

Roger Craik

COMMANDER V. EXPLAINS

It's a Special Operation.  
It's a Special Operation  
because it's a Special Operation.  
Not a war. That's all. Stop asking questions.  
It's a Special Operation.

## AMERICA

I saw—I saw four cows go sailing past  
on a truck that said that yellow jugs  
are best, yes yellow jugs are best!  
Each one, to a man, had seized this day  
to rise to her kind legs and quaff  
the milk that comes in yellow jugs.

Such jolly, happy things  
with water-melon noses,  
each one proffering her glass to me  
as they went sailing past.

*Epitaph*

If last time you came you left a stone  
Upon my grave, and this time find it gone --  
Kicked off, you guess, into the unmown grass --  
Or if, to your distress, the jar that reads  
Frank Cooper's Thick-Cut Oxford Marmalade  
Has spilled its flowers that, shrivelled up, lie strewn  
Beneath the legend you had carved of me  
Against your own mistrust, attend to this.

The grave that you presume of me now serves  
For couples clutching twenty minutes' life  
From daytime's striplit falsifying hours,  
Or for the pensive child who likes the stones,  
Who rather likes the dead, as I did once,  
And friendless wanders through these tussocked plots  
And learns although he does not know he learns  
A private catechism chronicled  
Of names and dates and middle names  
And four lines at the most of mundane verse  
And things that people said a person did  
Within a short and agitated space  
Between two massive walls of nothingness.

But most of all it stands here for the boy  
In blazer, shirt and regulation tie  
Who, fleeing from the school gate's iron-tongued clang  
Reverberating through his arm and spine,  
Hurtles headlong, full tilt at my stone  
And leapfrogs over by his fingertips  
As if by jumping he could leave the earth  
And fly, exuberant, beyond the sun.

ENGLAND

Cow in a pond  
up to its shoulders in the afternoon.

## CLEANING DAY

The place that used to call itself  
Angelea's  
(Patsy tells me, over a cigarette, getting  
over-excited – she's already got  
Smith Field and Massucci's Field  
thoroughly confused, and me)  
is now called something else but I've been there and  
Roger do you know what?  
(she adds, marsupial-eyed)—  
they've got a liquor license  
and Tammy says that people drink  
at six o'clock in the morning!

## FRANK IN A FURY

Like a button bursting off a fat man's coat  
he went bomberjacketbarreling through  
both sets of glass and aluminum doors  
and out across the parking lot and in one movement poured  
himself into his car and snorted off—

(I thought that there were other cars around  
this time of day with people going home  
and he could have to brake for them,  
thus tempering his storming-out's effect.  
I even said as much to Sharon as we stared,  
adding that he must have had  
an up-and-downer with the Dean  
whom I and everybody else called Chubbs)—

straight down the college drive and out of sight.

## WIN ALL ROUND

“Two English guys  
are teaching a Spaniard dirty words.”

Which is to say,  
sniggering at the dirty words

and laughing at the Spaniard  
for being a Spaniard.

## MIKE REMEMBERS

Most of the days you never remember,  
but me and Tim and Rog were out on this deck we're standing on  
and Tim had this old-ass 20-bore shotgun with iron sights  
and he was trying to get it sighted up,  
so him and me started shooting at seagulls  
and me and Rog were drinking beer  
for *hours*, man, *hours*, all afternoon, and it was  
*November*, and sunny as shit.  
We must've gone through 500 rounds and never hit  
a fucking thing, never once got *near*  
a thing and there was this big-ass boat right out on the lake.  
I'm sure they were watching us.  
It was illegal as shit.  
It was *great*.



## GOING BACK

Towards the end  
he started to revert.

Words were grey.  
A book of words was blocks of grey.  
There were no pictures in it.  
Pictures were better than words.

LEWIS

It's been two months since the divorce.  
He keeps himself attentive, exercises,  
embarks on solitary restive walks  
without the dogs. They're hers,  
or so she said. He acquiesced.

I phone him fairly regularly,  
admiring how he keeps his spirits up,  
and saying so. Of late I've noticed how  
he's adopting, though perhaps he doesn't know,  
the language of a man who's now alone.

He'll tell me that his daughter Kim  
(She's fifteen and plays twelve-string guitar)  
and his son, who's started school at Notre Dame  
will over Christmas want to spend some time  
with "their mother." He isn't sure exactly when.

Can there be words for this,  
this slippage into silence of her name,  
let alone the other words, the tender words,  
known only to them both, each one:  
the words he'll never say to her again?

MARRIED TO THE FAMILY

busy morning  
doing nothing

wife and sister  
talking talking

2:15  
lunchtime

talking talking  
talking talking

all afternoon  
doing nothing