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Taste

Water rolls in the kettle.

The spout's bird whistles
a call to action.

Across the counter,
you fill the cast-iron teapot
with a generous helping
of loose oolong tea.

Steeping fills the air
with earthy aroma.

Pour into ceramic cup,
add a touch of honey.

You in chair,
cup in hand,
tea in cup,
all in place.

Across the room,
snow falls in a gentle, rhythmic hush
beyond the picture window.

Just the right moment
to taste.

As for the Ticket

Don't burn the tongue,
on flavor still too hot.

Eat slowly,
savor the sustenance,
that will certainly end too soon.

The dinner is good,
the main course, half devoured,
still piping hot.

As for the ticket, no, not yet.
Keep it at bay.

The bill will come
that nobody wants to pay.

Not one to live off extended credit
or the kindness of others,
but no desire to settle up—
not now or even later.

These passionate days
steeped in desire and warmth and bliss
do not come for free.

The laughter and clinking glasses and
clanking cutlery and exciting conversations
crossing one another at a table of friends
with so much to say that half the fresh ideas
meant to enter the discussion fall
like generous crumbs for the less fortunate
scavenging the cracks between the floorboards.

The bill always comes at the end.

The thing to do is to avoid eye contact
with the waiter standing by in his black tuxedo,
lurking slyly in the shadows,
silver platter in white-gloved hand,
in search of an entry point;

not to look into the mirror at the aging stranger there
as you visit the restroom more frequently
than you used to;

not to spend too much time sharing recent
photographs of the kids and family,
only to realize that the photos you are showing
are ten, fifteen, twenty years old.

The thing to do is to pace yourself,
chew your food until the flavor is spent,
take your time, sip and savor
the wine and beer and scotch and cognac
that you once gulped
with a greedy thirst,
and don't be afraid to add a little ice
or water if that will make the flavor last longer.

If you can choose the tastiest morsels,
the finest beverages, optimal companionship,
stretch out your servings so that
what you consume does not
outpace your hunger, does not
make you uncomfortably full,

perhaps—just perhaps—
you will make the most
of the restaurant's operating hours
and the bill will not arrive
until you are ready to receive it.

Tremble

Remember
curiosity and exploration,
venturing to faraway lands and dark alleys
not knowing or fearing what we may find there—
yearning novelty;

going with the flow,
inquisitiveness guiding us,

being Bill Murray,
one day busting ghosts or gophers on screen,
the next, bussing tables or doing dishes
in the home of a college student,
striking up a conversation with a stranger at a dive bar,
then following them home to partake in the ongoing party;

not the confirmed plans and stabilities of today,
dinners and outings like meetings in a busy workday;

not the patio loungers of tomorrow,
birdsong in back yard as we read novels,
watch the dog chase a squirrel up the tree,
sigh, and think, *this is nice*.

Shall we trade in these securities,
seek out uncertainty,
not knowing what tomorrow will bring,

but waking, trembling,
daring to find out?

Community Workshop

The professor and his wife lead
the community screenwriting workshop.

The participants:
two men and three women who spent their lives
on careers and families and other pursuits,
who now seek creative legacies.

They discuss a sequel to the professor's wife's first script,

Nocturnal Shenanigans,

produced by undergrads,
runner-up in the county's film competition,
“liked” on social media by Kato Kaelin and Corey Feldman.

The scriptwriters discuss what elements
of the original film to bring back to the sequel.

The killer robots, for sure,
and the old woman who helps defeat them
with bobby pins and moxie.

There should be a chase,
with one of the former good guys
trying to murder her.

Yes, they all agree and flesh out:

he has an axe, and chases her to the lake house;
she locks the door, runs to the other three doors to lock them,
but she doesn't remember which way the third lock goes
and when she tests it the guy almost
gets his foot in the door—but not quite.

While he's hacking at the door with his axe,
she runs to the basement, removes the carpet,

goes down the secret trap door, and locks herself
in the bunker.

The wife takes notes, nods,
exclaims we can make anything up:
It's fiction, so we can write whatever we want.

No, the professor insists.
Fiction, at its best, is honest.
We can't make anything up.
We need to stick with what we know
in our hearts to be true.

The robots don't make it past the first draft,
and the chase with the axe and bunker are cut.

In the end, *Nocturnal Shenanigans II*
is about three old women, two old men,
and a professor and his wife,

sitting in a classroom long past their preferred dinnertimes
searching for a way recapture on the page
those elusive hopes and dreams of youth.

One of them finds Corey Feldman's angel on social media,
and asks if he'll take a look at the script.

Thanks for the Socks

Rummaging through the attic,
I came across an old picture
and remembered a thank you card
that I forgot to write.

Thank you for the socks
that you got me for Christmas,
immortalized in a photograph
collecting dust in an attic box.

I bore my soul
took the jagged shards of broken notions
from the darkest crevices of my mind,
examined them, conducted psychanalysis on myself,
and exposed my innermost despair to you.

You drove to the mall, in your sable,
parked in the garage so you
wouldn't need to bear the snow
walking through the open doors of Lazarus.

That cozy evening beside the colorful, lit tree,
I presented you the harvest of heartache:
a book of cathartic poetry dedicated to you.

You, in turn, presented me
with a pair of socks,
a pock-marked design
with a thin red line across the toes.

I declared devotion in verse,
painted your beauty in rhyme and tempo,
alliteration and angst.

You accented the men's hosiery
with a framed picture of you wearing them
to personalize the gift.

You commented on how much you
cherished the poetry—
a book devoted to who you were to me.

I said thanks for the socks
and the picture of you wearing them.

Half a life later,
I revisit that poetry—
cringingly sincere, earnest, naïve—

and I wonder whether you still have a copy
that you take from the shelf from time to time,
reminding you that such worship as this
once put you at its center,

or whether your copy has been discarded
like the picture of an old acquaintance
or a worn-out pair of socks.