Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Digby Beaumont: Flash Fiction

Digby Beaumont · Wednesday, October 7th, 2020

Let’s Never Be Apart

Late afternoon, I’m sitting alone in the lounge of the Brighton Holiday Inn remembering Ed, when we were kids, how he’d always want to play the Joker to my Batman, Lex Luther to my Superman.

I drain my whisky glass. A woman in the doorway stares in my direction. Early forties, low cut top, cropped hair bleached pure white.

I look away. When I turn back, she’s making her way over.
“Dean? Oh, my God. Dean, it is you.”
I start to say no, she’s mistaken—
“How are you?” she says. “You look great. Love the beard.”
She sits, green eyes wide, ash-grey flecks in her roots, and I try again.

“I’m—”
“I had a weird feeling about today,” she says. She moistens her lips

with her tongue. “So what are you doing in Brighton? Down on business?” I want to tell her: a funeral, my best friend, Ed. The thought makes

me lightheaded.
She glances back at the doorway, gives me a little, lopsided smile. “So

you didn’t give it all up and become an organic farmer, after all?”
I try to smile back. It comes out a twitch of the lips.
Moving her face close to mine, she lowers her voice. “I always knew

we’d meet again.” Her breath smells of tobacco and toothpaste.
I envy this Dean she believes me to be. Why did it end between them?

I want to touch her hand, say I never gave up hope, in all the years—the dreams, the disappointments, the loneliness.

A waiter appears, asking if we’d like to order something.

This is where I come clean, I tell myself. Sorry, I’m not who you think I am. Like I wasn’t for Ed. I couldn’t save him from jumping in front of that

train.
I turn to the woman. She places her room key on the table. I picture the two of us sharing a bottle of Pinot Noir before leaning into each other all the way up to her room, where she'll transform into Wonder Woman with me her arch-enemy Hades, holding onto bodies that don't want to die. And for a time, at least, we won't think of the darkness falling outside.

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The Naming of Fruit

Not long before Daniel's mother dies, she sits up in bed and leans close to him. "You're very young to be in a place like this," she says. He flinches as she strokes his arm. Is this flirting? he wonders.

Weeks ago the nurses told him, "Tomorrow she's just as likely to know who you are." It made Daniel think of that portrait by Magritte, the one of the man facing the mirror and seeing the back of his own head.

On his next visit he brought his mother fresh fruit: strawberries, peaches and cherries. Her favourites. She named each one. "See? Easy," he said, wiping peach juice from her chin. "Why's it so hard to remember me?"

A memory comes up: his mother when he was a young boy, how she loved to dance. Back home from school, Daniel would find her in the kitchen, singing along and moving to the music on the radio—The Beatles, Stevie Wonder, Fleetwood Mac, James Brown, The Supremes. Her hands would reach out to him. "Dance with me," she'd say. He'd roll his eyes and walk away.

He sits on the edge of her bed. She holds him by the wrists, turns his hands over to examine the palms and sighs, as if she can't find what she hoped would be there.

Later he'll call the nurses into the room. What was she doing out of bed? they'll wonder. He'll remember: "Hey Jude" playing on the bedside radio. Her starting to sway. The reckless smile she gave. How the colour rose in her cheeks as he cradled her in his arms.

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