

Credenza

by Ann Bogle

Now the house is empty of romance except a potted flowering plant from my mother for Valentine's Day. No man has set foot in my museum since I moved here. One man has set foot. The owner's brother to see about the gasket under the toilet. The Comcast installers, twice. The man and his son who sold me the corner desk and cupboards. The cupboards have a name that I'll think of before I'm done. I'm showing you that I'm not always right.

It was Abe Lincoln's 200th birthday, so that is how I'll remember it -- the day, the time. The years I lived in Binghamton I visited Irish bars in the evening, and I had many Irish friends, not from Ireland, but Americans whose ancestors were from Ireland. And one of them told me he could move to Ireland merely by proving his heritage, but he stayed in Binghamton afterall; he bought a house with a turret where his son plays drums. Later I wrote five short stories about him and about our plan to move to Canada, something we never did nor visited, even though we threatened it when Irish bars were closing, and we pretended to be bored by cloudy Binghamton. He had his birthday Feb. 12, and I'd talked to him earlier that day. He was worried about the bathroom renovation, and he asked me to give him some paint -- cobalt blue with copper in it -- but I laughed it off, as if: fat chance I'd send him paint. He was not enjoying his birthday in the least, which distressed me. Perhaps I'll send him a gift certificate for paint.

He and our Greek-American friend, Tomas, sat in the first row and smoked in the original Jerry Rothenberg course. I sat in the back row with Deb; she and I smoked when Tomas and Michael were done smoking and before Jerry smoked again. Other people smoked besides. We retained everything we learned. We learned more than usual for a seminar. My presentation was on Dada in Zurich, and while I talked, Michael drew my lips in his sketchpad, and this

drawing became a monument to friendship that started then.

When I met the other Michael in Texas, I dubbed him Michael to remind me of my friend, but other people called him Mikey, and I might have realized early but didn't or wouldn't that I was not replicating my happy days but was creating a bomb that would last a lifetime and that would turn out to be no one's fault, just something - - a timeframe -- that happened and that contained its own happinesses.

I wanted to say a few times that you are Irish, but you had said that already, so I thought it might not add much to the conversation to repeat it. It might add too much. I might put myself in the position of iterating stories of Irish men. My friend, Maureen, writes about Irish women writers and other Irish people. I went to one of her talks in NYC about the son of a businessman from Brooklyn named James Johnson Sweeney who became curator of MoMA.

The rest I told you, that I began to write male characters in fiction for the first time -- I began to impersonate men movie stars in the mirror -- I crossed over. I thought I would refuse to finish my novel about Texas and leave it as a short story, really leave it that way, without writing it in the first person, male point of view, but in the third person semi-omniscient point of view. A novel that spans 30 pages after all the cuts have been made, story with a complex chronological design that introduces a novel that doesn't exist. The woman in the short story is less interesting than the man. The reader might care very little about her, because she is emotionally frozen, immobilized in her apartment by her inability to make a decision about wrongdoing about which she knows almost nothing. The other people in her world are much more active and engaged. She is a poet who writes three poems and contracts to write little or nothing. Someone being funny might think it's a novella about writer's block rather than about a rock band named ISM-GISM.

Marie Ponsot told us in her talk about the writer's duty that "sex" had been referred to in her mother's past as "rendering the debt." What we call love or banging. I like your Pendleton sweater. I enjoyed your stories. There was such an opportunity to see each other in the evenings. If only I hadn't sworn off shaving -- it was awkward sticking to it all weekend -- I saw myself as beyond shaving when I swore it off. Let's cut this up and send it. You might think that's the end, but no.

There was a man, a Harley Davidson salesman I met in AA, with whom I ate at Perkins many, many nights. I told him he seemed Irish to me, though his last name was German. The next time I saw him, he told me he'd asked his mother who said he was three-quarters Irish and one-quarter German. Why wouldn't his mother or his father have mentioned Irish blood until then? My aesthetician, Kathy, went on a disappointing date with him -- the motorcycle salesman we'd picked out for her. He sells cars now that the bottom has fallen out. It was the car salesman she found so one-note; then he got pissed off that she'd told him that on the phone. That is how I came to avoid going in for salon treatments -- waxes, haircuts, color touch-ups, facials, manicures, pedicures -- something I was given to before that.

