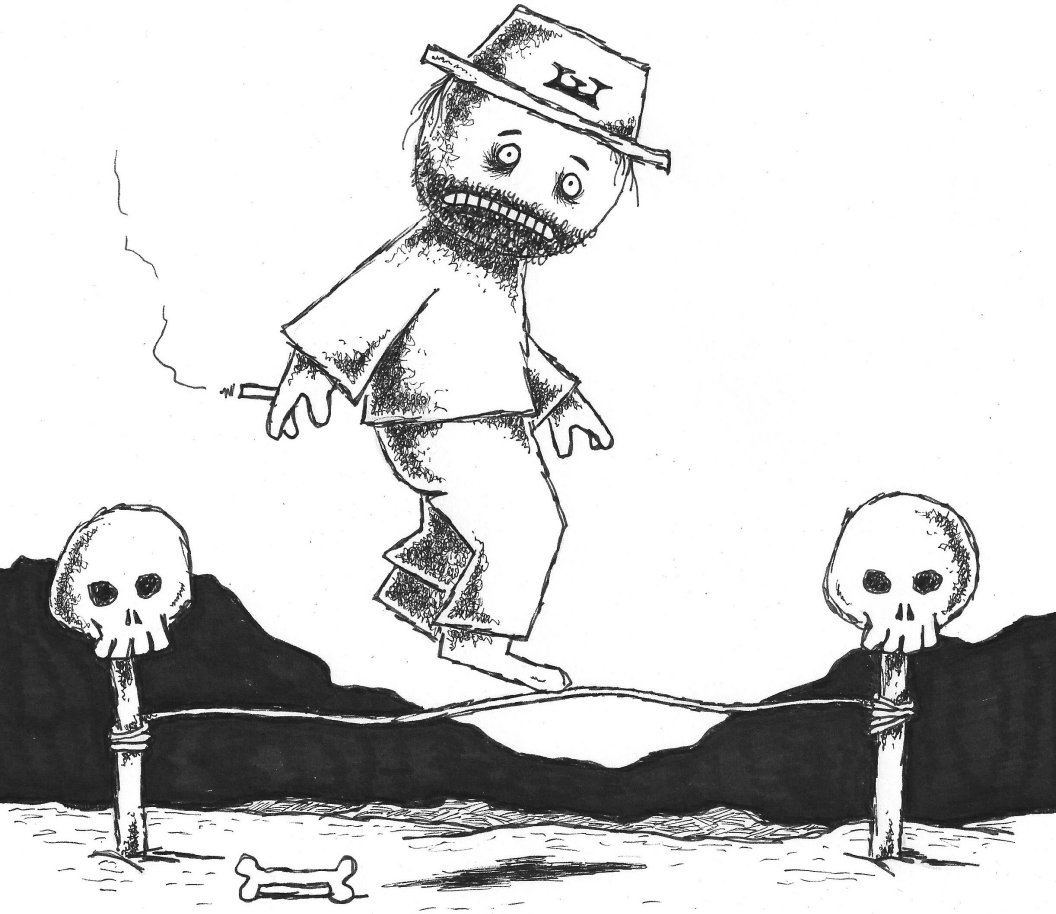
you should too.

and,
if you die first,

i promise

to do the
same.


ENJOY
Da
BOOM!
A
B
C
D
E
F
G
H
Janne
Karlsson '14



Wolfgang Carstens lives in Canada with his wife, five kids, grandson, dog, mortgage, and death. His poetry is printed on the backs of unpaid bills.

More information at wolfgangcarstens.com.

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