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poem

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Online Winter Seminar



Online Winter Seminar

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lips, "it's my way of thinking," she pauses to apply the lipstick, "that we keep this little chat private."

I follow my leader back to our office, saluting her behind her back, take my place at my desk, and steal an inconspicuous glance at my watch.

A fish comes up to me and whispers, "They treat me like an animal here. Have you noticed?"

"No," I revise, "they treat you like a fish."

Judging by the rings around her gills she had become a fish long ago. They're all fish, I realized, swimming around in stale, bagged water. Every other Friday they swim up to the surface for feeding. Some don't even bother, they simply lie dormant on the bottom of the bag and wait for the food to float down to them, in which case, I've heard, they don't make it. You hear stories about these fish who don't make it. They eventually float back up to the surface and get scooped out. Just like that. But what do I know. I'm the new girl.

It's time. I remember to date-stamp the day and stuff it in an envelope for the 5:00 mail.

* * * *

An oncoming train jolts me into 5:41. The girl has her head swung back and is loading ketchup potato chips down her throat.

"Scarborough, this stop, Scarborough."

I know that voice.

I open the door to my basement apartment and bury myself in my subterranean lifestyle. I pick up crumpled thoughts I had strewn across my rent-due floor, along with unpaid bills, and throw them in the garbage. A spider accompanies my hand, then scurries evasively away.

With mittens on my feet, I get into bed and close my eyes to find the day has conveniently condensed itself into Chinese script. I am the girl downstairs. Tomorrow, I chant to myself, I must remember not to let the new girl meet the girl downstairs. A six-year-old's piano version of "When the Saints Go Marchin' In" bangs above my head.

I wish I had my Walkman.

• poem

when the phone rang, abulatif parker answered it. when spring came, he wore shorts and listened to sheep bleating in the fields. when he listened carefully, he heard small flower buds bursting in the garden. when the sky opened up and tiny green extraterrestrials began to land on his driveway, abulatif knew some introductions would be in order.

if you look in the mirror for long enough, he told them, you see pablo picasso. sometimes you see marilyn monroe in a glass of water. you see small birds nesting in trees, the body of your lover sleeping. you see ramps when the highway closed for the weekend, the sun sinking over water. when the phone rings, he explained, you answer it & when spring comes, you are in another world.

gary barwin

You don't have to suffer to be a poet. Adolescence is enough suffering for anyone.

-- John Ciardi