Entropy

Tyler Evans

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The old man forgot to complete his crossword puzzle in the Sunday Paper, and in doing so he forgot the scent of his dead wife’s perfume. *Fleurs de l’éternité*: Flowers of Eternity it was called. Five dollars an ounce when he bought it for Margaret at Christmas time. She sprayed it on before she left for work in the morning, while the man, then young, yelled at her to hurry from the car. At a point the scent had inspired lust, intimacy. It was on her side of the bed, and the pillow he grasped when she got up to shower. Now, were the fragrance to drift to his nostrils on a phantom breeze, it would be met with indifference.

He sat in a recliner in his living room that morning staring out at the forest of his youth. He could remember at a point the vivid color board of trees, with paint blotch leaves, turning in the fall. He could recall the flowering impermanence of it all. There were the muddy creek bottoms, the naked after curfew swims that led to chill wind shivers, and the bike rides while narrow trails grew even narrower, peddling even faster now with a swift gust of wind to leave the world behind.

He scoffed, “What’s in a forest, anyways?” That thought too, he lost.

The trees across the street had been marked with spray paint Xs. Flags marked off areas of the wood soon to be removed. An avenue of these flags lined an area of raised, flat dirt, running right through the middle of the forest. It would be a road, the trees a schoolhouse, condominiums, and the valleys an area for sewage runoff. What is in Forest, anyways?

He got up with groaning muscles, and a dull click of any number of unhinged joints. He poured a glass of vodka from a plastic bottle he kept in the freezer.

He returned to his recliner in the living room, covered in course spider net lace and drank vodka from a coffee cup, championing the World’s Greatest Dad.

With his first sip he forgot the curry houses of Calcutta. He had lived in the city for two months following the war. He met a photographer whose name was Catherine. She had the deepest dark of hair, and sang while watering flowers in the morning. The flowers, they were white chrysanthemums in a small flowerbed on the balcony. Each stem held hundreds of delicate buds grasping upright towards those unbelievable sunsets. Each sunset, polluted with a
hundred hues of dying red, was another affirmation of a life to be lead. But this too, god this too, he had lost.

And the following morning, embraced by the massaging hands of an electric blanket, the old man sat up with a gasp because more had been lost.

“Aaron Welch,” he said. Words he had repeated many times before. It was his name. But he couldn’t think what title fit in between the two words.

“What’s my middle name?” he sobbed. There was quiet. The house was empty.

He called his son long distance. He was a professor in California, very well known, he told the man at the grocery store.

When his son answered, the old man screamed that he forgot his middle name.

“God Dad, we can’t have you all alone in that house.”

“I won’t leave here,” he shrieked like a disobedient child during punishment.

“Why don’t you just sell the place?”

“I grew up in this neighborhood, your mother died here. All my memories are in this house.”

“It’s so lonely there; please just come out West with me and Diane.”

“No. I’m not leaving.”

The son sighed deeply through the line. “We’ll be there soon enough to see you dad, just hold on ok?”

But his son didn’t come that fall. Soon the trees had shed their leaves, and the winter came, leaving the man to his desolate recliner. The house whispered boredom through the cold wooden boards.

And the old man, he ate microwave meals, along with hearty stews from a can, and he drank vodka from a dirty coffee cup in that recliner.

The winter robbed the old man. It took the first time he had ever had sex: it was in his parent’s basement on a cold slab floor beside the water heater. It had been a Sunday morning when he had stayed home from church sick. His sweetheart at the time (god, what was her name?) cried afterwards and assured him they were both going to hell. The winter stole his childhood friends, the poetry of Walt Whitman, it stole his favorite song, the texture of corduroy, the mascot of the high school he attended and it stole his laughter. The Greed of it all was unbelievable.

It stole his anger about the theft. Any anger he had at all.

When spring came, the man witnessed the 30,872nd sunrise of his life through the window of his living room. The forest of his youth had been removed, its trees felled, rivers polluted. A cheaply constructed neighborhood of condominiums had risen in its place. Children played football in the street...
before the complex. At a wicker chair beside a first story window in one of the buildings sat an old man in a bathrobe reading a novel. His gaze never rose from the book, never rose to meet the eyes of a lonely being across the way.

A child in the crowd went for a long pass and tripped while running. His body tumbled and skidded along the pavement. His head collided last with the ground. The boy laid motionless facedown on the pavement. One leg was contorted in an extreme angle opposed to the natural setting of his frame. His legs were covered in fresh wounds. They poured blood against the new asphalt. His friends began to scream. They wanted an ambulance. They wanted an adult. They wanted this and that, and all of it was lost on the old man. He sat and waited for the man across the way to look up from his book and meet his gaze.