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Floyd Whyte's Toll Booth

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Floyd Whyte's Toll Booth

Abstract

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

"White flashes leaped between my trembling hands as I vigilantly sighted the vertex where the lonely cinder bed joined the streaming markers of the vacant road. I raised my sweaty hand to massage eyes wearied by the insults of the pavement, but the portent of the assault beguiled relief."

Cover Page Footnote

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An unending path pierces the neighborless neighborhood—
An obscure night hides the islands on its way
Hides too the one who walks it. . .

with its people
its fences
its antennae
its meters, boundaries, lines, drives,
newly-seeded-lawns

Silence alone avails the sojourner of ears that hear;
Eyes that perceive—
Sensitive to the cries of the fatherless child;
folds his clean white handkerchief
joins and passes by

Attentive to grief,
Darkness swallows the mourners

—DONALD SCHWAB

Searching out laughter,
Jubilation colored now by a quickened memory. . .

the blue island trimmed with white and suicide,
red island closed in oceans of thick cancerous grass,
white island standing less firm in the near dark—
the Realtor's sign marks its cry. . .

Pavement pounded, eyes ahead, the sailor passes silently
Seeks that certain-numbered harbor
Sheltered from shouts; secure in even tide;
apart from lonely and unsafe waters. . .

Arms that reach and protect engulf him—
At peace in his pastels, vessels constrict—
a memory labors to dissolve walls that could not hide,
people whose cry he heard,
tensions acutely felt,
needs unmet,
seeds unsown

Good God! The paperboy must be paid,
The butter passed.

Floyd Whyte's Toll Booth

White flashes leaped between my trembling hands as I vigilantly sighted the vertex where the lonely cinder bed joined the streaming markers of the vacant road. I raised my sweaty hand to massage eyes wearied by the insults of the pavement, but the portent of the assault beguiled relief.

It is done. The burden of expectations is unzipped.

I turned to Paul, my companion in exile.

—You thought it. I thought it. Together we have done it.

Doesn't that sound ponderous as hell?

—Jees, Tob, we have.

A tired professor was recalling fond memories of what never happened. Napoleon was born and then died. Man has an intellect and knows things. Numbers reason. Animals and plants live. I am alive. Education is dead. I am alive. I must succeed. Degree. I am learning nothing of living—I am dying. I don't care. Indifference cannot be tolerated.

Bless me father for I have sinned. Windows are not to see through. Crucifixes are popular. People pray to themselves. The dead must die again. Hope is agony prolonged. Help, help, your soothing sweet words comb my hair but the wind blows unchecked. Indifference cannot be tolerated.

Hair, carressing soft beauty with a fragrance so gentle, clasped to retain that moment of closeness. A nervous smile reveals that the invitation of eyes is a paltering epic. Do you love me? Yes, I love you. Yes, I love finger nails. Yes, I love martinis. Yes, I love trains. Yes, I love lamp posts. Yes. Indifference cannot be tolerated.

The girlish voice tweaked out the final notes of Don't Fence Me In. The gym chuckles in mock applause and little Floyd Whyte solemnly accepts the grateful appreciation of his audience. Happy, happy am I, Floyd Whyte, that you are happy happy. You see not your false happiness. The ritual offering of youthful promise to the Minotaur of war you see not. Declare your duty to fight and die for you are called to consummate the sacrifice of human folly. The frantic scramble of cloistered minds to be free you see not. You demurely mumble of order, peace, and simple sameness. Love as a grasping need to be loved you see not. You marry a girl because she looks at you. Middle age is pleasant. Seams can be let. A noble job is yours—on lonely nights you raise your hand in benediction to the heretics of highway hypocrisy, who flee on the treadmill of tradition. You do not see. You merely tend a toll both.

—Sir, may we turn around and go back through your booth?

—Certainly.

It came with a condescending smile. That smile was yours, Floyd Whyte. You watched two feeble wills turn back to your sedentary middle age of stagnation. You took the money. You gave the ticket. You allowed the question to rotate unanswered. You inspire our prayer of despair.

—Tob, Tob, there's hope. If we must go back, there must be hope in doing it. Hope. This is our hope.

Floyd Whyte, to you I dedicate my mediocrity.

—CROSS WHYTE