Victory Over Delusion

by Gordon W. Brown

Mural-Front & Main Streets-Binghamton, NY-Anonymous

"I Am The Greatest!" He pumped his fists in the air then kicked in the alley door to the gift shop. Not in there five seconds when the alarm started howling. Beating, pounding, prying, tossing to the floor, stomping, kicking, he could not get the cash register to open. Pulling at drawers, gathering spilled trinkets of cheap silver, gold plate, shiny stones, tiny sculptures, he grabbed up a porcelain winged luminescence just as red and blue lights shone through the pulled down gate over the street-side window.

"Sting like this butterfly. Float like a bee-atch" jumped into his brain as he dashed for the alley door. Swinging his fists, head down, he charged the shadow in the doorway, trampled it, and flew through the backlot.

Collapsed on his back, on the bare floor, nothing but an old beach towel for a bed in his hovel he stares at the ceiling. The two dimensional champ, fastened up there with cracked, yellowed, strips of paper tape stares down with all his confidence. He pants there looking into his reflection, into his mirror on the ceiling, mouthing over and over, "I Am The Greatest." His eyes close into numbing sleep. He dreams. There is a ten count and bells, his head is bowed, sweat drips from his brow, his foe is on the mat below him as the ref lifts his gloved hand high, cheering fills his ears.

Cockroaches roam near him tickling the hair on his arm. Tranced, he stirs, he's reaching to brush away the bugs when there is a KraBoom! His plywood door is laid flat. The shadows

grab him up. His twisted wrists burn with pain, shackled, he's hauled away. Soon the litany descends upon him. Burglary, robbery, attempt at murder, the assault they couldn't solve, the battery they decided to add.

He is tossed into the dust bin with others, strangers, foes. In their eyes he sees his reflection. He thinks, "I Am The Greatest." He shouts, "I Am The Greatest!" He's pushed by one, shoved by another, knocked down by a third. On his knees he finds a shard, a splinter, a spike someone sometime had dropped and kicked aside, thought to be hidden, he takes it in hand. He flails, he brawls. "Stalk like a butterfly. Stick like a bee." That splinter, that shiv, penetrates a shirt, a chest, slides between ribs, stops a heart. Back on his feet, his fists whip into the air, "I Am The Greatest!"

The shadows descend, subdue, overcome, drag him away. "I Am The Greatest, I Am The Greatest, Stroll like a butterfly, Sing like a bee!" From city rat to butcher.

Charged, sentenced, housed, warm under a blanket, lying on a thin mattress, cold dank air on his face, he is now sequestered from the cacophony and chaos of the streets. He's been taken from the smells of urine stained doorways and rotting dumpsters. His feet are clean. His belly is full.

The ceiling has no reflection, there is no champ there to encourage him. The ceiling is his canvas now. He paints with his mistakes, shades with discarded chances, and draws with regrets from all of the mind benders he consumed. The desperate rawness and the horrors and the pain and the blood are vivid on the ceiling now.

Everything is still.

His reflections are now within. "I Am The Wasted."

Fragrances from the prisoners' garden waft to his senses, odors of Lilac and Lily-of-the-Valley. He's gotten no ten count yet. He gets to his feet and goes to his tiny window. Above he sees endless blue. Beyond he sees a lush hillside, greener than his trousers. In the garden below he sees a Monarch fluttering about, lively and feasting on the blooms. He hears a muffled thrum and sees dozens of Honey Bees committed to their activities, on a mission to secure a future for their kind. He comes to recognize, and he is able to believe, that these are symbols of life. They are no longer encouragements to die.