nicollsroad

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nicollsroad
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**Fiction**

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Our Song

When night shadows lift
from garden walls
and dew sparks the lawn.

thoughts of you,
fresh as this morning's air
swirl about me.

memories awaken,
and together again
we dance

love
provides
the melody

Franz Helner
Snow

Limbs of it, blankets of it
on the long, down-turning walk
leaving intensive care, all heroics
in a heap there, sucking a scruple of air.

All afternoon the darkness sinking.

In the open stretch of parking lot
the snow is whirl-winded, sweeping,
careening into soft hairpin turns,
swerving, clotting on slopes of glass.

All afternoon the darkness sinking.

I unlock, duck in, anything happens
when a key turns, an engine stalls, expires
from indecision. I slam the gas, the engine
explodes. I tilt the seat, pitch backwards.

All nature is a cling of leaf.

Waiting forever for some warmth
I punch the radio and listen
for bad news. Storm. More storm
to occupy a cold, passionless seat.

All nature is a cling of leaf.

The ungowned trees blanched with it,
snow filling the disappearing fields, silent
out there, snow flooding the shallow trenches.
I brush the emergency. Let it up. Let it go.

Dan Daly
Picasso on the Beach

“The purpose of art is washing the dust of daily life off our souls.”
— Pablo Picasso

Looking up from his sketch book, the octogenarian sprawled on the chaise sees the twenty-something couple standing hip-deep in the quiet bay. His right eye rocketed away hours ago, docking quickly on her long limbs, flat chest, exquisite Madonna face. Now his left eye lifts off—she surrounds her lover’s neck with her arms, his mouth with hers. He hoists her up. With lips still clamped, she scissors his waist.

Consumed by fire, the old man will not paint yet another portrait of the artist in flames. He burns too brightly, his brush too thick. He extracts himself painfully from the chaise, walks to the water, slowly, coolly wades in. He’s retrieved his eyes from her body even before he nears the two-into-one. Passing them, he plunges into the deep, swims forty strokes, emerges chastened. Back on his lounge on the beach, Picasso draws fertile conclusions.

Lee Marc Stein
Port Clyde, Maine

Attuned to tidal rhythms
twice a day in shallow water,
the great blue heron,
appears against the mist,
the color of restless waves,
an awkward body
in a graceful dance.
With the stillness of the watcher,
he stalks by standing.
Everything comes to him who waits,
in the right place at the right time.

Dorothy Schiff Shannon
LOST AND FOUND

In theaters, libraries, schools, museums,
Bus terminals, diners, and shops it seems
There’s always one special place addressed
To the absent-minded, the dispossessed,
Through which the mislaid wallet passes,
Where handbags, scarves, and reading glasses,
The sweater still in its Macy’s box,
The briefcase full of Grandpa’s stocks,
Rings with which true loves were courted,
Earrings, bins of gloves unsorted,
And hundreds of umbrellas wait.

I’ve only to appear, relate
My tale of woe, and claim with pleasure
That not-much-worse-for-waiting treasure.
But tell me where to go to find
A missing thought, a vanished mind,
A misplaced friendship, strayed connection,
My faded love,
My lost affection.

Sheila Blume
DOMESTIC ARCHEOLOGY

I see you when I sweep the porch each spring,
Eight curled up legs, two pedipalps outthrust,
Round empty belly, now a weightless thing,
Exoskeleton crumpled in the dust.

Sometimes I find your web across a screen,
No victims mummified in silk for food,
No pale, vacated egg sacs to be seen,
That would have hatched your nonexistent brood.

Sad remains of a foolish spider who
Squeezed beneath the wooden frame and wove
A miracle where no fly ever flew,
To wait in vain for nourishment, for love.

You lived your life as nature programmed you,
What more is there that you, or I, might do?

Sheila Blume
One More Day Beneath the Sun

Clad in tiny triangles of cloth, glorious young women stroll along a trail of hardened sand where tide meets shore, wavelets licking at their toes. They look like visitors from space, some planet where perfection is the norm. Their hemispheres of archetypal breasts are a challenge to the fabric charged with masking them from view. Their derrières—cantaloupe or honeydew—are variations on a fruity theme of firm and round.

The darker women commandeer the scene. Their glossy brown-black hair and acorn skin are stunning contrasts to the azure sky. Scattered here and there like extras on a movie set are older women gone to misplaced flesh and puckered skin. They play with grandkids in the surf or recline on sand chairs with a book admiring the scene relieved to be ignored happy to enjoy another day beneath the sun.

Carol Schmidt
A MATTER OF TASTE
(or)
A TIME CAPSULE

Mother's milk or formula
juice in a cup
a drop of coffee stirred into a tall glass of milk
a growing up treat
cream soda at home with a corned beef sandwich
Bug Juice - Kool-Aid - at summer camp

An egg cream sucked through a straw at the corner soda shop
up on the stool without a boost
A sip of sweet wine at holiday time
Hot chocolate with a melting marshmallow on a cold winter's eve
mustache licked off after drinking the last gooey foam
Coke and a slice of pizza with Parkway teens.

I remember days of gin and tonics, and any wine will do
white, blush or red
sweet memories all.
In current times a special occasion - a celebration calls for
a bottle of imported Domaine de Trieenn Vignonner
or fine champagne
But today, it's a jug of colonoscopy prep.

Sheila Eisinger
Button

She rests along the ribbon
round and flat, cut from bone
a little thickness around the edge.

She’s about push, slide-turn
about hold and release
a game of hide n’ seek.

I want to run my finger ’round
her edge, caress the attachment
coax her to let go. I want to

wheedle that smug innocent
body with my counter
push, slide-turn, to tease apart

the rumples of your blue
corduroy shirt
to let my hands slide across

the silky crinkle of your skin,
to let her breathe in
the windy flash of freedom.

Ginger Williams
Lilly Leaving Home

At nursery school
you hide your shoes
behind the bookcase
and run away
to the tall jungle gym
to climb
hand over hand
up its criss-cross bars.

I hold your lunchbox
wait below
listening
for the sudden thud
as you crash to earth.

Shading my eyes
from the noonday sun
I watch you
balance
on your stockinged toes,
watch you
raise your arms
above your head
to flap and flap
for your very life.

Mouth wide open
you shout with laughter,

"Oh,
oh!"

and my lips silently form
that same shape.

Your brown braids
bounce and wave
like wings.

Ginger Williams
The Visit

Sweet, bittersweet memory
sings to me
brings to me
the need to see
to be with them again
to stay the passing year
shed yet another tear
pray the ancient knowing prayer

And so we go
alone
together
alone
read, re-read
catch engraved stone
note the year, the anecdote
that keeps our loved ones near

Only then we turn toward home
alone
together
alone
remembering...

Sandy Wicker
The Night Listener

This first winter on the North Fork
I'm often the only year rounder
in a cottage sitting on an unpaved road
leading to the bay.
Beneath the warm embrace
of downy quilts, I fall asleep
to a concert of the wind,
a rhythm of raindrops,
thunder rumbling its approval.
And when January drapes a shawl of white
across the road's bare shoulders,
I listen to late night guests
rummage in frozen flower pots,
searching for a late night snack.
In the thawing rays of early light,
icicles drip a chilly sap
from the porch eaves
and the fender of my old Chevy.
No need to do anything.
Just sleep late, while morning sun
shovels the front walk.

Dorothy Giuffre
HOME ALONE
The day after my downstairs neighbor gets a dog, she leaves for work, and her new companion starts barking. Four hours later, he is still at it and, while my entire body is twitching, I cannot help but understand his protest, appreciate his dismay. And I begin to translate every yip and howl, his threats to pee on the sofa, chew the legs off a chair, if someone does not rescue him from isolation. I feel his annoyance as he wanders room to room, wondering what he did to deserve this, imagine his futile attempts to notify animal rescue, dial 911, call an old friend from the pet store. I want to wail along with him, raise my voice for his canine cause, but all I can do is take a broom and tap on the floor, Morse Code for a terrier trapped in a sad situation, let him know the lady in 2-B is also home alone.

Dorothy Giuffre
That Which Cannot Be Taught

She has that which cannot be taught
it spills out of her in abundance
in a gorgeous display of soul and wit
it is shy
but flares with incandescence
and displays the quirkiness of genius
you may glimpse a flash
but it's soon gone inward
someone else has noticed this fey creature
and knows that to speak of her gifts
would be to lose them

Pat Ballan

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The Farm

curls bobbing
flowered sundress
in a field of grass
a meadow of
dandelions
scooping up handfuls
showing joy around her

stalking a grasshopper
pincers drooling brown
eating blades of grass
from her hand

uncle’s truck
lying in wait
moves uphill
to a familiar place
forgotten as one
tries to forget a
nightmare

flowered dress hanging limp
small hands clutching
drooping dandelions
as she
walks down the hill
toward home.

Marilyn Marcus
Abstraction

by

Lee Marc Stein

The taxi stops in front of MOMA. Two people get out of the back seat and wait on the curb. Albert Goldman, the man up front with the driver, pays the fare, and slowly makes his way out of the cab. He winces as he watches the car pull away. As he steps to the curb, he looks to the younger man whose jacket collar is pulled up and who, despite the early darkness of the October evening, is wearing impenetrable shades.

“Jack, must you do this? You’re due at the studio in less than an hour.”

Jack shrugs his shoulders, takes a final puff of his cigarette and stomps it out, turns and heads toward the museum’s entrance. Goldman, who is Jack’s Manager, and his wife follow.

No one recognizes Jack Fate as he makes his way to the Jackson Pollock Exhibit on the fourth floor. In addition to his dark glasses, he wears a blond wig and fake goatee. He will be safe once he enters the gallery — it’s a private showing for the city’s famous and infamous, so anyone invited will be at least as well-known as he is and he won’t be bothered.

No sooner does he enter, remove his disguise and get a fast look at the thirty Pollock paintings than he’s approached by Dan Rather. “We haven’t had the pleasure, Mr. Fate, but I really enjoy your music. I just love Chimes of Freedom.” Jack looks at him with distrust and glances around the gallery plotting his escape. Rather can almost read what Jack is thinking. Jack’s aversion to the media has become as legendary as Brando’s.

“Please, Jack, I’m not here as a reporter. I’m here to celebrate a great American artist finally getting the recognition he deserves, almost twenty years after his death.”

Jack smiles and his head pivots around the gallery again. He spots Tony Bennett and Warren Beatty, Patti Smith with Mapplethorpe, Mailer talking to Warhol, undoubtedly about Marilyn Monroe. Jack likes Warhol’s films but cannot talk to him since his flings with and the subsequent deaths of Warhol girls Edie Sedgwick and Candy Darling. If some day he could talk to Mailer about Maidstone, Mailer’s oneshot at filmmaking, or even about the novelist’s American Dream, he’d enjoy that, but it might be too difficult to steer him away from politics.

He now stares at Rather, waiting for him to say something.

“Jack, you know of course that Pollock wasn’t always an action painter.”

“Oh, of course,” Jack snarls back at him, “I used to visit Lee Krasner in Springs when I was on my tour break on Long Island in 1965. The critics categorize him as an abstract expressionist.”

“But do you know who convinced him to go abstract?” Rather peacocks.

Jack’s silence tells Rather to go on.

“I don’t know if you know anything about baseball, but there was this catcher for the Red Sox who also turned out to be a spy for us during WWII. He died a couple of years ago.”

Continued on next page
Jack feels himself floating away, the way he did that day of the motorcycle accident, the day after Moe Berg told him that he was his birth father. He can’t let Rather get a whiff of this.

“No,” Jack says, “I don’t know much about baseball. What does this have to do with how Jackson Pollock paints?”

“Well, before we got involved in the war, I think it was 1940, Nelson Rockefeller was made coordinator of inter-American affairs by FDR, and given the responsibility of running a $150-million propaganda agency in Latin America. He hired Moe Berg to travel to South America to teach baseball. Of course, the Rockefeller family had heavy financial interests down there, and the Governor figured baseball would counteract Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo’s politicizing, and would help keep the region stable. Berg did a good job. When he returned to New York in 1942 after one of his OSS trips to Europe, Rockefeller wanted to see him. He explained to Berg that the Soviet Union had put a ban on abstract paintings and that to show the world how free America’s is, he wanted to encourage abstract art. He instructed Berg to go to Pollock and tell the artist that there will be a huge market for his paintings if he changed his style. ‘We can’t stand still,’ Berg told the painter. ‘Our liberty is at stake.’”

Jack Fate’s hands twitch as he adjusts his shades. He coughs. “Liar. You’re making that up. I never read that anywhere.”

Rather smiles. “Well, no wonder. It’s never been printed. Moe Berg told me that himself.”

Jack stalls for time. How could he not know this after spending nine years investigating who his father was? He mocks Rather: “Yeah, I’ll bet. You media people are always inventing things. You were better at inventing me than I was myself.”

“No, Jack, it’s true. I met Moe Berg in Dallas in November 1963. Off the record, it was Moe Berg who handed me the copy of the Zapruder film. I couldn’t get too much out of him, but he did tell me about Rockefeller and Pollock.”

Jack’s mind jumps tracks… though I know that evenin’s empire has returned into sand, vanished from my hand, left me blindly here to stand. Nothing has blown his mind this way – not all the drugs he’s taken, not the booing at Newport, not the yells of traitor. He’s got to say something or Rather will smell him out. The man is no third-stringer for Sing Out.

“And just what was this Moe Berg doing in Dallas? Dumb luck?”

“You don’t use ‘dumb’ and ‘Moe Berg’ in the same sentence,” Rather instructs. “He was a Princeton and Columbia Law School graduate, spoke eight languages, the smartest baseball player ever. At the time, I had no idea he had been a spy, but he used his real name and I recognized it. When Joe Garagiola did national baseball broadcasts in the early ‘60s, he would talk about Berg as a catcher he emulated. I could not get him to tell me why he was in Dallas and I was unable to speak to him again, though I tried.”

“Yeah, great. Maybe I could write a song about him sometime. I’m just finishing one about Hurricane Carter.”

Jack sees he’s turned things around. Now it is Rather’s eyes that show discomfort. They begin scanning the room and a minute later the journalist excuses himself.

“Well, Jack, nice chatting with you. I’ve got to do some politicking. Good luck.”

Rather puts out his hand, but Jack won’t give him the satisfaction. He watches the man walk toward Walter Cronkite in the other corner of the gallery.

He needs to get his mind off his father before he starts his studio session. He’s beginning to know himself: if he leaves no whiff, he’s only going to use the time to drink.

He looks around and spots John Schlesinger walking in. He had disappointed Schlesinger in 1969 when he delivered Lay Lady Lay too late for the director to use in Midnight Cowboy. Nilsson, that one-hit wonder, got lucky. Schlesinger too. He walks up to the older man and offers his hand.

“John. I liked Locust a lot. With the right music, it might have been up there with Cowboy.”
Schlesinger looks at him and smiles. “You mean something from Blood on the Tracks? I do keep up with you, Jack.”

“No, I actually wrote a song called Day of the Locusts, same as your film. But I always thought of Desolation Row as the abridged version of the West novel.”

“Never heard your Day of the Locusts.”

“Never sang it in public, never released it. Hey, you know I just did my own film.”

“What’s it called?”

“Renaldo and Clara.”

“Never saw it.”

“Never released it. I may not.”

He likes Schlesinger. He asks the director about Dr. Zhivago and Sunday Bloody Sunday which he has just seen again last week and about working with Julie Christie. Then gets the idea to promote his friend Sam Shepard’s work and asks Schlesinger if he’d have an interest in directing one of Shepard’s plays, maybe Mad Dog Blues or Ride Across Lake Constance.

As he listens to the Englishman, he wonders how his father was received by the Brits when he was over there on his spy missions. Did old Moe hang out in the same pubs as Jack had done on his tours? See Olivier on stage, as he had? Walk the same street where he, Ginsberg and the crew shot the Subterranean Blues bit?

Jack hears his name called, looks around and sees Albert Goldman glaring at him. He excuses himself to Schlesinger and begins moving rapidly around the gallery, stopping to study and take quick notes when he encounters Pollock’s Shimmering Substance, Full Fathom Five, Number 31, 1950, and Easter and the Totem. The paint absorbs his pain and at the same time splatters him with pieces of his father.

His brain is on fire. He needs air. Suddenly, though they’ve been drifting further apart, he wants to hear Sara’s voice and be in her arms. But he has to get to the studio.

Can he trust Rather and what he said? Did his father play a role in JFK’s assassination, in other assassinations? He had learned that Moe Berg had no home after the war. Where did he go when he wasn’t at his brother’s house in Newark? Was he, Jack Fate, doomed to wander the earth as his father did? He’s already walked and crawled on six crooked highways.

As he steps into the cab to take him to the studio, new lines come into his head: Your daddy he’s an outlaw and a wanderer by trade… He’ll teach you how to pick and choose and how to throw the blade. He oversees his kingdom so no stranger does intrude. His voice it trembles as he calls out for another plate of food.

Jack Fate is ready for his recording session. He realizes that his quest to find out everything about his father is not an intrusion on his life; it will be his life for a long time to come – just as his music and painting will be.
INTERVIEW WITH THE PRESIDENT

By

Bob Stone

Reporter: Mr. President, the pageantry displayed at this commencement exercise is most impressive. The dignity of the faculty procession combined with the enthusiasm of the student body created a dramatic, almost theatrical effect.

President: Thank you. We believe in planning and organization here.

Reporter: I don’t think that I have ever seen such a highly orchestrated faculty activity. As each faculty member entered through the door behind the stage he proceeded to exactly the same location as his predecessor and made a formal bow and wave before moving smoothly to his seat. It seemed to be carefully rehearsed, as if they had practiced each move many times.

President: Not really. The moves fall right into place. Our commencement committee keeps everything well-oiled and in order.

Reporter: That is most extraordinary! How can they keep so many faculty members synchronized?

President: The committee is primarily drawn from the technical staff of the Engineering Department. They have experience in assembly line procedures.

Reporter: You are not comparing an academic procession to an assembly line, are you?

President: There are definite similarities. The individual components must stay in order and move along in a controlled manner.

Reporter: They seemed to move well enough... but before we continue I must note that the quality of the lighting seemed harsh. The faculty all had a pale look with deep shadows under their eyes.

President: Well, our cosmetology program is quite new and our staff may still be a bit inexperienced.

Reporter: I don’t understand. The faculty put on make-up for commencement?

President: Oh yes! They would look quite poor without it.

Reporter: Is it because of their age?

President: I don’t think that age is a factor here. Our faculty is quite well preserved.

Reporter: Preserved?

President: Certainly. Lifelike embalming has been a specialty here for many years. We are extremely proud of our reputation.

Reporter: Your faculty is embalmed?

President: The senior faculty...yes. We have many living technical assistants and clerical staff.

Reporter: But they all seem quite animated.
President: Again, a tribute to our technical staff. We have a senior technical assistant who is a recognized expert in the workings of the elaborate clocks that decorate many of the European cathedrals. His attention to detail insures that the faculty procession doesn’t miss a beat.

Reporter: You mean to say that your faculty are all being dragged around by gears and cables?

President: Yes they are.

Reporter: Don’t the students notice this in class?

President: Students? We haven’t had any students here in some time.

Reporter: But then... who were all those people in the auditorium?

President: These are the people who watch our telecourses.

Reporter: You broadcast college courses on television?

President: In fact we started out doing just that. In recent years, however we have found that it is much more economical to buy advertising time on regularly scheduled programs.

Reporter: But what about the telecourses?

President: It is much simpler now. We give credit for watching the programs on which we advertise. The student just sends in the password that we mention during each commercial break along with tuition and fees.

Reporter: The people here today are getting college degrees for watching television?

President: No, not at all. We advertise that those who are fully paid up may have already won an award. These awards are certificates good for discounts on many of the items that we advertise. The winners must be here in person to collect.

Reporter: They come in academic regalia?

President: We offer discount cap and gown rentals in the “Smart Shopper” segment of our auction breaks.

Reporter: What about the Board of Trustees? What do they say about all of this?

President: The board sees all that we put before them. They recognize a well-run institution.

Did you know that the biggest single expense of a typical college is faculty compensation? We have reduced that to refrigeration costs.

Reporter: All of this is supported by tuition and fees?

President: No, our endowment has been growing at a dramatic rate. For example, we have just signed an articulation agreement with a major condom manufacturer. Our endorsement of this product was worth a substantial sum. We are always interested in thrusting our institution into new and exciting areas.

Reporter: This is certainly an extraordinary academic institution.
President: I take pride in the efficiency of this administration. When I took this position there were major problems here. Now we are operating in the black, the student center is spotless, the grounds are clean and there is ample parking. We plan to break ground for a new complex of administration buildings this fall.

Reporter: What about your plans for the future?

President: We are considered to be pioneers in innovative academic structures and I expect that our successful model will be widely emulated. Meanwhile we will continue to blaze new trails. In addition to licensing a line of health care products we are looking into a major expansion of our athletic program. This is one area where we are taking a lesson from other successful institutions. We are negotiating to acquire teams in some of the major professional sports.

Reporter: But won't the players be ineligible?

President: The teams will represent our school and wear our colors. The players will be offered the same educational opportunities as anyone else. This arrangement can be found in most major universities. There are several other exciting areas that we are looking into. I am not at liberty to disclose the details of this yet but I can tell you that our marketing experts have identified the area of leisure activities as potentially fruitful. We could evolve into a multi-campus organization after the acquisition of a number of theme parks and resorts. It is also rumored that the government is considering the sale of Kennedy Space Center and their other space related facilities... but I can't say any more about that at this time.

Reporter: Thank you Mr. President. This has been most enlightening.

President: My pleasure. After all, enlightenment is our business.
THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A WOMAN WITH A GREEN NOSE

by

Sheila Blume

Because it didn’t make any sense to me at all, it took me several weeks to accept the reality of my situation. I looked into my mirror at least five times a day; surely I must have noticed that my face was changing. And others noticed it too, I suspect, but were too embarrassed to comment. How can I put it delicately? The simple fact was that my nose was turning green—not the mottled, decayed-looking green that you would expect to see in rotting vegetables or spoiled meat, not the fuzzy gray-green that you might notice in the moss growing on an old oak tree, but the sharp smooth bright green of a parrot’s flight feathers. It was the green of a jade, of an emerald, a lime lollipop, or New York City on Saint Patrick’s Day. It was the green of an old English lawn or a snifter of Chartreuse. It seemed to become greener by the day.

During this period of change my nose felt quite normal, with no soreness or pain, and no unusual running or sneezing. In fact, my health seemed better than ever, except for my chlorophyll-colored proboscis.

Of course I consulted our family doctor, a well-respected physician who had practiced in our village for as long as we could remember. He conducted the most complete examination I could recall in my twenty-odd years as his patient, but he came up with nothing. I traveled to the laboratory in a neighboring town for the customary blood and urine tests of the time, and saw the nearest dermatologist, otolaryngologist, endocrinologist, toxicologist, and nasopharyngologist. I also saw a plastic surgeon who seemed delighted to see me and took a lot of instant photographs in vivid color. All of these well-intentioned docs had a go at me, but nobody had any idea about the reason for my problem.

Calls were made to the Mayo Clinic, the Harvard Medical School, and other prestigious institutions, all of whom were willing to have a look (for a fee), but none of whom could suggest a reasonable causal hypothesis. As you can imagine, I decided to pass on their kind invitations.

So there I was, smack in the middle of the twentieth century, living in the great nation that would shortly put men on the moon, with my nose turning greener by the day, and no logical explanation. The next thing I expected was that a stem would grow out from its tip, sprouting leaves, and maybe a few blossoms in the spring. What then?

But my nose didn’t bloom; it merely became exceedingly green and stayed that way. Attempting to cover the color with makeup was hopeless. I tried liquid foundation, pancake makeup, gel, and seven brands of powder, as well as special stuff made to cover birthmarks and scars. I tried theatrical makeup and even thought of having a latex rubber nose-mask made, but I was sure that would be too uncomfortable.

Uncomfortable? How do you imagine I felt in the bank, sitting in my teller’s window and watching customers fidget and look away, or even gasp? The manager eventually moved me to a desk job in a back office, but it was just my luck that bank branches were then being designed in the so-called “open style,” to increase their customers’ confidence in the integrity of the institution, and back offices were rapidly disappearing. Thus I spent what should have been my happiest, most carefree years in a state of uncertainty, and in an effort to hide myself. My family adjusted to the color of my nose, perhaps better than I did, so that after a while we didn’t talk about it any more, but when my parents invited friends to the house, I ate my dinner from a tray and watched television in my room.

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Just about now I imagine you are becoming suspicious of my story. If my nose had really turned so mysteriously green, wouldn’t you have heard about it? Wouldn’t I be in the history books, or at least in the medical literature? Wouldn’t I have been on television, in the press, on the cover of Time Magazine? Perhaps so, but you must remember that back in the 1950s newspapers were printed in black and white. Our town’s Gladeville Gazette did run a story about my condition, under a headline that read: LOCAL WOMAN HAS UNEXPLAINED FACIAL DISCOLORATION, and they also printed a photo of me. I was happy to find that the green didn’t show up very well in the picture, and happier still to be referred to as a “woman,” since I was barely out of my teens at the time. As it turned out, there were many newsworthy events on the day it was published, and it appeared at the bottom of page 5. It was never picked up by the other media. Television, not yet in color, could never have done justice to my malachite snout. So I learned to live with it, and those who had no choice learned to live with me.

I really can’t complain about my life, strange as my circumstances were. I need only compare myself with others who have endured predicaments far worse than my own. I realize, however, that my facial greenness bred in me both the wish that my odd appearance would be accepted, so that I could lead a normal life, and a wish to hide myself away from the scrutinizing gazes of others.

As I grew older and began to undergo the changes of late middle age, the offensive hue slowly became less intense, and I would pass days on end without giving the matter five minutes of attention. I found that I could attend movies at will and even eat in restaurants unnoticed, especially those that were dimly lit. How to describe the pleasures of my slow emergence from hiding? If not quite a butterfly coming out of a cocoon, or a bear from its cave of winter hibernation, I felt at least like a rabbit emerging from its hole to enjoy nibbling at the grass. I developed the habit of spending several evenings a week at the village library and attending whatever lectures, book club meetings, and yoga classes they offered. I even went on their bus trips to museums and parks around the state.

It was on one of these trips that I met a man of about my own age who had also lived a rather solitary existence. In Ted’s case it was extreme shyness (one doctor had even given it the fancy name of “social phobia”) that constricted his contacts. He was a writer who worked at home. I learned that he also frequented the library, but would bury himself in a carrel on the opposite side of the reading room from the one in which I hid, so we hadn’t noticed one another. We had both boarded the bus in the library parking lot and scurried to seats in its rear corners. Since nobody else sat down between us, we had begun to talk. Eventually Ted and I made a couple, of sorts, and began to go places together from time to time. Because he was a devoted sports fan, for the first time in my life I found myself in the grandstands cheering a variety of teams and really enjoying myself. We laughed hard at the spectators who painted their faces in team colors, especially at games of the New York Jets (whose color is bright green), but never dared to try face paint ourselves.

Ted and I were married by a justice of the peace in a small, private ceremony; we have been happily wed for the past fifteen years. My pigment has continued to fade and his shyness is much improved. He tells me he thanks God for delivering me to him, and swears that if it took years of my having a green nose to bring us together, he is grateful for that too.

Of course I notice that you have been inspecting me, although you’re trying not to stare, out of politeness. I’d be glad to step over to the window where the light is stronger if you’d like. Look closely and you will see an old lady with a greenish cast to her nose—maybe an odd, old-fashioned face powder? Maybe a trick of the lighting? But a decidedly greenish hue. However, I am glad to report that my nose is no longer the first thing people notice when they meet me. I think you have already observed my contented smile.