

Life Among the Epiphytes

by John Olson

Have you ever seen anyone die? It will alter your life. Because you suddenly realize that anxiety was worth something after all, and was a coin of the human condition, imprinted with hectic symbols, some of which resemble cypress, others more like Frankenstein: stumbling, groping, yet powerful, flinging villagers aside in an agony of misunderstood intentions. Good lord, how the long day accumulates, then falls off the edge of the planet. It is at times like that that I open the refrigerator door and find more emotion than I know what to do with. Much of it frozen. I have to break it in the sink. Its beauty is more amusing that way. I don't even know what I'm talking about anymore. Was it death? I think it was death. Here is what I envision for the afterlife: people rising on an escalator. After that, the picture gets very muzzy. I see God wandering around with a couple of books, talking to Socrates. Here on earth, our faces are haunted by mirrors. Time is patched together with photographs, most of which are digital now and posted on Facebook, where fragments of conversation ensue, detonating assumptions, hungering for more affirmation, more and more friends, and Egypt in a parenthetical aside, as if it weren't so much a country as an allegory of sand and eternity too large for protoplasm but somehow ok for Facebook. Personalities get nervous there. There is nothing to ground them. It's all milk and electricity. The pale meditation of a computer screen upon which a few words get loose and go wandering around in the mind creating thoughts and glorioles. Chrome bumpers laughing at their own distortions. There is no disgrace in watching television. Not when infinity is in jail and misanthropy is easier to bear than blood loss or industry. One easily forgets how much cotton goes into the making of shirts, how much finery gets implicated in swimming. I like swimming it makes me feel anonymous as glue. It is a vague pleasure to talk to the hallucinations at the bottom of the pool. But does existence grow if it is pulled into the water, or does it shrink? There is redemption in a

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gargoyle's dimple, romance in magnets and a palatial ambivalence in which to store my indecisions. It is for these reasons that I so enjoy the ambience of the hothouse, and the parables of the epiphytes hanging from the glass paneling, entangling the opacity in luscious ambiguities of light, and everything wet like metaphors.

