

Free Country

by Ann Bogle

Then I drive home over winter-rutted roads in the rain, thinking of the sin or error or wrong I have done. It is wrong to let another man inside me while my man is home, right in assuming I was gone overnight. Now the men are switching so there is not one man but two men aware of the other, investigating, someone will say “pandering”. Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, even Fridays, Sundays, the phone is on the pillow, but on Saturdays, it rings in its cradle. Saturdays I become a purveyor of film history, film noir. I tell my woman friend the new man's penis is too large. I tell her once. She asks me later whether I have asked about it at the doctor's—large cock, she calls it, and I say I told the doctor my boyfriend's in a wheelchair, not another man's too wide for me. The doctor addresses hot flashes. Her office is my temple. She illustrates by example, “Men who lose their testicles to cancer have the worst hot flashes.”

“We're getting older,” my boyfriend says, after the cell phone rings in the rain. “Where are you?” he says. “Near the Walker,” I say. “Where were you?” he says. “I couldn't go walking, so I went driving,” I say, and he accepts it, because of my years of driving and his of lying, because of my liking his lying once I got near to it. “It's 44 in New York,” he says. “It's 44 in Minneapolis,” I say, happy to be even.

“The manager of The Who lives in 2K,” he says. “The Who is still a band?” I say. “They played at the Super Bowl last year,” he says. “How could I forget it?” I say, feeling my age and the meaninglessness of female life. “She had knee replacement surgery,” he adds.

“Which matters more,” I say, “that the poetry editor's brother and photo curator lives above you and can connect to your poetry or the manager of The Who lives down the hall and can advise you on knees?”

“Do you remember the Lithuanian temptress?” he asks. A rut
insults my tire. He would have seen his children last night, but ruts
on Long Island injured his former wife's tire, debilitated it, she said.
He doesn't lie as I make my way home. It's a free country.

