

To speak in Ovaltine, to use  
His secret ring, but he has  
A sense of mission, of love.  
He lasts until dawn. It's a shock  
To hear a nation's static  
In his voice, to hear him say,  
Stand by, please. I'm temporarily lost.

An Answer

As to your letter of last month:  
I have been here, lately, by fields  
Like fish with soft snow--  
Bellies upward to the year.  
Winds are rising, blue is bluer,  
Further from my eye. Each night  
Something stands on the moon crust  
Moaning of star light. I wish I could  
Describe the sound as it goes  
Through the world. But that is not all:  
There is a lady on the road each day  
With something in her eyes like  
Thunder clouds. She taunts the cars,  
The Diesel rigs. The odds are not good ...  
She's chosen us to blame for storms.  
I wish I could love her. More later.

-- Harry Humes

Breinigsville, PA

The Hubris Blues

"They put me down, man, all those square people in  
Port Arthur; and I wanted them so much to love me."

-- Janis Joplin

I think I understand about Port Arthur. I come from Cedar  
Rapids and I'm not sure, except for the climate and the  
way the people talk, it's so very different.

I left Cedar Rapids 15 years ago and I still feel intimi-  
dated when I go back there. The trick is not to go very  
often. Also, not to think about it very often. I used  
to know somebody in New York who was really bugged by  
Cedar Rapids after 15 years, but that was because she  
thought about it.

In fact, once I was walking east on 4th Street and I walked right by somebody else I knew I knew from Cedar Rapids; in fact, he knew he knew me too. Our eyes just slid right off each other; we walked right by and neither of us dared to say: 'Hey, don't I know you from Cedar Rapids?' He was a friend of my brother's and once we went to one of those terrible dances together (I'll bet they had them in Port Arthur too). I'll bet each of us walked on down 4th Street -- he west, me east -- thinking: My God, Cedar Rapids! But not for anything would we have said: 'Hey! Don't I know you from Cedar Rapids. We'd already got very smart about the place.

Consider this for instance: I figured out once that for everybody who foolishly throws himself on a hand grenade (as in late movies, newspapers) there's got to be somebody who survived.

Suppose, for example, nobody else was there when the thing landed, who'd he be saving? So what would he do then; run maybe, or just lie there hoping to lose only legs or arms, eyes or a face, etc.

You're probably wondering what all this has to do with you. The answer is: nothing at all; I was just reminded.

Also, suppose the other guy got there first (I'm back to the hand grenade); just suppose, what's he supposed to say: After you, Alphonse.... Okay, Joe, but the next one's on me. And how's he supposed to feel afterwards (the one that's saved, that is). There's lots of ways this thing could turn out. Imagine a whole movie, slow motion of course, with just these 2 guys and a hand grenade; maybe backwards and forwards a few times.

Also, because you mentioned it, I wanted to say something about love (although you're too dead for it to matter). It only matters in little places like Port Arthur or Cedar Rapids. If you'd come, say, from Chicago or New York, you'd see it doesn't matter.

Love is quite serious, quite dangerous. Only people needing it would risk anything to get it. For one thing, it's asking too much of other people. For another, it doesn't really exist. Understand, for some people it is like eating bread, necessity.

People who eat & drink & sleep & die with moderation are wedged into a place so irrelevant it scarcely exists, except in the minds of the leavers. These people who stayed; they're mad as hell we left. That's one of the reasons they don't love us very well. Their sub-sub-basement-conscious is saying: 'How come I'm not walking

down 4th Street.' Consequently, they do really desperate things in Port Arthur or places like that.

Port Arthur is a state of mind I understand; a figment of respectability; the longest journeys take us out of there and back again, back again. If you'd gone back again, again, maybe you'd finally see it doesn't matter; the closer you come to it, the further away it gets. Like singing louder to drive out ugly things; it can kill you, at the very least destroy the voice.

Still, as an ordinary house-woman said to me yesterday, apropos her station in life & her appointments: Is this all there is?

However, if you understand any of this at all, you'd still be in Port Arthur.

I've been told that in certain hospitals, well hidden from us, we are keeping alive men whose faces, if we let them loose, would frighten us. Not just blind, armless men; but really disgusting men. We would like to call them vegetables, except that's not it at all. Vegetables are quite beautiful; they have their form; they maintain it, generation after generation. Also they are useful.

I'd like to make a recommendation, here & now, that we set those people loose on the streets; let's look at them.

-- Margot Treitel

Columbia, MD

Shane

He rode into the valley with his wide brim hat way down  
almost over his eyes  
but tall in the saddle  
even though Alan Ladd was, I heard, only about five-five.  
I was just a wide-eyed, freckle-faced kid  
but much dirtier than Brandon De Wilde.  
Shane did everything so slick and easy:  
the way he pushed his wide brim hat back on his forehead  
with just a nudge of his thumb;  
the way he dismounted in a single flowing motion;  
the way he worked the pump handle up and down so smooth  
and steady;  
and I never seen a man hold a water dipper so firm  
yet so gentle  
in all my eight years in Wyoming.