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Working Girls

I

Leimi wore an upfront name tag
while working at The Merry Wench,
kept a Ned Buntline in her bag,
bent a lot and affected French.
Born and raised in Bangkok (no joke),
she gravitated to the gig
because otherwise she'd be broke
and her mother'd said wear a wig,
keep your altar ego blindside,
never meet in a mirror glass,
forget about hitting your stride,
don't look back and lead with your ass.

II

Carmen worked out of her van
right opposite the cop shop
where she had a jiffy stand
charging fifty bucks a pop,
it was pretty good money,
with no insurance or rent.
Better than the nunnery
for to which she'd been sent.
Unmarriageable daughters,
from poor families to boot,
don't fare well in the waters
of scam artists, banks and loot.
Oh sure, turn a trick, that's fair,
she spoke the captain's language,
some of them would even share
a happy smoked meat sandwich
and if she needs a shower,
as working girls do for sure,
She goes snorkling for an hour,
She'll never again be poor.

III

Jailbait's in dutch with her kin
because they're competition.
They're showing way too much skin,
and they obstruct her mission,
which is getting drunk and laid
on south beach during spring break.
Running the boom box on eight
do Budweiser and tube steak,
and try to get back intact
with her salt-crusted feathers,
busted wallet, warpaint whacked,
but feeling really better
about herself and her boobs.
Forthwith they're assets upfront
and there won't be no more hoops
to hassle through with her cunt.

IV

Lamprey burns a red candle
pretty much every sunday,
she's not above panhandling
but limits that to monday.
Tuesdays she's at the market
because they hand out free food.
Wednesday she's working the park,
trying not to look too lewd.
Thursday she's at the clinic
since that's when she gets her meds.
She tries to avoid the shrink;
she doesn't like shrunken heads.
Fridays are a free-for-all
in the bars on coffin street.
They pursue their evil thrall
and charge extra for fresh meat.

V

Angel kinda stepped in it
when she quipped that the church choir
could certainly benefit from an infusion of fire.
The bishop got wind of this
and called her on the carpet.
"We're rich; that's our business!
Shape up or kiss off your harp."
So she polished her halo
and fluffed her undergarments,
dipped libations from the grail
mundane menial and karmic.
Thus the passion came to pass,
one of those shared episodes.
She was washing her ass off,

when a seraphim noticed.
One thing led to another,
“Halsies or you don't get laid.
Don't splat if you're my brother.”
And after that she got paid.

VI

My sister Kate likes to fuck.
If she's gonna anyway
I might as well make a buck
and get my friends to pay her.
I mean the reality
is what it is, truth to tell
and ain't it gallows jolly
that we're all going to hell.
Yessir, she accepts plastic,
sometimes she'll even barter.
Here's one posed on a hassock
in nothing but her garter.
Nice photo, isn't it?
Here's some more in French skimpies,
ravishing and insistent
and don't ever mention pimp.

VII

Dear Park, we're hooker haven.
We're not dark, prim, or gated,
we don't look smeared or depraved,
and we won't discriminate
against women turning trix.
It ain't none of our business
So they're casual or quickies.
We don't care whose his it is
just so long as hers is hot.
We encourage nudity
in the pool, and if it's not
we might even mutiny.
If we are denied our thirst,
we desire sweet champagne,
celebrate diversity,
needs, nor shall our ardor wane.

VIII

The Radiance struts her stuff
at the playmate cantina,
dances in white socks and gloves
to strains of Palestrina.
Certainly a classic move
you'd think for well-heeled patrons,
odalisque seen in the Louvre,
wealth of queens among maidens.
But reality says no.
The venue is as tawdry

as any stall bordello
where merchandise is served raw,
the booze is cheap expensive,
the church sells crozier grease paint,
the girls wear bleak defensive,
and fell beasts depose the saints.
Radiance remains undaunted,
her dancing way greets the dawn,
the playmate stage is haunted
by her drum. The beat goes on.

Michael Ceraolo

The Other Audubon: A Vision

I Known Parentage

There was no story that needed to be created
as an acceptable alternative
to the actual circumstances
so as not to violate
society's norms in such matters,

nor

would there later be any rumors,
no matter how unsubstantiated,
of a lost royal parentage

No,

it was duly recorded that
Genevieve Estelle Jones was born
May 13, 1847 in Circleville, Ohio,
to Dr. Nelson E. Jones and his wife Virginia

When she was six,
not long after her brother Howard was born,
Gennie began accompanying her father
as he traveled to see his patients
in Circleville and the surrounding Pickaway County

(county population,
according to the 1850 census:
just over 21,000
spread over an area
of five hundred square miles)

Dr. Jones was an amateur ornithologist
and during these buggy rides
he passed along that knowledge to Gennie,
while

also striving to increase said knowledge:
with the aid of family dog Archos
they collected nests and eggs
for further study at home
(in those days it wasn't a crime

to disturb birds' nest and their eggs,
and
before the advent of 'professionalism'
it was still possible for amateur scientists
to advance the scope of knowledge)

II

Write the Book You're Looking For

One day she found a nest
that no one could identify on sight
She went to her father's library
to look for the boo that would tell her
the bird that had made the nest she'd found
She was greatly surprised to find
that the book she was looking for,
one documenting and differentiating
one bird nest from another,
hadn't been written yet

Her younger brother Howard
offered to do the collecting
necessary for such a book
if Gennie would agree to illustrate
such a book,
and
the seeds of a dream were planted

III

Forbidden Love

"I intend to stay home,
& have a good time too,
if such a thing can be had in Circleville"
and there was someone,
a "fine-looking gentlemanly fellow,
with a wonderful memory"
whose compatibility with Gennie
promised much
But the man,
whose name has been lost to history,
was a drinker,
and Gennie's dad
believed in alcohol for medicinal purposes only

and her mother was active Temperance
The marriage would only be allowed
if the man could stay sober for a year
The man could not meet this parental test;
the marriage was thus forbidden,
and Gennie did not defy her parents

IV
The Cure

The cure for thwarted love?
Tears and a journey,
according to *Shakespeare in Love*
And so,
once the tears were done,
Gennie journeyed to Pennsylvania

While there she visited
the Centennial International Exhibition
being held in Philadelphia,
where,
among other scientific and artistic wonders,
she saw some of Audubon's engravings

Said engravings
had few nests,
and
those few were incidental, not essential,
and they were not informative either
Gennie believed she could at least
equal Audubon's artistry
while at the same time conveying
scientific information about the nests

This dream,
begun back
when Gennie accompanied her dad
on his rounds around the county,
had periodically re-appeared over the years
only to fade into the background
before it could be achieved

Now the dream was back

And this time
it would stay in the foreground
until it was achieved

V
A Dream No Longer Deferred

Gennie was not idle during the dream-deferred years:
home-schooled until high school,
then graduating high school,

after which
was what in effect was home college:
French,

German,
music,
instructed
by local tutors until they could teach her no more
And when her brother went away to college
he sent back copies of the textbooks
he was studying,

so she conquered
algebra,
calculus,
chemistry,
and
Greek and Latin, especially the poets,
so when the dream's time came she was ready

There were a few valid reasons
for the dream's deferral,
among them
the lack of adequate space
in which to do the necessary work,
as well as the cost of producing such a book
Now her dad felt he could no longer deny her:
he built a second story on the barn,
with windows for the needed light,
to serve as a studio and office
He also found a way to keep costs down
by convincing Gennie to confine the project
to the one-hundred-thirty species of birds
that nested in Ohio rather than
the three-hundred-twenty in all of America
(one of those one-hundred-thirty,
the Cerulean Warbler,
could not be located

and wouldn't be included in the book)

The business plan
was to sell subscriptions to the book,
with the book to be issued serially
in twenty-three installments
appearing on a quarterly schedule
The same high-quality paper
that Audubon used would be used here

Part One was issued in July 1879
when the initial goal of twenty subscribers was met,
and consisted of three lithographs,
one by Gennie,
two by her friend Eliza;
those numbers would be reversed for Part Two

Reviews came in:

"promises to be one of the great illustrated works
on North American Ornithology"
"The nest of the Wood Thrush
is even more admirably delineated
and is in its kind a perfect masterpiece"

and
subscriptions nearly doubled,
to thirty-nine,
and included the President, Rutherford B. Hayes,
and a Harvard College student who would become
the first future president Roosevelt

The dream was on its way to fulfillment

VI *A Labor of Love*

But it was not to be
Gennie contracted typhoid fever
and was seriously ill,
sometimes violently so,
for three weeks

But
on August 16, 1879
she had a lucid moment
in the fever's delirium,
and she said to her brother:
"I am going to die
and if you and Lizzie want to
you can go on with the book
just as if I were alive
Mother will help"

And
she died the next day

Part Two of the book
was already completed,
and
Gennie had finished two other plates
at the time of her death
Friend Eliza would finish seven more plates,
but lost interest in completing the project

But
mom Virginia and brother Howard
stayed with it,
meeting
the quarterly subscription schedule
until they too were stricken with typhoid fever
two years after Gennie's death
Both survived,
and in 1886
completed the last of the sixty-eight plates

Out of the goal of one hundred,
ninety copies of the book were completed,
each book a two-volume set
Fourteen sets of the book were sold initially,
and Virginia won a bronze medal for it
at Chicago's Columbian Exhibition
in 1893

A few other sets were sold,
but most were given away
to Howard's children and grandchildren

VII *Tell Me a Story (An Old Story)*

The story is one of the oldest:
an artist works in obscurity,

perhaps dying young as in this case,
and sales of the work don't come close
to recouping production costs

But

the artist is rescued from obscurity
posthumously (sometimes long posthumously),
and the work is highly valued
and will profit those who hold it
should

John Tustin

ALL NIGHTS ARE FINISHED

Tonight is finished.

All nights are finished.

Blood blooms like a flower

Under the water in the sink.

The sun will rise tomorrow

But it will rise without you.

You wear a garland in your hair

During this, your final dream.

The ring slips your finger,

The sheets soak in death.

The streets are slick with rain

And the cars hiss by but they go unheard.

The music is stilled in air.

Insects fly in and take bites of it.

Your belly fills with gas.

The mites nibble at your dust.

A hammer rings out Vacancy.

Your furniture is wrapped in plastic.

You are a sack of skin and fibers

While the food in the refrigerator decomposes.

Tonight is finished.

All nights are finished.

The temple door is locked.

The monks no longer pray.

Now the fire awaits the capitulation of your flesh,

The earth the repatriation of your bones.

The sky will fly your ashes like a ragged flag.

The bud on the vine will bloom like blood come Spring.

I WANT DANIELA

I wanted Daniela for a week
And then just like that
I had Daniela.

That is to say
For a week I wanted
Daniela
And

Then I had Daniela –
Not to say it was so simple.

I had Daniela and yet
I don't have Daniela
Even though I do.

It's complicated.

I wanted Daniela
And last night I had
Daniela.
I held her close,
Her head upon my chest
And we talked
And then we kissed.

I had Daniela
And Daniela had me.
We kissed and fondled in the dark
Until it was too late.
Then Daniela got into her noisy car
And Daniela drove home
To someone else.

I went back inside.
I listened to some music in the dark and then
I went to bed alone.

Daniela went home
And Daniela got into bed with a man
She neither loves or wants.
He didn't even ask her about her day
Or say good night.

I lie in bed and think about
How I had Daniela
And Daniela had me
And Daniela has me now
And I have Daniela
But also

I don't have Daniela
And Daniela doesn't
Have me
Yet

I can't wait to have
Daniela again
And again
As

She lies in her bed now
Thinking about how
We can arrange the next time
She will have
Me

And when she figures that out
She'll have me
And then afterwards she won't

And I will have her
But I won't

Even though
When she is gone
My body is alone
And we have emptied our own hearts
Of cares

Even though we haven't.

Again –
It's complicated

No matter how much we both wish
All of this
Could be easy

With our hearts both empty and full
Of love and sorrow
And the past
And everything that we own inside
That feels sometimes
Like nothing at all.

It's so very
Very
Complicated

is it not,
Daniela?

THE LONG DEAD DRINK AND DANCE

The ghosts of minds and hearts dwell in this room.

I sleep beside Old Love:

She wraps her naked body in my sheets,

Leaves room for sadness in the middle of the bed.

The long dead drink and dance upon the floor

That is flecked with the blood of what is unrequited.

The bare feet of the long dead now have flecks of blood

That they shall spread to other floors.

I lie awake in the dark with my eyes closed and listen to them.

I open my eyes and there is no one here but me

And the phantom Old Love dressed in my wrinkled sheets.

I reach and reach but I cannot touch her,

Bring her phantom body close to my earth body.

My heart beats so loudly I can no longer hear the ghosts

Of grandmothers and grandfathers as they drink and they dance.

My arms throb and my legs ache.

Old love lies like a rag doll a mile away in the same bed,

Her eyes two marbles cast in a face of wax.

The bruise on my bone squeezes inside my right foot.

The bruise on my left thigh blackens like an old banana.

The long dead pack their trunks and depart until tomorrow night.

The night slides down the bannister ass-first into dismembered dreams

When, in noise and dark and ache and pain,

I finally sleep.

OLD MAN

Your teeth are getting yellow, old man.

Your hair is either white

Or else the color of dried mud.

You've grown dusty with inertia and age.

You used to wear your wounds like armor

But now you've become accustomed

To peeking at them now and then

Underneath bandages of time's supplication.

The days have become the ritual

Of a life unaccomplished,

The big hand of the clock sped up,

The little hand slowed down.

Your chest is an excavated cavity,

Your heart a gray thing that beats dimmed,

Bowed, faded, daunted.

You wait for winter to cloak your mouth in scarves.

Life is a poorly beaten drum.

The minutes pound too fast,

The hours click too slow.

The metronome ticks its monotony off-time.

Your life is now about remembering that time

A cat rubbed against your leg and purred.

You get into bed at night

And it's just a part of the waiting to die.

WHAT IF

What if there is a
Christ-face on every soldier who lies dead
In the shreds of fog
And mounds of snow
That lie between us
In the no-man's land
Where you and I take our shots
At the command of our masters?

What if there exists many promontories –
One for each of us to stand alone
Yet we can see the others who stand on theirs
And allow them their own planted feet?
All of us with our beards, our bodies,
Our hair that flows in the sea-wind,
Each of us counted as one
And one of many?

What if we unearth the tokens and idols
Of past civilizations and see our faces
Rubbed raw with time but still present

In every cracked clay pot,
Every many-armed worshipped statue,
Every crumbling centuries-long disused wall?

What if we see ourselves in every master,
See ourselves in every slave?
Every time rusted sentry, whore,
Pickpocket and orphan boy?
What if we imagine we are them
And then imagine we rule them?
We are the prisoner, the guard,
The man in the tower far above
Who doesn't even bother to watch.

What if we are both lovers in the painting
And we are the artist who caught the carnal moment?

Maybe we all do this and
When we do
The gods will fade with non-necessity
And we will become the masters and mistresses
Of ourselves,
Only ourselves:

Smiling sternly at a prow –
Each of us our own prow,
Steering one ship apiece;
Billions of ships all cutting the water in half,
Moving and moving away from history,
Heading somewhere together.

John Sweet

[there's burning everywhere]

our mistake was god and

our mistake was the devil

our mistake was in letting all of

those days we wasted inside the suicide factory

come to define us

hope is hope, right?

love can sometimes matter

tell this to the crying girl when she's

on her hands and knees,

and see if she believes you

is the weight of truth

too much to bear?

keep the cameras rolling long enough

and all possible endings will
be revealed

this careful torture

in dying light but

without poetry

four feet of snow, okay?

the aftermath of living

scared in the kingdom of nil

man has a gun, has a wife, has

someone's kid in the basement

everything

according to plan

blow up the bridge then

burn own the palace but why

pretend you care?

why act like the

starving can be saved?

all you can give them

is god and,
after that,
they're on their own

[out of our minds and out of our league]

feels good or at least not

like dying and

that's gotta count for something

end of the line of a family of

junkies and albies and suicides, and

he remembers a teacher, 2nd or

3rd grade

smiles and the scent of lilacs and

she always told him that

everyone got to choose their own future

and maybe she even believed it

and forty years later he

keeps having the same dream, the

severed hands and the burning house

keeps waking up in a strange room

next to someone else's wife

and there is never any sound but
the sound of time running out

four

i.

dead man sifting through

the bones of

a dead man's culture

this is not the image

this is everything

this is

all there is

ii.

in the white

space the poem

the sound of

all sound fading

my father

or yours

a ghost at

the door

says all the

time i thought

i had is

gone

iii.

build a city just to

burn it down again

start a war just to

end all future wars

start another

iv.

dog or god or what

ever's in between

choose wrong and

you're fucked

choose wright and

you're fucked

choose not to

choose and

it's over

[i confess this death ain't killing me]

i will be at your wedding in
my funeral shoes,
thirty five cents and your phone number
in my pocket, or maybe this should
all be past tense

not exactly sunlight and not quite rain and
someone's girlfriend waitin for me
at her sister's apartment
twenty minutes away

make it an equation

one person's joy = another person's pain

touch, but don't feel

do you see?

had to have been '91, '92,
mudhoney, maybe tad on the tape deck and
the blonde on the front porch crying,

screaking *I LOVE YOU!*

while the neighbors laugh

fuck it

nothing to do when everyone is born dying

but get it up to 110 on the interstate

nowhere to go but away, and then

nothing to do when you get there but wait

stand in the almost rain

maybe finally understand your

father's reasons for wanting out

A love poem from the upstate desert, late february

and now nothing means anything

north of the city, late february, wastelands and

industrial parks and nothing quite living

and nothing quite dead

each sunfilled day an

infinite weight on the chest

each passing moment, and

what to do but drive?

shades of luminous grey layered over

shades of luminous grey, and that

the rain here tastes like poison

that you learn to accept it

and this is the plan, okay?

this is the nothing from nothing that

will come to define all of our lives

not freedom but the
freedom to consume

the need for more even in this
manmade wasteland, and have i failed my
children or was it my own children
who failed me?

i'm told the distinction matters

i'm told that all wars can be won,
but who are you willing to sacrifice?

who do you love more than yourself?

everyone lies at
some point

“...THE ANSWER IS- YES!”

(“A Discoverer’s Guide”)

by

Danielson Kartma

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This is less a story than it is a guide for an opportunity to go on a journey of possible discovery on the Internet. To that end, you will be given- to assist you- a number of clues.

Now, why, you might ask, should you embark? Well, it is to test a version of connectivity. We are all familiar with “six degrees of separation,” and the ideas of parallel universes and realities. But what if there is more? What if there is a connectivity that exists but one that we are unaware of mainly because we do not take the opportunity to “communicate” with others and try to “discover” those connections? This “discoverer’s guide” will start you on your trek.

You see, this is the third of three “stories,” but, actually, it’s the first in the sense that it can be the guide to find and validate the other two.

So, why should you spend the time?

Why not?

What better things do you have to do when you go online than to hunt and search? What you have here is a chance to apply behaviors which are truly primal traits of our species.

All right, where to start? It’s really quite simple. The other two stories have been published and are circulating on the Internet. They are unrelated except in two ways. First, the two characters in each story are in the same. Second, that notwithstanding, they are unrelated except for incidental knowledge that the writer discloses in both of them.

The goal of the task of discovery is to unearth the two stories in question and bring them together by way of the clues that will follow. Once that is accomplished, there are secrets revealed and a virtual reality found.

The most this writer can say is that, you, who sets out on this path will most likely not be the one who discovers the significance of the two stories. Rather, you have an opportunity to be a conduit that will ultimately be a permutation of the old line- "...a friend of a friend of a friend that I once knew..."

As such, the people to whom the connectivity will be most revelatory need to be alert and pay attention when they hear some version of the following-

"...I came across something that reminded me of you..." (Be prepared for the possibility of multiple variations of all the words in this quote).

Thus, if the attention is paid, if you are the people in question, you will experience a sense, a feeling- a wondering about an apparent coincidence that just might be far less so- and far more meaningful.

All of which will lead one to some variation of the question- "...I wonder if?"

This, in turn, will lead you back to the title of this piece-

"...The answer is- YES!"

Good luck.

All right, let's move on to the clues!

So- clues, clues- clues! They're around- almost abound.

Now, to begin-

- you'll find a connection, "down below;"
- you'll also find a "direction," "down under;"
- your journey does involve going coast to coast, but at the same time not going anywhere at all;
- you may be asked to don a cap of royalty and travel- navigate- a trip abroad, but then, again, it isn't absolutely required;
- there's also the opportunity to delve into fantasy and virtuality, but, first, you have to be prepared;
- your success in deciphering the clues, depends on how alert you are and how closely you pay attention;
- you'll go and pass through lots of places without having to go much of anywhere;
- part of your journey will be through a designated "empire"- of fact- but with the ease of personal effortlessness;
- be on the lookout for flowers and salt along the way;
- you'll encounter animals, but, it would be easy to miss them mostly because they look just like you;
- there are "things" that you will be "warned about," hidden "things;"
- then, again, there could be people who you might encounter who could- if you're open to it- foster your understanding of your search;
- every day people, blue collar, professional, harmful people, people who have pledged to do no harm- even a lot of both;
- there will be summer people and fall people;
- there's always the chance of deception and being deceived;
- suspicions could overwhelm you;
- if you tire, take some time off and share a drink with someone, maybe from the same bottle;
- there will be a time when what you see can be almost flawless;
- decide if you're going to watch it coming or watch it going;
- you'll wonder how is it that they know, don't worry- they do;
- there are the threads that bind, but they are very, very thin and very, very few;
- watch for a "car" within a "car;"
- if you dig long enough, you're bound to find something comforting;
- "...a kiss is just a kiss..."
- is it- "who she is" or "who is she?"
- they know what you don't before you do;
- what can be deeper than deep?
- there are boards and there are "boards;"
- there's always one last thing;"
- every bridge has two sides, only one side means anything;
- a name can change, but some things remain the same;
- hungry and can't wait, try some of this;
- some nitrites are better than no nitrites;

- finally, the author of this piece *is not* the author of either of the other two stories.

Okay, these are the clues.

Two last things, first, since both real-life characters know the writer of the two stories to be discovered, it stands to reason that once either one- or both- of them have been “Internet cross-pollinated,” they will approach the writer and raise the question. Thus, the connectivity time frame in question is the time from when this piece is first published to the approach to the writer. Almost like a modern day message in a bottle.

Second, once your discovery has been accomplished- at the end- will you be better for it, your journey? Well, you’ll probably get a gut-level feeling- much more satisfying than nauseating- that will bring a knowing smile to your face and in some manner or form- whether spoken or thought- you will say, nodding- “...the answer is –YES!”

END

J. D. Nelson

oh, yer apple is a headlining bat who fathoms a pebble of the brookley hand

a cloned cookie for the sake of the wilbur (now a marching head)

the slight wooden rook names a marble of the choice memory

a corn cake of the brain

tooth me a new eyeball

the truck learns of the brooking ticks

the world of the bomb is popular

the same name

the old way

this is the collapse of the answer

the clean leather of the moon

the cooking drac

the trouble with the continued eye

I was a grumblin' bug

we boiled a martian (the pillow man)

were you a halloween bat?

hair is the night island

the later apple was a robot

we are a comb = cob

when

a particle

an ape of the inner world

the dirt of the orca

willow mouth is the saturn of the felix

the treed forest now

the cotton chop is the bug of limits

the name of the cherry salt

learning the web was a surfing dog

this could be the truck of engines

spaghetti lake

the indented wolf

the spinach-on-saturn meal

that serious eye is the chain of the wood

wiki was a pearl of the same cloud

to be the *troom* of the head

pop a red ant lozenge

welby couldn't have been the cookie

the charcoal mosaic

the faring head

the former moss of the glass echo

to be the broth

I was the shrinking shark

I eyed the first gallon of rose water

the vinegar church

to be the gentle idea roaming with the power

to be the tree is the hand of the miracle

to learn of the surfing bread

to know the face of the tree

earth is the rose

earth is the hard luck of the nano

I was a winking skull

I was that older word

the beginning of the true ankle

the sandwich of the smart earth

Nathan Leslie

Cheese Fries

Wayne sits on the far side tonight. He is not one to perch on the same stool over and over. Something depressing about that. Something overly static about that. Also, Wayne is a Monday, Wednesday, Friday guy. He would rather not tether himself to a strict routine.

The bar is O'Neil's, a classic Irish pub with Guinness on draft and fish and chips on the menu. The owner--he is from Ireland. This is not some Johnny-Come-Lately hot spot. His wife, also from Ireland. The bar is worn and dinked and in places there are divots and worn spots and the bartenders cannot slide a draft down ten feet, lest the glass tumble over from hitting a mini-canyon in the wood. The music is pure 70's and 80's--the Cars, Boston, Led Zeppelin. Wayne has to shout over it to converse, but that makes it right.

He comes to O'Neil's to find a wife. For years, this is his plan. However, for years, it is mostly men sitting at the bar, grumbling about work or last night's hockey game or the wife and kids and the latest house project. Wayne feels younger because he is unencumbered, but older because when he returns home, beer buzz and fried food in his gut, there is no one to greet him. No one to give him a hug, ask him about his day. It is a mattress on the floor and a freebie couch and an overly expensive television that keeps him company--the blue glow humming him to sleep more often than not. Waking with a crick in his neck.

Where are all the available women? Not there--not at a sweaty pub in a strip mall. Occasionally a group will sit at a table after work, but that's a rarity--and the group intimidates him. Hank and Gary egg him on. C'mon, what are you waiting for? You only live once. When you are dead you will regret this moment. Look, the blonde with the necklace and the mauve power suit. She looks important and also what a face. What a beautiful mug. But usually Wayne cowers and mumbles not my type. I prefer a blah blah blah. The next week it's I prefer a blah blah blah. He has an excuse at the ready--lonely because, alone because. It's safer this way, Wayne knows. Deep down he knows.

Jed the bartender gives him hell one night for failing to approach the woman in jeans and a blue sweatshirt. She is sitting alone at the bar--no group to ward him off. No ring on her finger. Pleasant face, and right up his narrow description, or so he said a week ago. Pleasant, laughs a ton. But he won't. He watches the game instead, vanishes into the men's room, orders another basket of cheese fries. Takes a picture of them and posts it online for no reason. Falls asleep that night in front of a rerun of *Family Ties*. Been so many years since he's watched it. Must be something there for him, something to unearth in the blue light, his head propped up on two musty pillows.

Personal Pearl Onion

The reason Wayne is chewing on this green stem has to do with ownership. It was Wayne's idea to plant it and surreptitiously so. He planted it in between the gladiolas and the marigolds and he watched it every day. He wanted to tell Mom that she should never assume every green thing is a weed. More than anything, she loved yanking the unwanted plants on a steamy Saturday, sweating and bending and grunting and jerking the dandelions and crabgrass roots and all out with a satisfying yuuuuuuuuf. It was her gym.

He watched it though--everyday watering the plant and making sure it received enough sun. It was his little daughter. The plant loved him and he loved her and one day this plant would make fruit for him to eat and they would watch it grow over the years as it transformed into a tree and he would return with his son many years later and tell him the story of this tree and how he would take care of it so carefully. Was this sentimental? Was this sappy?

But after two weeks Wayne could tell it was not really a tree. It was maybe an onion or some sort of garlic. How was it garlic? The green stem grew and elongated, but nothing emanated from it. But Wayne could tell that the plant was bulging underneath the ground. He was young.

He wanted to keep the plant a secret--something just between himself and the ground but he also feared that Mom would remove it if she thought it might be a weed. They had come so far. Wayne gave in and asked her.

"That is a little pearl onion, don't you know. I have been watching it come along now for several weeks."

Of course she knew. He wanted to die.

Wayne continued watching the plant grow and one day he asked his mother if they could dig it up to see if the onion was ready. You only get one shot at that, Mom said. Let's take a look. So they scampered outside and examined the plant and she said it was likely ready.

Wayne was nervous because this was his daughter, and on some level it was as if this was the moment he had been waiting for all his life. His little plant daughter.

Here he is chewing on the stem. Mom tells him he can eat the stem--it is part of the onion, legs as it were. He can taste the onionness of the stem. It is sour and tangy and earthy and as he is tasting the stem, Mom is taking the picture. Wayne drops his ear to the ground and listens. It is as if he can hear the earthworms and beetles and ants underneath doing their thing, or maybe he is only imagining this. Mom shakes her head at him, this outside lover who won't sit still.

They dig up the plant and it is indeed a pearl onion, about the size of a cherry. They wash it and she shows Wayne how to chop it up into little pieces. Into the soup it goes and they eat it that night. Wayne can taste it in the broth and he feels like he did something. He does not feel rotten. He does not feel dread. He feels excitement and he wants to start all over, this time no secrets needed. No secrets.

Watering Can Girl

Flynth Ogento grew up poor and her parents tended to the flowers and plants and gardens of the rich families in the city. When she was a young girl her parents instructed her how to water the plants, how to prune them, how to germinate new seeds. Flynth Ogento became a plant tender at a young age and though she went to school, she was also prepared for a similar life. She did not mind this idea.

When the disease struck, Flynth was only fifteen years old—her first thought was that she might have to miss several days of school. The disease was bacterial in nature and rare, imported from the mainland, most likely. Only two others on Loaf Island were also struck by the infection—both died. Flynth Ogento was fortunate, the doctors said. Her parents were persistent and asked if they couldn't search for antibiotics that might counter this rare and incurable disease. Though Flynth took a medicine that is not known for curing this infection, somehow her body fought it off and she survived. However, as a result of the disease, Flynth lost the use of her arms completely.

Everything became difficult for Flynth—though she rarely complained. Her teachers allowed for her to submit her work orally and her parents asked Flynth's brothers to help her out with chores.

The only thing that upset Flynth was that she could no longer help her parents with the plants. Then she realized if she was able to find a watering can, which she could carry between her teeth, she could still provide some assistance. A friend of her parents was able to create a contraption which allowed for Flynth to strap a watering can onto her head without needing to clench her teeth around the handle. This, the friend explained, would mitigate the inevitable damage to her jaw.

As she grew older she became the watering can girl, always ready to water the next plant. Her contraption held up and she was able to lug water behind her using a wagon with jugs that she could tap using her chin. Flynth knew that some of the rich families hired her as a kind of curiosity. She knew that

she was a charity case. Still, she tried the best she could and she was able to make enough money to live in a small flat with two other women her age. The women who served stuck together.

Flynth missed so many things about not being able to use her hands or feel anything. She missed running her fingers through her hair and clapping and the warm touch of another's skin. She even missed being able to pick a Kova skin out of her teeth and the sting of a paper cut.

But her neck and jaw muscles. Her brain and shoulders.

Wind Aided

During the windy season there are those who try to take advantage. In Tortuga on the Southern Coast, for instance, the wind is so notorious it often blows clothes from clotheslines, flowerpots from balconies, bird cages from window sills. The wind has been known to blow poorly secured boats all the way across the sound to Rust Island. The wind is all-consuming, blustering and wailing. The wind is so strong it can become difficult to walk, so forceful we must wear goggles to keep the grit and sand from our eyes. Many Loaf Islanders sink into sleep, some venture inland until the wind calms.

But some on Loaf Island collect the clothes and plants and birds and boats the wind took asunder and sell them back—or attempt to sell them back—to their owners. Some find this distasteful or exploitative, but the Wind Aiders, as many call them, are doing a service—rescuing what the wind has unjustly taken. The fees, the Wind Aiders claim, are miniscule and how else would you be able to become reacquainted with your lost canoe or camisole or canary?

Most families on Loaf Island have a member who is or was a Wind Aider. It has almost become a rite of passage—as many Wind Aiders are teenagers. But the wind giveth and the wind taketh away. Though Wind Aiders can often make several hundred dollars on a good day, Alton Weaton was also blown off a cliff chasing a wayward blanket. Yourn Kurkle was blown into a sinkhole as he made his way back from saving an antique manuscript (the manuscript was later salvaged).

As long as the wind blows, the practice will likely continue.

Some Loaf Islanders like to perch upon hilltops—for instance Bruid's Hill—and watch the chaos unfold on the island through telescopes or binoculars. They comment upon the proceedings and gossip about unruly teenagers. “Wouldn't Kuda's parents like to know what he's up to today?” If they see fancy sheets gusting toward the sound they won't lift a finger. They watch and laugh and if the Wind Aiders fail to notice, mum is the word. They let it all unfold before them.

Tomas Sanchez Hidalgo

Anniversary. She

Towards the End, time rushes.
Someone is thinking about that
but craves the fulfillment of their desire.
That someone, dream swimmer,
remembers the time of illness and of death.
“If I go and die today”
is a death like something given to oneself,
isn't it?
and “she still hasn't come,”
is something far off,
that comes with the death being thought.
The dead remember the death of the living
(because they're not there),
and the living remember those absent.
Poems curve time,
and make “now” a timeless word,
a long word,
something like “the now in the nowadays.”
The gaze focuses then on feet,
on the boundary of the abyss
and of the leap.

Activists

It was a... rough day. A demonstration. Enormous. We fled early from a uniformed series of elephants and pedestals. This may have been an indication of what was to come. We know now where the caves are, but not really how to get to them (and weaken them or at least try to tear down the myth). Let's not debate self-evident truths: if we happen by chance to go to the Supreme Court, they'll end up reading our minds. We've probably left fingerprints on the trail that prove we were there (one of the four biggest empires in the History of Humankind, significantly worse for wear). We don't know how to convey the details of those feelings. We walk into a three Michelin star restaurant, where a hallway leads to a full room that leads to an open space that leads to a Gothic cemetery. And, then, one of my comrades is fire laughter. Sometimes we have the feeling that someone is watching us or pursues us. And we ask ourselves if we haven't been sleeping on razors this whole time. The high-profile chef, his outline can be distinguished through a room divider: he's staring at his dick, and counting tiles, in front of a nitrogen tank. We're opinion leaders: and so we're authorized to not realize. We're paying for this fantasy with our credit card. We need, maybe, authenticity in the production of all of this, however we continue our protest without rest or remorse. Finally at the border, we can look behind us. The sky is a dirty blanket; the moon and a few men move submissively towards the sea. Spain, Spain, Spain... Or the child nearly knocked off: he reinvents himself for his goats after having had to quit school. Miguel Hernández soon turned into the arrival of the dark and not the day.

The Wall

We've learned to protect ourselves a bit from the cold, we have, but too many of my dreams these days are allgray. We believe in God, depending on how the month's going. REM phase. What will be told here comes to my rapid eye movement in a close up, in a vicious Technicolor. Drug addicts in a concentration camp. Terminally-ill. They were naked. A bit later, and in a palace, a meeting of intellectuals. And of ventriloquists. They, the abovementioned, those and these, were also naked. A train station in Moravia. Locomotive: you groan swift madness, devastating: party of the mannequins. Gold, the owners no longer existed. Kafka was right: Prague won't let you leave. If Europe were a tango, or a sexual theme park, I would say that seventy years is nothing, but that the borders have been broken up for good. In the background, Wrigley Field (and that's a bunch of chewing gum).

Post Scriptum

Bruce Dale Wise

Deliscious Illusion of Twelve O'Clock

by Carb Deliseuwe

for Walice de Beers

The building's haunted by white shirts and ties that one can see,
and rings, of varied colour, carat, cut and clarity
Naught here is strange, but socks are black, as are the laceless shoes;
black ceintures are not censored; one may have one if one choose.
None dreams of periwinkles, or the speckled-band baboom,
yet though it's noon, one may observe a faint and fair, full moon.
O, here, or there, if one look close, a soldier can be seen,
slunk in his shoes upon a chair, in real imagining.
o, battling the boring boardroom of the business man,
who's eating lunch at twelve o'clock, beneath the turning fan.

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