

Arabic

by Daniel Harris

I would see her at the gym in the mornings. She usually worked out from six to seven and then took a Pilates class from seven to eight. She was probably a grandmother, but a well preserved one. She had the hips of a mother and the usual dimensions of a well-formed woman in her sixties. She had dyed blond hair in a Dutch-boy style. Her remarkable feature was a perfectly round face with a ready smile and sparkling eyes. I noticed the few times I used a machine after her, that she could pull some hefty weights. She wore an engagement ring and a wedding ring, though I never heard her talk of a husband, either to women or men. Many of the men of her age flirted with her and hit on her in an innocuous way. She seemed to enjoy their attention, if not encourage it. I had never spoken to her in the three years I had been coming to the gym, but then the mostly conservative WASP population of the town, looking at my nose, thought I was some crazy Semitic artist from New York City. Yesterday she was waiting to use a machine I was using and asked my name.

—Jack. Jack Mahler

—Ah, you are the artist? Bill spoke very highly of you.

Bill was a politician I had befriended when we were in physical therapy together when I first arrived in town.

—Well, I said, you know Bill is a politician and a lawyer. You can't trust what he says.

—He says you are a good sculptor and painter. He has shared some of your stories with some other members of the gym.

—Sounds like Bill.

—If you are so good, why haven't I heard of you?

—You got me there. I've been hiding in Brooklyn all my life. But if you send me an e-mail, I'll send you links to images of my work.

—Is it a difficult e-mail?

—No. Here it is: [jackmahler1 at nfb dot art](mailto:jackmahler1@nfb.art). That's an Arabic 1.

—Oh, she said, turning and walking away.

Later I could see her talking to other members of the gym and pointing to me and mouthing, "He's an Arab."

I thought seriously about moving back to Brooklyn where nobody cared, or if they cared too much, they were considered extremists.

