

# Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

## Peter Neil Carroll: Two Poems

Peter Neil Carroll · Wednesday, January 6th, 2021

### Hitchhiker

Driving through blue-collar suburbs, I see  
a thumb shoot up, brake fast, taking her in—  
light hair, tight jeans, lots of mascara.

*Stop here*, she orders in half-a-mile, pointing  
to a solitary Chevy parked at an grimy curb.  
Someone, she claims, has stolen her purse.

Doors unlocked, I search for the keys, find  
none. The trunk is sealed. Neither locksmith  
nor a felon, I can't retrieve her stuff.

Though helpless, she's not distraught, rather  
calmly asks if I'd drive her home. A poker term  
comes to mind: in for a nickel, in for a dime,

but first she reaches into the back seat, saying  
*you might as well take it*, offers my reward—  
a gallon container of peanut oil. Can I refuse?

Entering the city, I break silence, ask her  
what she does. *Dancer*. And I guess that's why  
she wears so much makeup. Where, I wonder.

She names a well-known strip club, tourist bait.  
I'm stuck for a response, decide not to question  
her dance style, but inquire about the clientele.

Mostly married guys, she says, lonely guys, losers.  
I'm surprised. My thoughts turn to my lucky self.  
*Just lookers*, she adds. They're not allowed to touch.

*Here*, she announces, in front of a redbrick row house  
on a tree-lined street, *My halfway house*—and leaves  
me to ponder what I'll do with so much peanut oil.

\*

## The Old Flame

Portland's gray streets feel midwestern, nestled  
under cloud and drizzle, small saloons the best  
havens from the wet, where my pal plays piano.

He's my excuse for coming, but it's Valentines,  
an old flame I hope to find is on my mind. She  
sells natural food in a town that begins with *The*.

February 14, perfect day to find women in bars,  
I hadn't expected a marathon: Cassidy's, Metro,  
Satyricon, Aldo's, Ruby Hearts and more.

We do them all. At Bogart's club, Dave meets  
a lady friend who knows all about the *The* place,  
offers to guide our expedition to the grocery.

In the morning, we head east, past Multnomah Falls,  
Horsetail, Bridal Veil and not much further to bingo!  
a road sign, *The Dalles*, with a scruffy auto row

and a downtown grocery selling brown rice, tofu,  
an alphabet of vitamin pills. I step inside, pause  
to share a long stare across the counter, then a hug.

Her freckles have faded, her hair a shade darker,  
she's pregnant. Right now, she's holding a mop,  
says one of her goats has just peed on the floor.

A Midwest farm girl, she grew up on horses; me,  
I grew up knowing beans about oats and goats,  
sheep and manure, not to mention quinoa and kale.

Herbal tea she pours, a nervous look in her eyes,  
not thrilled to see me. *It wasn't meant to be*, she says,  
though we can still look at each other for hours.

*Photo credit: Jeannette Ferrary*

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