

Fiction at Work

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Issue #37
6 April 09

Reading Spring, Looking Forward to the Day the Ice Starts Out

by Tom Sheehan

I find the days about us now, which keep me indoors and at this machine, to be very special; they allow me wake-up composition and comfortable reading. So it was that I paused at your remarks on winter, and went right on past them, with the Great Book at hand, open for me. It demands attention.

I can bear all this silent reading of the Great Book, Mother Earth's tome, sitting here waiting for that day of signals, the day the ice starts out from secret places where it's been harbored, in whatever crevice or cranny, from lake, or pond, or river. It'll begin itself by spitting. There's a law against that in some places, you know. It'll spit anyway, mostly off real mountains and mountains of my creation, hunchbacked over all, and up the valley from the main routes barreling all that way from capital cities. Spring, crushed downhill, is buried in dark spots, but has been stretching forth this way for days on days now. Actually, it's somewhat like a host of dark prisoners slyly coming past capture, past hard cement and bars, in quick moments of illusion and evasion. Things move unsuspectingly, everywhere; Earth shudders, a root douses under onus of added obligation, and near-frigid water trickles anew in a cave. See how (and why, oh ever why) on garage floors in many towns long-sleeping baseball bats slowly roll a half inch, mere radius, without any real inclination, or so it seems.

Sonic booms without aircraft thunder across the frozen lakes, echo in awakening caves still dark in the Appalachian spine work. Old gold mines behave as if they have company. In the whole Shenandoah Valley and the Ashuelot Valley nearer here, the trout and bass thrust upward in one free magnificence, waiting the mastery of hooks. That's all coming along the way, even though stiff platelets have been worn water's way. The Earth, we know, slung itself here, calved itself from plates and formations huge underlings once hid, responded to the soft reach of sun's life, moon's open-door policy, made dirt shine. Can you imagine one platelet or calved cliff-face cut up in the aftermath of heat along the incessant chiseling of glaciers? Spring, near atop us, does the same deed in quicker time. Those among us who measure time, wrestle edges, knock ice illustrations to the back row of thought and creativity, must shiver at such intelligence.

I say, Whoa, horse, whoa, Earth, this never changing Earth, yet changing, the maneuvering underneath, the slides and vast sleds of rocky knobs and blobs. Whoa, future hills of white coming calved, cheating us of old tunes, old ways, by being brittle yet, but hear us. Hear me, outland, overland, inland, less than what I seemed I was. Ho, Earth, ho, this hardness in the firmament, this space taken up in its place, this burg with all parts of measurement, glacial interchange and maximum, oh, endless Earth not yet melted, not steamed out of self, holding in place grand Capricorn and big Cancer Mother Earth has long known in dashed sluggish aftermath. Her tough fuselage's being primed out in the mainstream, aloof, water in different forms, yet making up everything. Lastly, thus, appropriately wet, we drown in the plenty of coming, stiff platelets' stuff of ocean's derring and oh do, like Zanzibar and Rio too, the Equator slicing through half the waters of Earth and blessed bonnie rebirth be, salty, testy oh full of mirth and flowered hills.

Issue #38

13 April 09

Office Routine

by Wayne Scheer

In two hours, Palmer Aarington would look like any one of a number of young men in florescent ties entering the Hugo Building, but at 5:13 A.M. he stood out. With an overstuffed leather briefcase in one hand and the Wall Street Journal in the other, he checked his reflection in the glass door and pushed it open.

"Good morning, Frank," he said a little too loudly to the security guard sitting at the front desk. He offered the white-haired man a friendly smile and a wave with the hand carrying the newspaper. How's Mary doing?

"Much better. Thank you for asking, Mr. Aarington. Early again, huh?"

"Need to get as much done as I can before things get hectic today." Palmer watched Frank noting the time in his log. He walked briskly to the elevator and punched the button with two quick jabs of his index finger.

At the twenty-third floor, he scanned the empty halls and smiled. Heading directly to the coffee room, he measured two cups of coffee.

Coffee brewing, Palmer proceeded to his cubicle, where he removed his jacket and placed it carefully behind his chair, rolling up the sleeves of his white shirt. Reaching into his briefcase, he took out some papers and arranged them on his desk. He booted up his computer, grabbed his coffee mug and returned to the kitchen area where he poured himself half a cup, no cream or sugar. Returning to his cubicle, he placed the coffee next to his computer and called up a work folder. As he waited for it to appear, he adjusted the photograph of his twin nephews in their Little League outfits, so it could be seen more readily from the hallway.

From his briefcase, Palmer removed the Daily News, turning it to the back page where the sports headlines shouted, "Yanks Tweak Tigers' Tail." Opening the Journal, he placed the tabloid inside and checked the box score.

He glanced at his Rolex to make sure it was still before six. In twenty minutes Mr. Bolton would arrive. Palmer wanted to make certain he would be in perfect position to proffer the first kiss of the day to the boss's ass.

Issue #39

20 April 09

No Spark

by Angela Carlton

When our rent was late, the landlord pounded on my mother's front door. Our duplex was dusty and hot and a country-western station played on in a cluttered room. I'm not sure how long I stayed with my mother in the blur of her dark hours. Once, the sky did change from dull gray to a blue, swirling into something bright against her washed-out face. It chilled my insides to see her so weak, frail like a dead bird. I rubbed her hand some while she lay in the bed with her low breathing.

I could feel the thumping inside my ears, and the swish of the electric fan blowing against my skin as I ran a damp sponge over her face. Sliding it all over,

I washed her like grandmother did the last time my mother was recovering. "Watch her carefully, dear. Her eyes are darker now. There's no spark."

Whispering and mumbling, my mother whispered, "Stop it. Stop, you hear that?" When it got too quiet, she set those flat brown eyes on the window. "You hear that? Listen," she swallowed. She was picking up those voices in her head. And I following her gaze, looked too, for something outside of sorrow.

Later, when the landlord found the pill bottle, I sensed his fear. Sweat was forming above his upper lip, the horror on his face, blurting out, "Jesus Christ,"

as his wife clutched that stripped robe up to her throat. And the neighbors, they all gathered, gathered around our yard shaking their heads, as I stood near the window, lost, with filthy hair and a empty gut, watching the lights flashing, listening to the sounds of new voices filling the house, footsteps, commands and the tick, tick, tick of the kitchen clock as they strapped my mother, the frail bird, DOWN.

They said the landlord called for the ambulance right away. And you could hear those sirens far down the road past the Hess station, a long low whine for my mother as they carried her.

Issue #40

27 April 09

The Eyes Met Basilio's

by Lee Hershey

He drank, he set his coffee, he smoked, on the ground of the fire escape, and he smoked to watch the sellers below on the streets two for one special and the people whipping by. Basilio nudged the newspaper with his toe, then reached down, and drank and smoked and smoked to look over his shoulder, and to the left, down, and over his shoulder to the left, to the pink curtains breezing from the next apartment's window. Laced and frilled, lazing. Shouts and tires, the screech of children ah ha hello! laughing, distracted him for a moment, then his mouth twisted into a wry smile from thoughts, and the shuffle clunk soft eyes, distracted his eyes left. Following the wicker basket, following the blonde head, soft eyes, came a body pulling itself from the widow, and then, soft white hands, which smoothed down a pink dress. Soft eyes, soft white hands, lifting from the wicker basket, soft hummings of I'm gonna love you cut short to the breaking voices below. The eyes met Basilio's, then lowered to the basket, to the washed clothing, and hung them on a blue clothesline and raised the humming, the eyes again to Basilio's. Then away, go, the blushing smile. Basilio picked up the newspaper and shifted his body towards the voice, began the gentle rocking from the hips. Inside the pink dress, the hips moved smoothly, back of the blonde head turned and the eyes met Basilio's. Widened wet and raped. Handsome Basilio, charming no? drank and smoked as the dress vanished into the curtains flutter, and he smoked to watch the people below as he buttoned back and wiped his hands on his jeans and placed the newspaper on the ground.