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And He Died Partly On Some Shady Shore

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Abstract

In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"The scene was hectic, as it always is. The men-commuters were running to the work-bus in a graybusinesssuit-and-attachécase type-way. The younger set were milling around (as the younger set will do) with tennis rackets and golf clubs and radios and suit cases and mod clothes and "Dutch Boy" caps and dirty sweatshirts and toe-hole sneakers and guitars."

Cover Page Footnote

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And He Died Partly On Some Shady Shore

By No. 201279

The scene was hectic, as it always is. The men-commuters were running to the work-bus in a graybusinesssuit-and-attachécase type-way. The younger set were milling around (as the younger set will do) with tennis rackets and golf clubs and radios and suit cases and mod clothes and "Dutch Boy" caps and dirty sweatshirts and toe-hole sneakers and guitars.

Only the guitars seemed out of place. Not the guitars that were carried or held or leaned upon—they fit in. But two guitars that were fingered by two bearded tenors and connected by a pseudo-soprano did not belong. The difference most readily seen was that they were alive and not silent, yet hummed only for themselves. The two guitars and three small voices were partly here and concrete and yet also were far removed. The song was of some shady shore or perhaps a high grassland or silent slope close to the horizon. No, not the content of their songs—that wouldn't stand out. Probably they mouthed pious platitudes or perhaps impious irony. But the composition they fingered—that's what impressed. Now soft, flying, free, light as sunshine, combining nature with nostalgia. Now swirling, pulsating, combining passion with platonism. No, they did not fit in. They were not of the solid here and now. They were not mindful only of thoughts of trying to sidestep some goddam kid with that goddam big bag or wishing this old hag in front would either "move it" or go to hell. They sang of the not now. They were not of the here.

Sitting near this island sanctuary was an old man. He was not moving, not looking around. He seemed not even to sense the bustle about him. There was a case near him—not an attaché style nor a luggage style. It was hard to classify it.

He and the guitar player-singers were seated on a long bench in a waiting alcove; he on the end near the archway, the three someplace-else near the middle. Like his proximate companions, he seemed to be somewhere else. Perhaps he was with them on some bygone grassy hillside or maybe he had his own island.

Now he did begin to move. Not up but rather over in a circular motion. Strange — he made no effort to stop himself. Leaning, sliding, falling, falling. Falling over the end of the bench down, down, down onto the floor. Stretching, sliding, slipping, cutting, bleeding, oozing, exhausting.

"Ignore it." "Walk around." "Step over it — it's in the way." "Get away from it." Only about three and a half people noticed. The rest just continued in their well-worn tracks.

Oh yes, a doctor and a nurse did presently come, but it was no use trying. The floor was sticky red, and so was the head. They tried oxygen, hand pump, needles. But —

Now a small crowd had begun to gather. "I saw it all. He just rolled off the bench and knocked his head open. No, it didn't jerk around or nothin'. Yeah, but so what — he's dead, ain't he?"

Even with this increase in activity, the quiet guitars were never silent. Three heads never turned; the tempo never broke. The quiet, humble beat of the soft tide could barely be sensed above the angry turmoil of the turbulent seas. But the shore of the island was still there.

The body was wheeled out and barricades were set up around the mess. Some big, slow mop-wielder came around in about twenty minutes and slopped some water on the floor to dilute the mess and then went on to move it from the floor to the mop to the bucket (and then down the drain). He finished up and then removed the barricades and went away. Everything returned to normal but the case still sat at the end of the bench.

And the player-singers continued to play and sing. They stayed on some shady shore.

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As the concrete flows onward
towards a screaming leaden crevasse
smothered by a hardening element . . . progress
A tree laying upon its side
crying out as timbers are slewn from its side
and crucified and buried beneath plasterboard
— a stagnant heap of human refuse
An earth trembling from explosions
a broken hill lies dying
as its limbs fly skyward
All in the name of a reverent god . . . progress
destruction of a wooded hill top
a sandbox constructed from open fields
Yes — progress truly tis marvelous

—FRANS WETERRINGS