Stories from “The Waste Land”

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by Patricia Frey

Journalism, Soph.

Stetson

There I saw one I knew, and stopped him, crying: Stetson!

T. S. Eliot

Stetson! Stetson!

What a name to call someone yet that was his and it settled well with me and all the rest of 'em. It was a name that made us all glad that he was gone a lot, running away down the green valleys through gray-stick crevices. It was good that we did like it for that because he was always moving and never being there or here and we always wanted him.

Stetson!

Such a thing to stand at the edge of the dog-mud porch and creak back and forth on the rotting boards and call for him. And the black dog would be with him joggedly cutting up and down all those hills and the both of them escaping into the tender land.

Stetson!

He truly did run wild on our farm and our farm was endless as the day was long in the hot summer. The old house standing like a castle, all in red brick there in the farm yard with a rounded front spire and we used to want him to come in all the time. To look out there and as far as the eye could see were little specks of black and brown cows walking in the hills but never him. Horses nibbling at the smooth ground,
heads down and tails swishing and sometimes the swish gave you to think that it was him going by between those tails.

Stetson!

Calling him forever and ever but we never knew where he was out there in the flat land among the hills, that land that stretched for a small space and had corn stalks standing yellow and half broken when it was a wet winter field. Then we knew that he was out there in the snow not leaving any tracks and crawling in and out of the snow fences. He was everywhere out there following the thin thread of stream that was winding its way through the valley every day, out there where the wind mill stood still because underneath there was only a barren well and the wind never blew.

Stetson!

Come back to us, down the mud roads, down the wet and juty rolling hills that are gentle and tender like a rough shod blanket, down the country lane where a lot of life comes and goes. Where are you—behind the new harvest bin that stands tall and throws a shadow on the cracked house? Behind the old wagons with their wood hook-pulls lodged in the ground? Come back because the long rope hangs dirty in the afternoon sun and it has a black tire on the end that no one swings on.

Stetson!

But then we knew, we all knew that he was part of the tender land we lived on and that all his long days would be spent out there and there was nothing our tired mouths could say to ever make him come in, come back, or come home. He was the muddy earth, the long stream, the tall grass, the bent corn stalks, the withered sticks, the gray rocks. We knew this and yet...

Stetson!

We called...
The Wind

There is always another one walking beside you
Gliding wrapt in a brown mantle, hooded
I do not know whether a man or a woman
—But who is that on the other side of you?

T. S. Eliot

I came from a small town and God knows where it is now—maybe on the other side of that muddy, muddy river I crossed when I ran through the night to escape so long ago. That's where it all started—born into that small town.

Yes, someone said to me that I should go away because the town held nothing for me. It was always that someone who whispered in my ear telling me that I had to go away—do not be afraid of the new faces, it said, seek out the new or you'll die and live out your good years in the cemetery right along with the rest of them.

There I grew up and played in the black dust that is the land with my hair streaming down long and dirty. There I would sit in the middle of the yard and watch the horses go by and the tractors and the long-faced farmers. Then I'd walk barefoot over to the blacksmith shop and stare at the welding light even though I knew it was supposed to blind me—but I didn't care, I just didn't care.

Run with me in the green meadows, run with me on the gravel road, run with me to the hill above the town and look down—as I told you, nothing there. You see why I had to go, you see why I had to run away across the river and never go back, you see?

Messing in the dust and dirt of the town and walking on the wood plank boards in front of the big-windowed stores. In one and out another and looking at nothing and watching the people that did look at something, and I wondered what they saw. I asked them, what is here, what do you find in this town? No answer ever, just long looks of deep understanding of
themselves and I thought them foolish.

I think one day the wind blew through town and the whisper was very loud so I followed the wind to get away from them all. To get away from their long looks at me and their quiet talks, to get away from their silence, to get away from the good just so I could find someplace that had some rot and was proud of it. Ten years or more or however long it took to get through school and I was finally through after all those times of getting up in the morning. Forgetting my books at home and then again on the desks at school and again out in the cornfield or behind the old barn after I'd been there with somebody, somebody that was different than me, you know.

After all those years of going to school, I was finished and ready to leave town, so I followed that one wind that one day right on out of that small town. That small town that wasn't much more than forty empty buildings standing lonely in a flat place. The wind was long and strong and it carried me far away and I left without many of them knowing, they never cared, I figured, anyway.

I am not alone out here where I escaped to—someone is walking beside me, I don't know who it is but the voice is there, always and forever, pushing me on and farther away from the small town. The voice says go to the big town where life is really real but I say hey, wait a minute—where is this big town? I can't go any farther with what I want to say because I'm not there yet, I'm not at the big town.

The wind died somewhere—died and left me out in the middle, I can see that now. Hey, voice, where have you been taking me? Where is that someone walking beside me I say, and the voice says turn around and I do but there is nothing. I made it away from the small town I was born in like the voice told me to do and I didn't get any farther than this empty place I'm at now.

God
Why did the wind have to go and die just when I was on my way. I didn’t make it, make it to the big town. Hey, voice, you still there—where’s the wind, who’s beside me, when does the big town come?

HEY

Parallax

by Morgan Hewitt

Elementary Education, Jr.

The butterfly, turned brown by dust of wheat,
Her effortless abandonment complete,
Threads languidly like syrup from a spoon
Across the amber sky of afternoon.

Waiting for you, I sit and think a smile:
That I might catch or counterfeit her style.
With nothing done and nothing much to do,
I contemplate my flying free in lieu

Of sitting, sun-warmed, bound to earth like rock.
Then you arrive. Your laughter comes as shock,
As if you know and ridicule my thought;
Your sympathies too distant to be bought.

I move to take you coldly by the hand
Caught in a mood you could not understand.