

An Ode to Joe Miller

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A son of North Carolina that Joe Miller was.
He migrated to Harlem, attracted by its fun and
‘buzz.’
Here in Harlem, he found his meaning and place.
Running numbers for ‘the family’ in this hellish rat
race.
He made his reputation as a numbers man,
extraordinaire.
Hey, when it came to the nightlife in Harlem Joe,
Junior,
And ‘Little Willie’ enjoyed it with much debonair.

One day, at M&G’s eatery the waitresses did
observe.
It was something peculiar about how Joe Miller ate.
“Joe was spitting a lot, not swallowing, the nerve!”
Perhaps, doc, you should talk to him, see what
gives.
Is he sick, or what? Does he want to live?
I talked to Joe Miller and the way he looked, soon
realized.
He needed a CT scan because things just did not
jive.
His symptoms were not that of a cold, I fast realized.
Perhaps, a cancer in his throat. Uh oh—airway
compromise!
Billy too saw him wasting away and looking bad.
And, as expected, she became concerned.
The booze, the cigs he’d imbibed and long burned,
Have finally caught up to him, because he didn’t
learn.
That moderation is crucial, and tobacco is a no go.
Nevertheless, Billy being concerned, got him to go
To St. Peter’s for care late one night.
He fought us, and fought us. Has he given up the
fight?
Once there and admitted, the CT scan test did
reveal,
As I suspected, a large cancer on his supraglottic
laryngeal.

Tried as I might, no one at St. Peter’s wanted to
treat him.
They said, “The die is cast, the metastases would eat
him.”
Strangely, at the time, we hadn’t found metastatic cells.
Please somebody, do something before I raise high
holy hell!
He then got a tracheotomy and feeding tube too.
We thought we were making headway for all we knew.
Then one morning after awakening and sitting in
my den,
It occurred to me, Mister Joe is in trouble, and I
better get in.
This time, strangely it seemed, ‘his number’ was
coming in.
I rushed to the hospital to verify my premonition.
As I entered his room, his last breath! Hmm?
Intuition.

We bid him farewell at Griffin-Peters, Harlem style
and all.
Over 100 came out to pay Joe Miller their final call.
Now he’s in a grave in Jersey, with others, stacked 6
feet tall.
Harlem’s numbers game continues, but Nikki’s Bar
is gone.
Gentrification is here and folks are losing their homes.
So there’s more homeless being added to the
downtrodden.
Damn. Harlem misses Joe, but like most, soon he’s
forgotten.
We’re in the morass of the second Harlem
renaissance and
They tell us, things are changing, hopefully, for the
better.
Old Joe would be fairly amused if he could read this
letter.