Another Man’s Poison

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Abstract

There are days when the little Horner boy sits alone in the corner and readies his thumb, concentrating hard on just what it is under that pie crust and anxious to find out what exactly he’s getting into and all the time knowing that only the Shadow and Jack Armstrong know for sure and they ain’t talking...
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by John Graham

Soc., Senior

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Ah, yes, rise to greet such a fine morning already slipping into a Coolsbay afternoon. “Coolsbay, Coolsbay, by the beautiful sea, no other place I’d rather be than Coolsbay, Coolsbay by the beautiful sea.” Yes, Coolsbay, who buried my grandfather beneath the waves and found my old man face down drunk in a gutter. For this I salute you, obviously ignorant of your crime. Years I’ve stumbled down your alleys and watched and, why, you’ve even immortalized us in one of your children’s own jump rope recess songs—

Big Jim Hendee, a mean loggin’ man,
He cut the westwood pine
And late one dark and drunken night,
He carved up the sheriff’s wife.

The town was in a frenzy,
So they tied him to a tree
And come the following morning,
They threw him in the sea.

Big Jim cursed them through his teeth,
As he sank beneath the foam
He swore he’d haunt their secrets,
While through the town he roamed.
A fine and dandy myth, Coolsbay, but you need not be so harsh on Grandad. It wasn’t the sheriff’s wife at all, at all, that he rose up against in a fit of passion. And I myself, as did my father, have a similar love who beckons me with open armed delight. So it’s up and step outside to Coolsbay under a blackeyed sun, the violet haze of noon-time blinding my vision. A pity such a late start, but I shall make the effort to regain the time lost. Sip some wine to clear the head and dry cracked throat. Up and with purple jug in hand I’m off for my rendezvous, to rewitness the argument between the ocean and the shore. A rather vicious discussion it was last week, slashing remarks by the waves being knocked back down by cutting replies from the jagged coast. I hope they are in better spirits today. (And have you noticed, Erich, how the wind blows flat over Coolsbay this time of year? Builds to a cool breeze out west over the steel blue waters, surrounds the town for a moment, and then passes by unnoticed on its way to points farther east, over the mountains.)

Coolsbay, my dream city, backdoor to the mountains where hides my soul. Windblown through the Spring and Summer but quiet this time of year. Why act that way—sweet Coolsbay? Are you tired of the harvest, wish to slow down and relax and fry the fish you’ve caught? “Noon o’clock and all’s still on the dock—the fishermen have all flown home.” Home to all the houses gleaming white-washed with sunny blue trim and every doorknob is exactly wrist high, for convenience, I suppose. (Even the dinghies slumber pale against the rubber tires at the wooden docks, scarred on the bows where barnacles have been scraped and cast aside.)

“Well hello Mrs. Nose-in-the-air, what a pleasant surprise to see you on this lovely Coolsbay afternoon and what a fine little bubbly blueeyed bouncing baby boy you have wrapped up in that carriage. No, I’m sorry, I cannot come to dinner, however much I’d like to, but you see I already have a date and you know how the neighbors would talk. Oh, I beg your pardon. I certainly meant no offense but you must understand that I did not know you cared not for the juice of the vine. I myself have been known to partake on rare and special occasions and truly this fine day is one to offer such a toast. Which is why I must be running, off and over to the shore.”

(And do you remember, Erich, when the evening fades
into the town, gulls on the horizon seem to rise out of the sea, some speckled—some gray, to glide slowly down the air currents and quietly settle home again among the rocks which are the peninsula.)

Open on the peninsula reeling in my mind to the silence of the gentle fingertip caress of the ocean breeze. Hard cracked rocks, yes, left to confront the edge of the sea while stands of Douglas fir grow quietly, a backdrop to the stage. Times were when the West would bellow its disdain and send waves of deep green fists smashing against the bleached gray coast, surf splintering upward and collapsing back into the foam ready to continue over and over while the granite walls stood silent and determined and always the rocks were bruised and always the waters receded. But today the sea sleeps calm while its sundanced silver ten thousand eyes wink a secret back at me. Mocking and in cynic disguise, the waters roll methodically, again and yet again, against visible wounds once inflicted, slowly smoothing out the scars. And this the setting to unfold and creep on over the metallic bowl, up over the jagged scars laid bare in the light, and into these red-crazed eyes. The sun grow cold and blind! Blinding, I raise my jug, I drink my wine behind the violet curtain, I’m ready.

No more, great God, no more to be taken by surprise. This time I meet head on what crawls within the shadows. Dive, blessed guardian of the uncovered light of day, dive away from my sight and let me face my tormentor! One moment a slime scaled and dragon horned demon crouching behind every corner with claws of sick black bone ready to cut deep into the flesh and roar with delight to cast one more into the pit. Or then to change and ease upon you like a goddess of the West, golden and dressed in a turquoise gown with a smile and chalk white arms embrace and crush you unawares, startled in a dream. Evil and devil, daughter of the midnight grin, come and this time it shall be your heart ripped out and left to be devoured piece by piece by carion birds. Come! It is time! Steal in on the dying breath of the wind, crawl into the deafening void of silence. Chill the air to make your entrance and I am waiting. Ready, I stand at last before you face to face. No more am I hid, no more shall I hide. Tonight I greet you before you stalk me down. No hunter and no hunted. Come! It is time. I welcome
you with empty jug as even now I watch the ladies dance upon the shore, “dance, sweet angels, dance, sweet naked angels.”

(There are times, my dear Erich, when one wishes to be alone, when one, quite voluntarily, walks away outside the town to sit eyes shut upon the soft meadow grasses and listen to the songs and sound, content to be alone and knowing that soon he will reenter the circle of bland handshakes and friendly smiles. This time spent is only temporary, the passing of the moments each dissolving into one another. Alone but yet still able to share the experience.

But there are other times, Erich, when one does not desire solitude but is dragged screaming and kicking to the edge of the precipice, eyes wildly open in rage and terror; immune forever to the joys of his neighbor. Left empty outside the past, unrelated to the present, and uncertain about the days to come. His aloneness is absolute. Deaf ears hear him gasping and choking and struggling to regain a foothold and all the time he’s falling madly in midair.

The situation is so ironic, Erich, for the choice is never yours. You stand and turn your face but will you see me as I enclose you in the fringe of light and do you truly think to see me as I slide up your spine and down deep into your soul?)

The day drops slow as the angels dance and soon the two shall mix. Black, evil woman. Fiend of my dreams! You stalk unheard upon the darkness. Tensed and dropping slow behind the rising mass of speckled gray. I cower no more against my doom, no more shall I fear the night. Come, proud Proteus, arise from the sea; swirl in feathered spirals upward in the evening blue; gill to gull to granite rock; burst strong in revolt against this silence! Winged vibrations pick up on the breeze. Calls shrill flat out over quiet bay, a warning, a signal. Come and swell over me, fish to flight to fading light, envelop and guard me from her blackened charms. Single shadows against the sun now one to mesh the dark with white, blood to blood to blood, and, now invade the rocky shore and followed behind the shadow the claws of a queer-eyed cat.)