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children churches & daddies

the non-religious, non-family oriented literary and art magazine





edit
editorial

So I'm sitting here taking a my lunch break at work, and a coworker comes in with his sandwich. "What are you eating?" I ask, and he responds, "Chicken - I'm being good to myself." And All I could think of was the fact that eating a Chicken not only isn't good for the Chicken, but it isn't good for him. The diets of Americans in this country are founded that we don't get enough protein, too much fat, and that it's necessary to eat meat in order to be healthy, when this just isn't true. Not only does it take one tenth the energy and money to produce grains and vegetables over produce, but this country - the one that eats the most meat - is also the one that has the highest rates of heart attacks, breast cancer and osteoporosis. For example, osteoporosis is caused by a lack of calcium. Americans have enough calcium in their diets - but having too much protein actually REMOVES calcium from your bones. Why do we as American do this to ourselves, and to our children?

janet kuypers

children, churches & daddies

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and geez,
recycle this.
do i have
to tell you
everything?





watching people play

mom and dad's home in florida is right across
the street from a pool and a pair of tennis courts.
in the mornings, if mom was already out of
the house when i woke up, i'd get dressed,
maybe a swimsuit, maybe shorts and a t-
shirt, and walk outside, down the driveway,
across the street, through the fence and past
the pool to the rows of brown bleachers that
faced the courts. dad might be playing, or
maybe there's a tournament with our neighbors
and friends. and i'd sit next to mom, both of
us with our feet up on the fence around the
tennis courts, just sitting in the sun. that's
how we spent our mornings, watching people play.

janet kuypers

wouldn't have to

whenever i hurt myself
playing when i was little,
roller skating or bicycling
in the driveway, mom would
usually do one of two things:
she'd either try to make me
laugh by asking, "did you
crack the cememt?", or
say she'd cry for me, or get
mad for me, and then she'd
pout, so I wouldn't have to

janet kuypers

"VISITING TENNESSEE"

Just before noon on Monday, Paul Dankin kicked off his comforter and stretched his six foot three body over his six foot cot, yawning. He instinctively clicked on the tiny clock radio. Thick fingers clumsily spun the selector dial. It angered Paul that no matter how hard he tried he could not gracefully blend one program into another. His spin of the dial ripped into many stations, creating a garbled static that he hated.

After many seconds of fighting with the dial a clear voice spoke to Paul. He withdrew his hand and placed it under his pillow, smiling. The smile turned to a frown when the staccato bursts of a typewriter indicated that it was one of those twenty-four hour news programs and not a talk show. Paul pulled his hand from under the pillow and was about to attempt another station change, but thought better of it and instead placed his hand on his stomach, kneading a loose roll of flesh.

The newsman finished the last sentence of a story concerning laboratory animals and was recapping the headlines while Paul's fingers crept down his stomach, playfully slapping at his penis.

"Meanwhile, here in New York, the body of Pulitzer Prize winning playwright Tennessee Williams is attracting hundreds of friends and admirers. Williams, noted for his plays "The Glass Menagerie" and "A Streetcar Named Desire," died here late Thursday night of asphyxiation. An autopsy revealed that the playwright had a swallowed a bottle cap. Williams' body will be at Campbell Funeral Home at 81st and Madison Avenue until Tuesday. Hours are ten a.m. till eight p.m. Internment is scheduled for Saturday in St. Louis."

"Yeah, that was a great movie," said Paul Dankin as he cracked his knuckles. "Brando was great." He clicked off the radio. "Tennessee Williams. I just seen that name somewhere." Paul lay in bed trying to remember where he had seen the name. His hand automatically returned to his penis. The playful slaps soon gave way to a more determined motion. Aroused, his erection pointed him towards a plastic milk crate full of magazines. Dropping the Newsweek and People magazines back into the crate, he returned to the cot with an issue of Puritan. It was not a current issue but it was his favorite porno magazine. Thumbing through colorful closeups of male and female genitalia spitting at and swallowing each other, Paul emptied himself.

"That's how you spell relief," he grinned, "P-U-R-I-T-A-N. No wonder those pilgrims gave thanks." His laughter ricocheted off the walls of his efficiency apartment; the echo made him nervous.

He flipped through the magazine a second time. Its images bored him. Halfway through the issue a full page photo of a bearded, round-faced man in a large hat smile up at him. Paul stuck his finger on the page to save his place. The article accompanying the picture was an interview with Tennessee Williams.

"Tennessee Williams! Christ, I knew I seen you somewhere. You're alright, Tennessee. No . . . no you're not. You're dead. Choked. Brando'll probably cry. I wonder if he remembers me?"

Paul threw down the magazine, walked over to the door and slowly opened it. He darted his head into the hallway and lunged for the day old Sunday News lying on his neighbors welcome mat. He quickly bolted the door.

Paul opened to the obituaries. His forefinger turned black as it slid down a column of names under Death Notices.

“Watson, Wilhelm, William,B., Williams, M., Williams, T. That’s it! 1076 Madison. Till eight. Great!”

Paul stepped into the shower. As he lathered up the shampoo his thoughts turned to his finances. He knew that Tuesday was the first and that his check would be in the mail, but the only cash he had was in coins. He needed a dollar-fifty for a round trip bus ride.

Wrapped in a towel, Paul grabbed at the coat flung over a kitchen chair and shook it over the cot. The clinking of coins on the sheet made Paul smile. There was a good deal more than a dollar fifty splattered across the cot.

The smile still felt strange. In the six years since Pooh Bear Lennox down the hall knocked out three of Paul’s teeth, Paul seldom smiled.

Pooh Bear Lennox, who was half Paul’s size, claimed that Paul rubbed up against his girlfriend in the elevator. Onlookers were surprised at the beating he gave Paul in the hallway, but Paul’s size was a disadvantage. Nobody ever challenged him so he did not know how to defend himself, whereas little Pooh Bear Lennox learned early how to destroy an opponent and nothing pleased him more than to tear into a big man like Paul Dankin.

The neighborhood was amazed at how frightened Paul behaved on the streets, even though he towered over just about everyone around him. Paul reasoned that if little men could beat him up anyone could, including women. In fact, women did. His mother slapped at him from infancy to puberty as did the woman he called Aunt Amy, his mother’s lover.

Paul rolled his tongue across the space in his mouth, licking his gums. His face twitched nervously as he stood in front of the closet, rummaging through his clothes, trying to pick his most impressive jacket and tie. Pants were no problem. All he owned were blue jeans.

Paul’s eyes lit up as he pulled out a slightly wrinkled, slightly stained gray sports jacket.

Beneath its left breast pocket was a frayed yellow patch that stated WTC SECURITY.

Embroidered under the letters WTC and above the word SECURITY were the Twin Towers.

Paul took a thick red striped tie out of his underwear drawer and dressed.

After parting his hair in the middle and plastering each side of his receding hairline with tonic, Paul brushed his teeth. This was a painful process. Stained a bright yellow by years of neglect, each morning Paul spent ten minutes rubbing his teeth as hard as he could with a brush overflowing with toothpaste. His tooth enamel disappeared years ago but the yellow remained.

Without enamel protection the slightest pressure on his teeth — by his tongue, liquids, or the air — filled his face with pain. These painful facial contortions gave him the look of an idiot, and coupled with his great size, a threatening idiot. He was unaware that he frightened people as much as they frightened him.

Paul grabbed his raincoat, triple locked his door and dropped the newspaper back onto his neighbor’s welcome mat. Outside the housing project sat Martha Poseagle from 12 K, clutching an umbrella. She was leaning against a metal sculpture that looked like a frozen

game of pick-up sticks.

"Where you goin' Paul?" she asked as he walked past.

Paul stopped and fingered the WTC emblem. "Hey, Martha. A good friend of mine died and I have to see him laid out. Name's Williams."

"William who?" asked Martha Poseagle. "I didn't know you had a friend."

Paul continued walking.

"How'd he die? Somebody kill him?" Martha yelled.

"Choked," Paul called. "Choked to death."

"Goddamn neighborhood," muttered Martha Poseagle. She leaned back on the work of art and patiently waited for another visitor.

Before entering Campbell Funeral Home, Paul Dankin groomed himself by looking at his reflection in the glass door. He squinted at a young woman sitting at a desk next to the elevator. She's beautiful, thought Paul as he turned the large doorknob and walked inside. The woman's head was bowed over a stack of papers; she heard his footsteps. "Good afternoon. Who do you wish to visit?"

"A, um, Williams. Tennessee Williams. From the movies, you know, with Brando."

The woman looked up. She studied Paul's face. "Just a second, sir."

"Yeah, sure."

She disappeared into an office behind her desk. When she returned a man was with her.

The man looked at Paul, nodded to the woman, and went back into his office.

"Second floor, sir," she said.

The female elevator operator asked Paul for a name.

"Williams. Tennessee Williams, please. I told the other girl that." His face started to twitch.

When the elevator doors snapped shut behind him he heard the operator laughing.

"They sure got some great looking girls working here," Paul said to an elderly man standing in the second floor lobby. "Seen him yet?"

The old man nodded.

"Look okay? Jeez, what a way to go. Think it was suicide?"

The old man shook his head and shuffled over to the elevator. Paul started to walk into the room but pivoted and signed his name with capitals in the guest book. He leafed through the book trying to find celebrity signatures. He was glad Marlon Brando's was not scribbled in it. He had not missed him. Paul wondered if Brando would remember him.

Stepping inside the room felt good. The thick red carpet soothed Paul's feet, relaxing him.

The room was huge.

There were many couches and chairs of soft crushed velvet and Paul was determined to sit in them all. The coffin was mounted at the far left of the room. Paul decided to explore that part of the room last.

In the middle of the room was a percolating coffee urn and styrofoam cups. Paul walked over to the coffee, intentionally scraping his toe into the carpet. It cut a line that pleased him. He thought of it as a trail that others would follow. A trail that would eventually lead people to Tennessee.

The annoyed usher standing guard at the wake asked him to lift his feet.

“Yeah, sure,” answered Paul.

The coffee was good and hot. Warmth spread throughout his body. He sipped the coffee while surveying the room. Two dozen people were loitering, many of them were crying. Paul watched a fat middle-aged woman swiping at tears with an index finger wrapped in a handkerchief. She moved the finger across his cheeks with the same rhythmic motion as a windshield wiper, causing Paul to wish he had a driver’s license and a girlfriend to take for a drive.

Imagining the wind sweeping through his girlfriend’s hair as he gunned his convertible around narrow curves, Paul was unaware of hot coffee dribbling down his chin. His delayed reaction to the burning pain was a shriek as the cup dropped out of his hand, splattering coffee across his shoes, socks and the panty hose of a smartly dressed woman fixing her own cup .

The usher walked over to the coffee urn and apologized to the woman. Paul, afraid to look at the woman, mumbled. She squinted at him and walked away with a snarl.

“Please be more careful, sir, “ said the usher. “We expect to have quite a few quests and we’d like to maintain the room just as it is.”

“Yeah, sure,” said Paul.

“And I’d appreciate it if you would continue to lift your feet when walking on our carpet. Please behave yourself, sir.”

“Yeah, sure,” said Paul.

The usher returned to his position at the far right of the room. He stood at attention with his hands solemnly cupped in front of him, watching Paul.

As soon as the usher turned his back Paul marched over to a couch. Paul lifted his feet up so high that it looked as if he were marching in place.

An attractive blonde sat on the far corner of the couch. She giggled and Paul felt warm again. He plopped down beside her; their knees brushed. The blonde’s lips became a tight line as she looked straight ahead.

“Did you know Tennessee Williams?” Paul asked.

The woman ignored him.

“Excuse me, Miss. Did you know Tennessee?”

She turned towards Paul. “No. I admire his work.”

“You’re beautiful. Are you an actress?”

The blonde coughed.

“Can I get you a cup of coffee?”

“No . . . thanks.”

“It’s too bad he’s dead but we all have to go sometime.” “Yes. Me, too.” And she was gone.

The couch became a frightening experience for Paul. It was so soft and formless that his body sank into the plush contours, swallowing him. He struggled to free himself but his stomach muscles were weak. He could not lean forward. Pushing against the back cushions for support only made him slip further down the spine of the couch until he could not move at all.

With his body trapped within the couch and no one nearby to help him escape, panic seized

him and a high pitched whimper, like the whine of a punished dog, cleared his throat. The usher hurried over to the couch. With his hands on his hips he glared down at Paul. Paul looked up and sighed; he was rescued.

At nine-thirty a.m. sharp, Paul Dankin was dressed and in the lobby awaiting the mail. Leaning against the mailboxes, Paul traced the WTC jacket emblem with his finger. Martha Poseagle, who was rumored to have a crush on the mailman, joined him.

“Good morning, Martha,” said Paul.

“Did I miss him?” asked Martha.

“Miss who?”

“Furfante. You know, our mailman.”

Paul shook his head.

“You’re all spiffed up,” said Martha. “Where you going?”

“You’ll never believe this, Martha, but I’m meeting with Marlon Brando today.”

“The movie star?”

“Yep.”

“Good. I’m glad to see you getting out more.”

“You look pretty spiffy yourself, Martha.”

“How do I smell?”

Paul shrugged. “Okay.” “You sure?” Paul nodded. “Yeah, sure.” “I thought so. New perfume.” They waited together in a nervous silence. When Furfante arrived Martha smiled, as did Paul when Furfante handed him a check.

After cashing his check and eating a leisurely breakfast in a Tenth Avenue diner, Paul returned to the Campbell Funeral Home. He walked past the woman sitting next to the elevator and pulling on a thread of his WTC emblem instructed the elevator operator to drop him off on the second floor. Before re-entering the room Paul thumbed through the guest book.


“Still no Brando,” he said.

Paul felt comfortable. Everything was familiar, including the usher staring at him. Paul waved. Everything was familiar. Everything except Tennessee. He walked a diagonal line, pausing at the head of the coffin.

“He’s as little as a doll,” Paul said to a woman kneeling at the prayer stand. Paul studied Tennessee’s fleshy face. It had a rich tan that Paul admired. His admiration turned to amusement when he spotted the uneven line between Tennessee’s forehead and widow’s peak where the makeup ended and his hair began. Paul felt that the makeup could have been stretched, pulled up a bit further to cover the gap. It reminded him of the many cold nights in his apartment when he tried to pull his comforter up over his head, but it was too short and would expose his feet to the cold.

“His feet must be cold but they’re not exposed,” he remarked to the kneeling woman.

Tennessee’s mouth fascinated Paul. The dry lips had begun to part. A thin crack separated



the bottom and upper lip. Although Paul leaned over the corpse to get a closer look, he could see no teeth behind the crack. The mouth was opening but Paul could only see a dark empty space. Staring down at the blackness inside Tennessee's mouth, Paul remembered that Tennessee had swallowed his death. He brought his hand up and traced a line across the dead man's lips.

"I got black spaces inside my mouth, too," he whispered.

Paul quickly withdrew his hand and spun around. No one had seen him touch Tennessee. He walked over to a couch, and taking the ashtray from an end table, placed it next to him on the couch while lighting a cigarette. A scolding from the usher prompted Paul to remove the ashtray and place it back on the table.

Paul took long, deep pulls on his cigarette, exhaling so much smoke it made him squint. He was squinting when he saw her enter the room.

continued in the next issue...

mark blickley



best friend

“I had a best friend once,”
I said matter-of-factly,
as I stared into the palm of my hand.
You laughed my remarks off a sarcasm.
So I waited for a silence
so that I would have the thrill
of breaking it.
“I had a best friend once—
and he raped me.”
There. You wanted to hear it.
How can you break the silence
now? I’ve taken away your weapons.
Have I taken away your compassion, too?
Tell me what good this knowledge
does you now.
Reminding me doesn’t help,
and there’s nothing you can do
to make the pain go away.
As you sit there in silence,
I wonder if there must be someone
who can say what needs to be said to me.
A best friend, maybe.
But if only a best friend
can help me now
then I would prefer
not to be helped.
I don’t ever want to find
a best friend again.

gabriel athens

find myself

I had my own ring
but on days I'd forget to wear it.
You had your own vows
but your memry seemed to fail you.
You were foreign to me:
a frightening foreign,
an exciting foreign.
Do I know your name?
Do I care?
Let me just take off my ring,
I thought,
and put it behind
the frame on the dresser
where I cannot see it
tonight.
I was only resigned to the thought:
if I forgot myself with you,
if I was lost with you,
I would only remember again
and soon find myself.

alexandria rand



cc@d



you'll like them

mom was always cooking things, eating the strangest things, and trying to convince us to try them. just because she likes hot peppers or pickled beets or pigs' feet or oysters doesn't mean we do. so once mom cooked some garbanzo beans, wanted me to try them. "you'll like them, they're low in fat." no, thank you, mom, i'm not hungry. "but they taste just like peanuts." no, thanks, mom, i'm really not hungry.

"they taste just like peanuts."

sandy and i start a conversation.

"just like peanuts," we hear her say again from the kitchen. i start to laugh. she's still in there, trying to convince me to eat these things, and she just keeps repeating that they taste just like peanuts, in that cute little high-pitched squeak of hers. "just like peanuts."

"do they taste just like peanuts?" i asked. they were soft and mushy. nothing like peanuts. nothing at all.

janet kuypers



the explanation


so i figured i'd have to write out information
that our readers might want to know
in the form of a poem, since
they seldom look over the ads.
ha! i got you, you thought
you were reading a poem, when it's actually
the dreaded advertising. but wait -
you'll actually want to read this, i think.
Okay, it's this simple: send me published
or unpublished poetry, prose or art work
(do not send originals),
along with a SASE for response, to
Children, Churches and Daddies, Scars Publications,
3255 West Belden, Suite #3E, Chicago, Illinois
60647-2559. Then sit by your mailbox and wait.
Pretty soon you'll get your SASE back
with a note from the happy people at cc+d
that says (a) Your work sucks, or (b)
This is fancy crap, and we're gonna print it. It's that simple!
Now, if you're also interested, there are two
books available through scars publications:
one is called "hope chest in the attic" and
the other is called "the window."
Hope Chest in the Attic is a 200 page, perfect-
bound book of 13 years of poetry, prose and art
by Janet Kuypers. It's a really classy thing,
if you know what I mean.
The Window is about 180 pages of her newest
stuff. It's hand-bound, paperback, and she'll
even sign it if you beg her enough. Man, it's groovy.
two dollars would cover the cost of printing and
shipping. oh, and four dollars would cover
back issues of cc+d or chapbooks. and make
those checks payable
to me, of course, janet kuypers. gifts are always
appreciated as well. just kidding.
and for you people out there with magazines, just
keep in mind that we here at cc+d are more than
happy to run ad pages for you, if you'll do the same
for us. seems pretty fair.
is that all? yeah, i think that's pretty much it.
now for the real poetry...

miranda revised

You have the right to amass taxable assets
you have the right to work yourself
into an expensive but early grave
you have the right to go into debt
if you become ill, anything you've earned
will be taken away from you
if you're not white
if you're content with less
then you don't deserve to be
an american

larry blazek





An hour of idleness
sweeping in it is a river
of despair and mini-madness
this perfumed wilderness
beautiful platonic tomorrow
with a ruby in its throat
where the iceman worked a stream
of consciousness simmers bloodlike
from a granite cliff of gray
we have found solace
in the epic twinkle of neon
an age of no reason
to the front of the room
a blue nun weeps for all of us
our prized possessions
our noose like sanity
our sad stories of last night
when men in capes
glided to the core of Earth
for each action a reaction
turning the corner into tomorrow
the silence of Tara's
bygone era overcame us
for we were lost
in summer's solstice heat
the mournful gears
of the universe lubricated
with the literature of hurting
maiden mucus and phlegm
and poignant authors rowing out
to meet a god they never knew
calling home to Mama
there is no answer
room in the inn
for other dusty travelers
but for us only the roar
of time's pistons churning
in musty parlors with
running lights extinguished.

Dixie' s
Long Gray
Line
errol miller

backbone family act

I
tried
you
actress
part
you
cared
damn
you
feelings
emotions
daughter

nothing
motions
think
family

flashbacks
kill
forget
told
long
cry
leave

closing
more
part
worry
filled
backbone
family
act

gabriel athens

some people want to believe

janet kuypers

so we were sitting there at denny's in some suburb of detroit, i don't know which suburb it was, but we were there at like ten in the morning eastern standard time, i was grabbing a bite to eat before i crossed the ambassador bridge and travelled into canada. you know, i really only associate places like denny's with travelling now, i always stop at some place like denny's only when taking a road trip and just stopping for some food. i think if i went into a denny's and i wasn't travelling, i'd get really confused. well, anyway, like i said, we were at denny's, and it was morning, so the both of us got breakfast. being a vegetarian, i ordered eggs with hash browns and toast, right? and the waitress says to me, like they always do in some no-name town in the middle of america, "yuh don't want any MEAT?", like it's so unheard of to not eat meat at breakfast. so i say, no, no meat, thank you, and then my friend orders pretty much the same thing, and we sit for a while, and talk and stuff, and then the food comes. so then she asks me, "you're a vegetarian, right?" and i say, yes, and then she goes, "but

you're eating chicken." and i'm just like, well, no, i'm not, an egg is an animal by-product, not animal flesh, and i was about to say that that was the difference between being a vegetarian and being a vegan, and she says, "but if a chicken sat on it long enough, it would become a chicken." and i'm just like, well, no, it's an unfertilized egg, there was never a rooster around that hen, so it could never become a chicken. and she's like, well, it's a chicken, though, and she just couldn't think that this wasn't a chicken. and i'm just thinking, my god, does she really think that a chicken can lay eggs without them being fertilized? like only worms and stuff can procreate without two sexes present. so our voices start getting a little louder, and then it ends up where i'm saying "so are you having an abortion every time you have a menstrual cycle? are men who have wet dreams mass murderers?" and she's looking away and saying "i'm not listening to you -"

and then i realized that some people, with logic thrown in their face, will still believe what they want to believe.

Chicopee, MA

The only thing to do was confess.

I felt cheated for the noise because not even phones were trying to be heard, I didn't have to take a number and as soon as I said something, the big black woman busting from her uniform pointed to a desk some feet away that had no papers on it. The man was doing nothing behind it when I said, "I did it."

He leaned forward, and I thought I recognized him, until he said like a woman, "What did you do?"

"I let them all live!"

I didn't appreciate them locking the precinct because I kept thinking about all the other people who wanted in. Pounding on the door, I tried to point to the junkies who needed a place for the night, the handcuffed sluts who had to wait in the cold and the cops chatting them up, but the faces kept coming to the door, motioning I should leave, I felt dejected past Christ on his worst last day I thought.

I saw them all. Niggers in muddy suits raising their hands to me for drink change, women with kids coughing up nothing because the baby food never was there, men keeping buildings from falling down, their strong, unemployed backs huddling against that bowling alley, together, because I had the balls to let them...

What do you do? I found the highest place you didn't have to pay for to get in. This was a golden tree. A monument I suppose, but I only sprained my heel, and limping up to a drug store, a woman asked me, "Can you take me around the world?"

I looked in my pocket, and found the gun. Nothing lost, just. No energy to - I couldn't... That's when she handed me the plane ticket, and I thought it was the least I could do for her.

First Athens, but I found greater depression here because half the country was fucked up. The poor just had different mumbles, but we caught the Herminick cruise line to Singapore, and not seeing anything but the rich gouging their eyes out on food helped, it really helped me.

You go along the deck. People are in chairs. They look fed. Well nourished, a lot listening to portable tape cases and stuff, a lot caring about what the others are saying, and smiling, and I went to my cabin, filled with individual happiness that was so reassuring. So very.. wonderful.

We were taking the back way in, through the states, sneaking up on Hawaii, it was great, the kind of "no country" world cruise, wonderful, and I could see the islands now, green, luxurious, from where I was, on the rail, windy. Holding onto the hazel-eyed woman who needed me, because she had no one. Grabbing my arms around her, pretending the wind was knocking her away, and I remember her laugh most

of all when I looked into her beautiful face. I remember the radiant words she said to me, of present and future, and how delicious the yellow melon honeydew had especially been this morning, and I said, "You're great, no really." Taking in her soft complexion. Stealing away the warmth of her skin with a half kiss, relishing in the perfect sight of everything, seeing her smile stretch to something unbelievable when I removed the gun, and happily killed her, seeing myself true finally, released.

ben ohmart





and i forgot to send cards

when you're a poor starving poet
every day is a special day

for instance, this is

Do I Hock The Guitar
For Office Supplies
Day...

as i twist the top from my 1st
quart of beer

suddenly death is
in the room, i think

with a fine
quick fear

& a curious
feeling of
relief

fading into
ordinary apprehension.

peripheral vision

that woman sitting on the sidewalk
head on knees as if in pain
doean't need your help

she turns out to be
a piece of plywood
leaning on a
trashcan

c ra
mcguir t



finest feeling

Drench me
in the finest furs
surround me
in the rarest silks of the Orient.
Rest me in the clouds.
I don't care.
I still contend
that the finest feeling
is laying
with my head
on your shoulder

alexandria rand

making classes

“They were identical twins, I mean so much alike that their mother probably couldn’t remember which diaper she had just changed. Anyway, that’s the way they looked to me. Naturally, I didn’t know them all the way back to when they were babies, didn’t meet Howard and Henry, those were their names, till I was in high school. The story, from some of their friends, was that they had always been as close as the lips on a dead man, till they got into high school. It seems that Howard asked a girl who was new at school to go out on a date, and she already had a boy friend, so she said no. But that evening she had a fight with the boy friend, so the next day when Henry happened to ask her, not knowing there were two of them, she thought Howard was asking again, real persistent you know, so she said yes.”

“Well, you know, Henry started going out on dates with this Blanche, that was her name, and when Howard found out about it he was crushed. Henry, not being too sure of himself with the girl, and she having already told him she liked his asking her out twice, in spite of her turning him down the first time, well he decided he had a chance to get a permanent leg-up on Howard and he took it. He had never liked his own nose, so he told Howard that the girl didn’t go out with him (and he made like he was doing Howard a big favor when he said it) because she thought his nose was too big!”

“Howard, of course, said right away that the girl would think Henry’s nose was too big too, since twin’s noses had to be exactly the same. And that’s when Henry put it to Howard that the funny thing was that their noses were not the same, but that he had never wanted to hurt Howard’s feelings by telling him that, and neither had their parents. He added that he knew their parents would never confess that there was a difference in their son’s noses, no matter how much anybody asked them.”

“Well, I tell you Tony, for a couple of weeks Henry worried maybe he’d loused it up. But then he got overjoyed when he started seeing Howard linger in front of mirrors, car windows, store fronts, and he even seemed to be trying to see himself in other people’s sun glasses. And right along with this he started to give way to Henry. He led Henry into the bathroom first every morning, where they had always taken turns! Henry started getting the biggest baked potato at dinner, and the least burnt toast at breakfast and if they walked down the street together, Howard walked on the inside, near the buildings, like a woman’s place, you know. Are you getting in the back, around the heel? A lot of times they miss that.”

“To make a long story short, Howard got a real complex about his nose, and never got over it. Story was that he talked to a lot of plastic surgeons about the possibility of having his nose fixed, so it would look like Henry’s. And when their father retired and turned over his builder’s supply business to the two boys, Howard insisted that Henry be the company president, with a big salary of course, and he just asked Henry to let him manage one of the branch stores. Which is likely the way it still is. Henry has a real knockout of a wife, I mean a real joint lifter, while Howard got himself the

plainest mousey-est looking skirt you've ever seen. On top of that she shoos him around like she was doing him a big favor to spread her wings every once in a while. Watch out for my socks now, don't get any polish on 'em, or I'll have to forget about your tip. And don't make me late for work either!"

"Anyway the two boys were not like you and me. The difference between us is real, except maybe that we're both in our fifties. You see, I finished high school, and I bet, it's not your fault I know, but I bet you never finished high school, did you Tony?"

"No, Mr. Meckle, I stopped high school. My father said I was dumb. He found me a job doing deliveries for a day cleaner. It wasn't no bad job either, and my folks needed the money, because of so many kids. But I do OK. I think all of Wall Street comes in here for these shines. Tips pretty good you know Sir, ha ha, yes Sir. That's it, all done."


"Yeah, the shoes look alright now Tony. I think you found the thing you were best suited for, maybe the best shine on Wall Street. It's funny you know, now here I am a supervising margin clerk, and you're a bootblack. I could have been a bootblack, but you never could have been me, because of the way you kind of smell like shoe polish. I mean, you understand, no offense but some people, people who were meant to take control of their lives, have a lot more options than some other. And it all comes from showing the other guy that you're made out of better stuff. Right Tony? Here's a dollar. Right? Just like now, you can't wait for your money. I get paid once a week and I can wait for it. But you, you you're willing to take whatever you can get the minute you finish a little job. You should think about that Tony, it's the reason why you're suited for just shining shoes, and why I have a lot more than you!"

"Yes sir, Mr. Meckle, if you didn't have more money than me, I couldn't make nothing shining your shoes. That's right ain't it? Ha ha, yes Sir, thank you!"

Tony's shines in the afternoon were somewhat absent minded, and several times his boss, owner of the shoe repair shop, stopped his work to cast threatening glances from Tony's head to his toes, but it didn't get Tony's attention at all. This was because Tony had made up his mind that he was going to get a bottle of Five Star muscatel, and he was going down by the Brooklyn Bridge that night and find Reeva. Ever since Mr. Meckle had left the stand that morning, he had felt down-hearted and he needed to be with her.

Around eight that night Tony was peering and poking through a dark and sometimes fire-lit forest of cardboard boxes, newspaper pallets, dirty shanties made from old coats that hung between shopping carts and a hurricane fence, while he stumbled, fumbled and called to Reeva, never getting an answer. Then he reached the point where the bridge structure intersected with the ground and he finally saw her dirty and snagged red down coat, wrapped around her and puffing out a few feathers each time she shifted her sitting position against a granite abutment.

"Yeah, Tony, is that you?" she called out slowly, with the thickness of a tongue that could have been pickled by wine. She had started on the wine ten years before, right after she had lost her only three children in a house fire. Tony got down on his hands and knees a few feet away from her and then crawled and planted his body next to



hers against the abutment. Having been careful not to make a threatening approach, he next produced the bottle of muscatel, fearful that she might otherwise spew a string of curses at him for bothering her reverie-unless he had brought something to make it last longer! She grinned broadly when the bottle caught and then reflected the light of the several small fires that warmed the general area. She immediately seized and put it to her lips without even realizing that the cap was still on until she had fought with it for a few moments.

Tony was grateful that the winter night was mild, supplying a minimum amount of cold to make heavy clothing comfortable, but also not even making his breath visible. He thought it would be smart to test Reeva's mood, just in case she was in a mad instead of a happy drunk. After all, she sometimes hurt his organ when she was mad about something. "How you doin' Lovey? he quizzed, while trying vainly to see into the depth of her eyes, which the darkness was protecting. "I'm OK," she mumbled back, easing the bottle to one side of her mouth to let the words out. "But I'd...be a lot better...if that hundred-and-fifty year old bitch...would stop hanging around here. Every time...I come here to sleep, she's here. I'd...like to kick her in her face, always lookin' at me! See her, over there...by those old tires? So goddamn old, ...you want to ...go over there and kick the shit out of her...for me?"

"Not now Reeva, leave her alone. She's maybe gonna die the next time it gets real cold. The old pissy-ass."

Tony had gotten a little concerned when Reeva first mentioned old Olga, thinking she might be in a mad drunk, but from the way she kept on swilling the wine he knew she was actually very pleased with the world at that moment. So with his own hand that was blackened at the cuticles and knuckles from a lifetime of applying shoe polish, he groped in Reeva's lap and found her free hand, which was covered in a deteriorated woolen army glove. He pulled the glove off and placed her hand inside his fly where she automatically began manipulating him, without ever turning to face him or pausing in her swigs from the bottle of muscatel.

For a brief instant Tony was transported out of his world of wine, and shoes to be shined, and the filthy room that he secretly rented from the crippled woman on Welfare and the sores around his ankles that never healed, and the potato knishes that were his diet, and even the smell of Reeva. As soon as he recovered he became acutely aware of his diminishing bottle of muscatel and he snatched it from Reeva's hand in mid-swallow, making some spill down the front of her red down coat. Then, rising abruptly, he stepped just a foot away from her and urinated on the abutment at the spot where he had been sitting. After closing his pants, and without turning toward her, he threw out his good-bye words: "be seein' you, you dirty old whore. You drunk too much of my wine!"

From an approaching stupor, Reeva answered gloomily, "good-bye Tony...you're all right."

justus e. taylor



philosopher at the blue note

he seemed so interested in philosophy, which seemed strange, sitting at a bar at about one-thirty in the morning, it didn't seem the time or place for philosophy. but i asked questions anyway, so do you believe in a god, and if so do you believe in a mono- or polytheistic religion? and he answered by saying that everyone has a god, whether it be their soul or an icon they pray to every night before they go to bed. and that it doesn't matter what form the god takes for a person, because the moral values are similar in most every religion, what matters is that we have a god of one sort or another. that most people don't pay attention to their spirituality, who they are or what they really want.

no, they don't, i thought, and was amazed that this drunk man was able to formulate cohesive thoughts at two-thirty in the morning. but then, of course, he had to mention something about sexuality, and then i realized that it was all one long, drawn-out come on, then he asked me for my phone number and i gave him a fake one, and then he tried to kiss me, and i pushed him away and he ended up running out of the bar. so much for philosophy, i thought, and i went home once again, alone with my morals, or values, or whatever the hell you want to call them, wondering if there is anyone out there like me.

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