The Balloon

Patricia Frey*
The Balloon

Patricia Frey

Abstract

Anyway, what do you think of graves in general—not too much room and not too much light but then I suppose that’s all right for some people, if you like to live alone that is...
can at all, but rather marvelous. Anyway, what do you think of graves in general—not too much room and not too much light but then I suppose that's all right for some people, if you like to live alone that is.

The woman (from the grave) said well, it does get tiring after a time and you have the urge to just get out and see the city, know what I mean and the girl says perfectly yes, I know exactly what you mean. So, said the girl again, are you going to the terminal and the woman says yes to see Pooh take off holding on with one hand to a black balloon. (The girl says) But ma'am really you have your colors mixed—Pooh is going to be holding on to a purple balloon, I read those exact words in the newspaper this morning, but then that all depends on the newspaper you get, I suppose, whether you get a black or a purple balloon. Anyway, (says the girl again) I think I'll walk to the terminal from the next bus stop and you (the woman) can go on ahead and perhaps save me a seat. So the girl pulls the cord to tell the bus driver she wants to get off and says thanks ever so much to the woman for letting me share this rotten seat with you.

The bus stopped and the girl got up from the seat, went to the rear door of the bus, jumped on the treadle saying open sesame at which time the doors did sort of slide back and she stepped to the sidewalk carefully avoiding a currently-in-process drying patch of spit. The girl, by name of Gem Stool, began to walk the sidewalks to the terminal looking at great big buildings. But looking up was tiresome, she thought, so she looked down and decided she would not break her mother's back by stepping on sidewalk cracks so she walked very carefully, guardedly you might say, and did not step on any cracks because her mother, whoever she was, would not enjoy having a broken back, or so she figured from reasoning very logically and deducing possibilities of hospital insurance and the like.

My god, thought Gem, (but that is entirely another matter (god, that is), anyway, my stars, thought Gem, (which could lead to a discussion or rough thought pattern of time lag or nonexisting entities, other civilizations long gone, etc.) but to the matter at hand—Gem noticed she was almost to
the terminal. The street signs said to her utter surprise and luck that she was within 459 long-feet steps from THE DESTINATION, i.e., the terminal. So, only 450 steps later because Gem’s mathematical figuring isn’t very good she found herself standing in front of the door to the terminal.

Gem silently thinks that she has beaten the bus since buses always take the long way to anywhere so she figures that her graveyard friend hasn’t arrived yet. She decides to enter the terminal alone and hunt for Pooh’s take-off place. She goes through the door but before she can close it a man comes running up and says my name is Seymour Something, people call me S.S. for short, and I’d like to know if you would like to go see Pooh take off holding on to a balloon that is basically white and sprayed with rainbow glitter to which Gem said, quote, really. (Gem answers) Well, to tell the truth, I was going to see the take-off anyway, and since you asked me, I’ll go with you. They begin to walk around the terminal looking for a crowd that would obviously be there for the show and the following conversation ensues.

Gem dear, he says, Gem dear where do you live to which she says in the boondocks and I’ve only been in the city for two short months. He says boisterously what is this I hear about the off-duty cop that was in your neighborhood the other day who took it upon himself to shoot one of our beloved countrymen. But then, (he goes on) that is beside the point, what do you really really think of city life in general now that you have been here for an eon (Gem reminds him that it has only been two short months that she has been in the city) and wouldn’t you like to come back someday (assuming that she is only here for a short while) just to see how it has all advanced terribly from this present state of naivety to genuine creativeness, that will be a marvelous era don’t you think.

Gem yawns. Remembers a first statement that S.S. has made.

Says Gem—the balloon is purple, not basically white and sprayed with rainbow glitter, and S.S. says what are you talking about, I know what I’m talking about, and I say the balloon is whatever color I said it was. Gem delays answering,
rather retaliating to this obstinate man, because she has a
greater desire to find a pack of cigarettes in her shoulder-strap
bag, which she always carried because she liked its pseudo im-
lications. Her search was of the indignant type, the looking
but never finding sort of thing but finally she came upon a
pack of her usual brand and pulled one pencil-like object
from the small square opening. Saying then, do you have a
light for me S.S.? He complies by clapping his hand against
his breast pocket and finding a small bulge there, extracts a
match packet. He takes a single match from its colony and
slams it roughly against the terrain of its field. Then, while
the flame flickered, coughed and sputtered, he held it up to
Gem's cigarette and she drew her breath in to catch the flame.
So much for that.

And just where did you get your information about the
balloon being that ridiculous color (Gem is now at the angry
stage having encountered two such people who believe the
balloon is a different color than purple). Well, says S.S.,
(much taken aback by this girl's anger for apparently no
reason) I heard about it down at a pub to which I frequent
because of low-class reasons and you know, it seems all I get
done any more is to frequent bars, but then that's what
happens no matter how big or small any place is because
when you go looking and it isn't given to you, things to do
I mean, you just look in bars first. Anyway (continuance of
S.S.'s voice) what I just really like to do when I have the time
is to go slumming because I've always had this desire to see
lower-lower class bars and go to roller derbies.

Gem sighs and believes S.S. to have some sort of neurosis.
She vaguely does not listen to what he continues to talk
about but rather searches with her eyes as to the place where
Pooh will take-off. Only then, she decides, will she know the
ture color of the balloon and only then, will everyone be
proved wrong because she knows that balloon is purple be-
cause of the conviction she has in her own being.

Simultaneously, Gem and S.S. spot a crowd of people
obviously waiting for Pooh to take off. They rush to join the
throng but sense that something is somehow not right. Gem
is the first to sense this since S.S. is involved primarily in see-
Sketch

ing how long he can keep up his side of the conversation. Gem taps an elderly (old) man on the shoulder and says what's going on, isn't Pooh here yet and isn't he going to take off holding on with one hand to a purple balloon? The man looks at her and says what do you take me for, I don't know anything.

Gem then goes over to a middle-aged woman and says to her, what is going on, i.e., give me the word about this event. Slyly, even half coyly, the woman says—well, you see it was like this (and a tiny tear forms in her right eye which is very convincing). Pooh was scheduled to take off about 20 minutes ago and the darling thing was right over there (she points to a platform to Gem's left) and there he was holding on to the balloon, all sweet and dear looking, when all of a sudden this balloon makes this horrible grinding sound and the next thing I knew the balloon exploded. Before I go on (says the woman) I had better ask you if you were very close to Pooh. Gem says no not really, but Pooh has always been something to hold as ideal in my mind. The woman then says (now with both eyes brimming fairly enough with tears)—Pooh was killed when the balloon exploded!

Gem says, quote, oh.

But, wait a minute (says Gem) you've got to remember this one thing for me, can you remember which color that balloon was, can you just remember that. The woman looks at Gem, and acts like she is thinking quite seriously about it, and says, I'm afraid I can't tell you. You see, the people here who were in charge of this event asked all of us not to release any of the details until they found out why the balloon burst. They said we would find out about it in tomorrow's paper.

Gem begins to walk away from the maddening, thoroughly unbelieving crowd, and thinks only to herself, knowing that tomorrow is a new day and that she'll be able to find something else a little more exciting to do.