

Light Speed

He fashioned a little scope one day, full of lenses and apertures, but did not know what he would see. Dimly at first, then more brightly as he turned knobs and adjusted angles, he saw a man bent over, at work on his own scope. He looked through the thing every night, at the man who was somewhere else.

He noticed one night that the other man enjoyed a bologna sandwich, and a drop of mayonnaise squeezed from between the slices onto his shirt. The shirt—bottle green, with pockets—was the very one he had ruined with a drop of mayonnaise from a particularly good sandwich. Yet his shirt had long since been thrown in the bin. *Light speed*, he realized.

Did this man who owned his shirt, ate his bologna sandwiches, and fiddled with the knobs of a little scope, did he know that these things had already been done, that he rehearsed for a play already performed?

Did the other man see him, the man thought, did the other man see himself in the future? Will he ever know it is himself years later, or just go on munching cold cuts? What will the other man see when his distant cousin no longer sits down of an evening to gaze?

But that would be all wrong, he thought. The man upon whom he gazed would in turn look into his scope and see an even younger man fiddling with a scope. And that younger man looked, he thought, at a boy who was also himself. The boy, he thought, should never press his eye against the cold ring of the eyepiece.

Heliotropism Is Not My Concern

These leaves insist
that the price of falling is to be mine.

But why should their whispery will be worked
upon one who only wanted to enjoy their autumny business?

The distant mountain is full of trees, and now am I
to expect this pleading pushiness everywhere?

It is no wonder the dog quickens to a trot
when they scuttle into the street

as if we held hostage the chlorophyll
that would restore their drying souls to splendor.

They can go to hell is what we think,
because who could foot the bill

and there are just so damned many
that having done so once would mean

a misery of a future
propping up their single-minded turning toward the sun.

Dear Mr. L

Once I hired a girl to do the filing because I was in love with how she said "water cooler." I learned my lesson when she filed "Napoleon" under "garments, archaic." What were her personal charms to me then, under the wrathful cloud of middle management? I informed her of my decision over appetizers, and I have never made a mistake like that one again.

First I suggest you try every variant under which you believe it could be filed by one less seasoned in these matters than yourself: try "Lincoln log," even "chambered nautilus." You never know what a neophyte might do. My own such item is filed under "South Seas," for personal reasons dating back to the acquisition of "experience, nautical," but then my system is idiosyncratic, and I don't expect anyone else to use it. Other possibilities might include "trick knee" or "Cool Hand Luke."

Misfiling has brought greater men than I to the rending of sackcloth and gnashing of teeth, I can tell you. Things will become out of hand. The scurrying of underlings can do nothing for you, my friend, when "alarm clock" gets crossed up with "humidor." Eyes bulge with tears. Veins tear. I wish you all the best in your search, but I warn you: your failings have been noted.

Tonnage

If an ant is made large like an elephant,
the spyglass of its abdomen

funnels up a black storm
then clears to yellow like a sick day in Cairo.

In it, you can spy distant armies marching.
It's a hot time in there, a desert

full of clanking metal
and bottles of watered gin.

The tall hats of the cavalry
amble down the dunes.

And if the elephant in its turn
is pinched right down to ant size,

it clicks and sifts out a sound like waves
and it wants, you can tell by its twig of a trunk,

to go on shrinking until
it slips between grains of sand,

until atoms swim by in the dark
and the tramping of all those boots
reminds it of the tonnage it left behind.

James Heflin