Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Jack Grapes: Two Poems

Jack Grapes · Tuesday, April 10th, 2018

Gulf of Mexico

My father liked being on a boat
in the Gulf of Mexico,
anchored near one of the oil rigs,
pulling up spade fish and red snapper
and swigging from a bottle
of Jim Beam.

Fried chicken, ham sandwiches,
burgers from Bud's Broiler,
the bagels and lox my father brought
and who knows what else
he and the men ate with their beers.

The boat was slimy with fish
blood, the men bare-chested,
yelling out instructions
as the fish dangled from their lines.

The one time I went with him,
I was ten-years old,
and all I could think about was
would he be able to drive the car
all the way home, would he end up
falling down drunk as we walked
to the car carrying the ice-chest
full of the day's catch.

But now, when I think back on it –
God, he musta had a good time!
I'm so glad my father had a good time.
These men were not Jewish –
his drinking buddies from AA –
they had all that gentile good-ole boy
razzmatazz, red-necks for sure

slapping their hands together
and howling at the midday sun.

My father, who never finished 8th grade,
who read Kant and Hegel and Lenin and Marx –
God, he musta had a good time!
I'm so glad my father had a good time.
Maybe it brought back the days of summer
on the lower east side,
during the Great Depression,
when he was in his early 30s,
without a job, without a home, a man
riding the rails like Jack Dempsey,
and like Dempsey, he fought
in the ring for chump change
so he could rent a room for the night.

I want my father to have a good time.
I want my father to taste the salt of this life,
to carouse with the men and spend the night
with a woman he met in a bar,
to come home with no money in his pockets,
just the matchbooks we found
from Gentillich's Bar on Rampart Street
or the Econo Lodge Motel
a mile from the airport.
Live it up, Dad. Hook those fish,
spray that Jim Beam all over your face,
guzzle it down and stagger back
to the shed where the fish are gutted
and puke your guts out in the parking lot
and drive down the Airline Highway,
turn right on Carrollton Avenue,
past Borden's Ice Cream Parlor,
past Jim's Fried Chicken,
past Ping Pang Pong's Chinese Restaurant,
then a left on Fontainebleau Drive,
then slam into the driveway of that two-story brick
colonial home you bought
selling eye-glasses to the country folk
from Houma and Gretna and Bogalusa,
then fling open the front door and charge
up the stairs to the bathroom
and slam the medicine chest cabinet
to smithereens,
to this life,
to this fishing trip
on the Gulf of Mexico
where you're finally

and irrevocably free.

*

The Fire Next Time

Fire ain’t
what it’s
cracked up
to be
but that’s
another story.
If I say the door
was open,
I’d be lying,
but that’s
how it is
in a poem,
the lying
I mean.
It’s all a lie.
Like you think truth’s
gonna save you
and it ain’t.
Mary’s gonna weep
no matter how
you slice it,
Jesus gonna get nailed
and you’re gonna warm
your toes
by the fire
when you think
life’s all cushy and cozy
only to burst
into flame
when the unseen hand
pokes its finger
into your business
just to see
if your legs curl
from the heat
and if the smoke
from your heart
be white
or black.

(Author photo by Alexis Rhone Fancher)

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