

Fiction at Work

Issue Archive #5, Issues 18 – 21, November 08

Issue #18, 3 November 08, <i>Pigeon Stuffing</i> , by Tom Sheehan	p. 2
Issue #19, 10 Nov. 08, <i>Me and Theodore Fought the Law and the Law Won</i> , by Mary Hamilton ...	p. 3
Issue #20, 17 November 08, <i>Diner</i> , by Marisa Plumb	p. 4
Issue #21, 24 November 08, <i>A Bundle of Nerves</i> , by Lois McShane.....	p. 5

Issue #18

3 November 08

Pigeon Stuffing

by Tom Sheehan

I have some heavy stuff weighing on me that has to be shared. My neighbor, a Type A personality with a capital **A**, came to visit my wife the other night while I was at our high school ball game. Seems he has complained to the Town and to the neighbors directly in back of his house about their bird feeder. The bird feeder hangs on a limb of a maple tree about twenty feet inside their fence line. He says pigeons feed over there *for free* and then come to sit on *his* roof. The pigeons are going to wreck his roof, he says. He and his wife took pictures of *seven* pigeons feeding at the bird feeder, which then came directly and sat on *his* roof. *Seven* of them! Type A complained to the Town and they sent up a pigeon reconnoitering person and the PRP only counted one pigeon. The neighbor came home one day later and six or seven other pigeons were staring down at him, *from his roof!* "It was eerie," he said. "Can you imagine my feelings?"

He called the Town again and they sent another PRP (they only have two pigeon guys and one of them's a woman) and this PRP only counted two pigeons. Type A says he is going to sue his neighbors and the Town for a new roof, if and when the time comes. And then, to cap off his discussion, a little Merlot on his breath, his hair down as far as it can go, letting secrets out of his house where I grew up and came of age, (Type A bought the house from my cousin who had bought it from my sister) he sported his humanity and told my wife that he and his wife just bought a new parrot (his/her name is Cinnabar) and paid \$400 for it. Birds of a feather squawk together, as one old sage said, or "the bird is on the wing, but that's absurd, for I've always heard, the wing is on the bird."

But my pal Smitty in Jersey says it best when he offers that my Type A neighbor really will get upset when he finds out the neighbor out back has been feeding the roof pigeons a bit of nuclear waste.

Jim also says he has a vision in the belief that everything happens for a reason and nothing is ever wasted. How about this? *2000 years after Pax Romana, its bastard spawn, Pax Americana, moves into the 21st century. New empire. Novus Odo/New order subjugating the peoples of the globe with fearsome weapons, explosives sometimes being made from the nitrates harvested from, you guessed it, pigeon shit!*

Questions and comments arise though, from Jimmy and other folk: *Why are there not more trained pigeon people on your town's pigeon staff? What are your tax dollars for anyhow? And "I have a question for the Merlot-man: Can Cinnabar be trained to fly outside and kill pigeons? If not, for four bills he can probably get a hawk trained to fly roof-wise and kill pigeons and will likely do the job handily, but that might mean another mess of blood, feathers and shit being thrown all around. Meanwhile, a caution is advanced here for the town pigeon man: Be sure not to imbibe alcohol for at least 8 hrs. in advance of rooftop pigeon-dropping maintenance or count assessment. Are these pigeons or are they really mourning doves? Does the neighbor know the difference? Mourning doves are generally ground feeders but have been known to perch on a bird feeder to knock food to the ground and even occasionally one or two may perch on rooftops or telephone lines. The keen observer may even witness them on trips to the liquor store. Hell, if they can handle nuclear waste, don't you think they can handle a little bit of booze?"*

Issue #19

10 November 08

Me and Theodore Fought the Law and the Law Won

by Mary Hamilton

We like each other. We like each other very much. We are best friends. We say "besties." It sounds a little dirty, we think, when we call each other "besties." We like each other from the other side of the room. We make faces. We smile. We cringe and we Totally. Understand.

We are best friends and we go on long walks together and we talk politics and POETRY. We talk about POETRY like it's really really really important. Like it's the most important thing in the world and that, we think, makes us important. Makes us very important and smart. We are so. Smart.

We like each other. So very much. We should get married, we say. We should buy a house by a lake and go for long walks along the lake and we should collect rocks, the kind that are smooth and oval and we should throw those rocks at the lake and count the number of times they skip because that is so very nostalgic and we think nostalgia is great. We are best friends. We are hip to hip. We are shoulder to shoulder. We don't even need to talk. We look at each other across the room and we raise our eyebrows and we Totally. Know. We start a new exercise regime. We do calisthenics in the back yard. We get in great shape so we can have relay races around our neighborhood. And award ceremonies on the front stoop. And we'll put our hands over our hearts while we sing the national anthem and feel really great about patriotism and our physical fitness. We buy a book about birds so we can go to the park with binoculars and go birdwatching and we can call out the names of various species of finch and we will feel very smart because we can determine one finch from the next, like they're our brothers or something. We should wear matching sweaters, we say. We should live side-by-side in a duplex with a shared lawn and driveway. We should have a big Christmas party and invite everyone we know and we should gather around the piano to sing carols and drink egg nog and smile with tenderness and love.

We should go on a road trip. We should drive from Key West to Vancouver and, along the way, we'll take every exit that promises to show us one of those really cool and totally awesome roadside attractions. We'll take pictures of us standing next to a giant metal sculpture of a grasshopper in the middle of a cornfield and so we can both be in the picture, we'll put the camera on the hood of the car and we'll set the timer and the picture will be of us with big goofy grins and we'll look at the picture later and we'll laugh because we were being ironic, but actually, well actually, it was pretty fun and we had a good time because we were together the whole time and we like each other. And we're totally not being ironic or sarcastic when we say that we like each other. We like each other so very much. And when we're together it's like time is nothing. Time is like whatever and we don't even notice when it gets late because we're all lost in talking to each other about smart things.

We make t-shirts and on the t-shirts we screen print the word "I'm with my bestie" and there will be an arrow so when we're standing next to each other people will know that we like each other. We like each other very much. We are best friends. Best friends forever. Just like it says on our necklaces. Be. st. Fr. iends. For. Ever.

Issue #20

17 November 08

Diner

by Marisa Plumb

Wrung my hands, seated in the torn and rotting booth. And he was very involved, as he might have been a good listener, as good listeners might be, listening being questionable, questioning. Almost like an activist, and that must mean that the situation was motivated. Being kind and changing the world having become such things. Having become the things embedded in the terms *action* and *time*; essentially, time spent. The name of a day having become malleable.

Would we have preferred giving piano lessons in a basement, running a pen pal service, or just one world record.

At the diner he had said something about detailed control and manipulation. The nuanced way we take the present into the future. And messages – advertising, political ideas, lifestyle suggestions – have always based their distribution tactics on speculations of the public consciousness, things that have always been complicated, and are ever more so. Think of it. There are businesses with sensors, and what they sense is immediately digital and they are set up to do the electronic analysis of that data, met that great challenge, and said the procedure could be improved, but they did end up with startlingly powerful results.

“We should avoid,” he said. “Give me your credit cards.”

“I don’t have any.”

“Yes you do. Let me cut them up.”

He Sure, he said all that. He would say as much again, because it was all the result of some prompting, my own suggesting. Anyway, *Maybe we should stop, have dessert—*

I interrupted too often. Lit a cigarette. Waitress wore heavy perfume and butterfly earrings. The forks were spotted. In the future we would be sitting in other establishments and we wouldn’t be any different and wouldn’t that be nice. I smiled then and he asked, “Why don’t you think these are good ideas?”

Afterwards we walked down to the street by the water. We leaned against a building on the south side of the city, watching a pack of motorcyclists go by. We were drinking wine out of a water bottle, and in general, it had been a grimy and depressing fucking weekend.

But still, we were going to change things. By focusing on what was being left out. We would leave ourselves out and focus on the meaning of that; in this way we would have our future and our past at once. Keep them both intact and throw a fit for our demons.

Issue #21

24 November 08

A Bundle of Nerves

by Lois McShane

"Caroline dropped off a copy of the guy's driver's license and told me to call the police if I didn't hear from her by Monday night," Barbara said. "She runs around like this and I worry the whole time. What if something happens? What do I tell my mother?"

She took a sip of coffee.

"I'm physically and emotionally drained," she said.

"So, they're going - where? Did Caroline say where?" Millie asked.

"She just said 'upstate' and that they'd be riding his motorcycle," Barbara said.

"What happened to the flamenco dancer guy?" I asked.

"She told me he slapped her when she was drunk, so she set fire to his couch. That's all over now, I think."

We always had to ask a lot of questions to get the interesting stuff. In Barbara's view, Caroline's antics were just a backdrop for the greater drama of her own emotional state. It annoyed us no end when she'd say, "I'm physically and emotionally drained." She made the claim so often, it became a joke around the office.

We felt sorry for Barbara. When you asked what she'd done over the weekend, her answer was always, "I went shopping with my mother," or, "Not much."

Each week, on Thursday or Friday, Barbara would make some casual mention of Caroline's latest scheme or conquest. We'd drag the details out of her: Caroline agreed to baby-sit someone's leopard; Caroline was going to crash a party at Gracie Mansion; Caroline had a date with a famous, but married, actor.

Brazen, audacious Caroline was a superhero to the rest of us.

On Mondays, Barbara would be "physically and emotionally drained" from anxiety over Caroline's escapades and the burden of keeping her sister's activities a secret from their mother. We'd go on asking her questions anyway, until we pieced together how things turned out for Caroline.

Barbara called in sick on the Monday after Caroline's trip 'upstate' but Millie came in with news that electrified us.

"There is no Caroline!"

Millie couldn't get the news out fast enough.

"I went to my cousin's wedding and Barbara's mother was there," she said. "She works with my uncle. When I heard her last name was Ghazarnijcek, I knew they had to be related. I asked about Barbara and she said, 'That's my daughter.' Then, we're talking, and she says something about how Barbara is an only child. I couldn't believe it. I'm saying, 'What about Caroline?' over and over and she's looking at me like I'm crazy."

"Are you sure it was her mother?" Karen said.

"Hadta be. She knew Barbara worked here. She lives in Greenpoint. Her cat's name? Marco!"

On Tuesday and Wednesday, the atmosphere in the office was chilly. No one said a word to Barbara that wasn't about work.

On Thursday, Barbara looked so miserable, I asked if she was all right.

"No, not really," she said. "It's my cousin. I'm worried sick about her. I can't stop thinking about her problem with the bank. She could get in such big trouble."

Karen and Millie looked up.

"What problem?" I asked.

"They made a mistake and put an extra ten thousand dollars in her checking account. Debbie hasn't told them. She's taking it to a casino in Atlantic City this weekend to see if she can bet it up and then keep the difference."

Karen drifted over to us.

"What if she loses?" she asked.

"That's what has me so upset," Barbara said. "She could lose it all and, then, what?"

"Hey, it was their mistake," Millie said.

"She'd still have to give the money back, right?" Barbara said. "It's not hers. What if she gets arrested over this?"

"Yeah. But, what if she *wins*?" I said, imagining the excitement of high stakes roulette.

"All I know is I didn't sleep for even a minute last night. I'm... I'm a bundle of nerves from thinking about it," Barbara said. "A bundle of nerves."