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The Old Drake

Todd French

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Mythcon 52: The Mythic, the Fantastic, and the Alien

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Abstract

Weary, the Old Drake rises
On an icy breeze;

Keywords

Poetry; The Old Drake; Todd French

In our home, I took the top floor, and she, the bottom. And then, wonderfully enough, it occurred to us both that we might set up an interim fantasy room between us and so reapproach one another. We gave it all the surfaces of fantasy: glowing, dark walnut, wind instruments, candle-light, chimes. For you, conscious fantasy is entralling. For images, on the other hand, it is the blackest despair. All the acts we might have carried out we knew in advance to be artifice. So we sat in that quiet, horrible room, unable to speak or raise our heads or even cry. In a room of fantasy, even images become empathetic. One day, I saw her standing before me, nearly coming into focus. Then I knew how utterly miserable she was. I stood up, intending to embrace her. She came toward me in such a wavering, hesitant way, as though she both loved and hated what she did. Then she gently took my face in her hands and bit my cheek and throat until I could feel the warmth and moisture of blood. I knew a pure metaphorical horror: she had actually altered my image. In our passion, we had become fully imaginable to one another and therefore vulnerable. At that moment, she disappeared to me, and I, to her. That was the end."

Well, you can imagine what a tussle it was getting the show back on its feet after that one. I mean, that's the kind of thing you want to sit still awhile after. Or go to sleep. Or just plain blow your nose. And that's why they pay old John Q. his salary, to get the folks out of that kind of mess, and you can be sure John Q.'s worth every penny of it.

"Buck up, man," I said to him. "You'll ride it out. I mean, that's so astonishing, how long are you going to remember it, anyway? Like a dream, probably."

"That's kind of you, Jack," he said, still real deflated.

So I went on, "And what's more, that old love muckety-muck is pretty much the human condition."

He didn't say anything and didn't look like he was going to. The folks looked great, though, mellowed out and comfy as hell. Mick can do that. He can scare the pants off them, take their breath away, then bow out. The best talk show material, without a doubt.

"We all got to get close to one another and sometimes we get bit for it, sure enough," I said. "Intimacy, communication, that's what makes life tick."

"Not quite, Jack," he said in that cool, remote voice, and here he crosses his twiny legs again and smiles. I was glad to see something sparkling in his eyes, but just the same, it always scares me.

"What you love is the image of intimacy. You have no idea what it is. Images and abstractions are the most graceful assailants; who can stop the warring of dancers?"

Now that wasn't so bad as it sounds. The folks like a little obscurity now and again. They all rested a little more deeply into their chairs and a few lit cigarettes, thoughtful like.

"Well," I said, "talk shows seem to be as eternal as what beats in the human breast." Afterall, a little promo for yourself now and again never hurts.

"The image of communication. You're in love with your images, even the most insipid ones. Alone in your homes, you're far too self-conscious to talk to yourselves. It would reveal your truth to you. It would terrify you."

"Well, I guess we're the restless, curious species, Mick. We just go off and explore one thing, find another, learn to control this and that. The up side of carbon. Our heads are really lit up, it's true. It may seem a little bright for someone out of silicon, but these things are

just the biological truth of life. Your kind has the efficiency, we've got the nerve."

"I wonder, Jack . . ." he said. He'd been getting deeper and deeper into that chair and I confess, I thought either something scary or another bunch of rectangles and cubes was going to come flying out. "I think of you as rather blank, as perhaps having few attributes outside of your images. But for images, you and the folks are plenty dazzling. You're restless and curious for them, for little else, perhaps least of all for one another."

You see what a tough guy he is to have around! He's velvet, he's funny, he vaporizes, and then he just throws some more dust in your eyes. It was getting late and frankly, I thought it might be a better thing for the folks to hear a bunch of decent, honest commercials than listen to Mick anymore.

"You're one of our images, too, old fella," I said not to sound as though we were mad. Close it on a little bonhomie. The strangest light came on in his eyes, more, well, bright, angry, violent, even brilliant. It's like I'd popped him on the snout.

"Mick, get it together," I whispered. And aloud I said, "You've come a long way, Mick." And still he didn't say a thing, just lounged back in the chair like something that wants to coil around in a cave. God, what a strange, powerful guy to have on my show!

Then he smiled that bright old Mick smile and said, "So have you, Jack, so have you."

I still wondered what he had been thinking before he said that.

A fascinating guy, you want to know what's in the gaps and peeps and silences. Then good old Mick! He made his eyes sort of wan and milky and held both his hands up in those "V's" again. The folks roared. I mean, what a performance! He'd been programmed as a talk show host once, so you do expect that great public instinct sometimes.

So I guess I got a pretty good show and I shouldn't be belly-aching. But I wonder what all the weirdness was and what it meant and all like that. And still, I never want to see the guy again. And then again, it'll be damned exciting to see him again. Maybe I'm writing this because I can't wait! ■

THE OLD DRAKE

Weary, the Old Drake rises
On an icy breeze;
Battered scales fall free
Like wind-wracked leaves.

Weapon-scored and tenebrous
Wings beat hard and slow;
Tears, bitter and combustible,
Fall on the fields below.

Todd French