

Masthead Logo

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On a Bad Painting in the Lobby of IBM International

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The beauty of children is beauty's illustration
of its constant hunger for new forms, new bodies—
condensation rising from a rail fence at dawn
as if the solid world were melting, as it is.

Every fall is beautiful! The sound of stiff
dry leaves skittering down the roof at the wind's
brusque urging; high thin sheet of cloud,
blues and whites shifting like tropical waters.

October. A spider has dropped a line to my hair.
I am connected to her tiny cave in the tree
by a long shining strand. Always eager to be bitten,
I turn my head slightly, and both worlds tremble.

ON A BAD PAINTING IN THE LOBBY OF IBM INTERNATIONAL

The sly artist knew what he was doing—
all color and abstraction, no obsessive
rage. I sit with my red leather notebook
on my knee, waiting to enter the maze
of partitions, to sit and calmly answer
charges of substandard service, leveled
by a blond manager with a gorgeous tie
and bright future. I will not defend
the sad imbecilities of my employees
but tack the blame on money, how slim
the margin of profit, how you get
what you pay for, etc, and he'll come back
with original agreements, the contract
is quite explicit on this point, etc,
and we'll shake hands and I'll leave
carrying the implied threat of his smile
and a list of changes in personnel.
This is only the pattern of little whips
I get paid for (same as how many million

others?), and god knows I no longer blame the pleasant receptionist who must ask three questions one hundred times a day, while she wants only to return to the rating for sexual attraction in *Redbook*; or the manager doing his best to rise, someday, he trembles to think, to an enclosed office on mahogany row, his service awards and aged brandy hushed and elegant in the glass cabinet; or the ones who believed TV promises and now sit before terminals, pale green light like a sigh on their faces; or the guys trading numbers in the mailroom, half joking, half praying for the combination that might land them in the local paper, their arm around a woman with an uncertain smile; or even the strong willed ones who descend each noon from glassy clouds, the ones who've learned to say three things at once without anger and appear kind, showing their even teeth—for some are kind, and not one of them unnatural. My client keeps me waiting. I light a third cigarette, check my watch. The painting on the lobby wall is right before me, calm, easy to look at, so little movement inside it is impossible to describe. I touch my forehead and my fingers smear a thin line of moisture. The receptionist is waving.

LOOKING AT A PHOTOGRAPH OF MY FATHER AT MY AGE

The graying brushcut stands up like a warning:
This black and white face is square, lean
and dangerous. Seven years out of the FBI and he