

Gerontophile: An Imposition

by S.H. Gall

His shirt, striped, fuzzy, is of fabric like velour and wreaks havoc with sunlight.

His seat faces the aisle, I am sitting forward-faced across the aisle, we are on a half-full city bus, this afternoon.

It is a funny shirt so I smile. I am not smiling because of the shirt alone, though—he, himself, is kind of funny, and in his way beautiful.

Eyes, dregs of milky tea, a little magnified by lenses in cheap frames. Hair, lakewater gray, and chopped short. It is not these things I am staring at, but his hands, wonderful large hands; the index finger of his right hand has a band-aid taped over the tip. A deformative effect: every time my glance returns to that finger I am startled slightly because it looks like he has no fingernail, like his skin has grown over it, and shiny from some alien use. Oh, those hands... poetic are they in this sad dull particular moment. He twists them in his lap, then holds them light together, puts them on his thighs—lovely big thighs!—and they are loose-skinned, kind of fat and glovelike, so expressive. I can feel them on me, their size, heft, softs and hards. I am staring rudely but he's paying not the slightest attention, and his withdrawn daze is familiar, the days of life's tail spent sitting, for too damn long, on a bus, alone. Some of us are drawn to this.

His lips, resembling in their sucked red pallor an anus. I would like to lick and kiss them, take them light in my teeth. Would he kiss me, I sigh inward. The answer is No; well... there isn't an answer. They are healthy looking lips, shiny, with no sores or callouses, just simple

big ethnic—Jewish? Polish?—fruitlike lips. And it's bright now, we're passing under dozens of yellow trees which dapple us indifferently, produce a speechless richness bigger than light, the autumn resonant.

Big clunky shoes, of course. Black, or brown, it's hard to say. Then gray socks and—yes!—a gap where skin shows between sock and trouser cuff. Whitest skin on the body, there. I am pleased and my eyes move up, unabashed, and take in his groin, which I do not actually see because his pants fit very loosely but I stare at that area, out of habit. Then the shirt with those stripes in hues of brown and yellow which were current the year before I was born. It is not that the shirt is from a thrift shop but that he is the man whose shirts will go to the thrift shop (when he dies). It gets to me.

Six blocks from my stop and the elastic air slips to hang from time, creating a chasm for me. I am getting up. I am taking four steps and sitting again, by him. The bus stops at a traffic light. I am just some man, just bored, my move gone unnoticed even by myself, it seems. Nothing has happened. My arm is coming up, twisting, coming to rest on the seat behind his body like we're on a first date at the movies, we are touching a little as I do this, brushing and bumping and he is finally looking at me, quick, then back forward—nothing is happening, please—but it is not over. My arm is now curling in—the light has changed, taken on a pinkness, and the bus is roaring on—acceleration pulls his body to me, so fast it cannot help but seem violent, and I push my lips against his and taste mouth air. He is straining and jerking, set to yelp, I break it off, pull my arm to myself again, he is startled and looks unlike he did, yes awake now.

And I am cold now, shrinking and locked back in time.

He is wiping his lips—but not furiously—and his eyes are huge and startled and he's making noises of indignant protest—but not of outrage—and he is not getting up, not getting away. His face, dark

planes of fear and doubt—but then softening. His own chasm yawns. Well, he says, now composed. Aren't you a special find.

His voice high and lilting.

The other passengers? Have they all pretended not to see? But they have noticed, for it is either louder or more quiet on the bus. And he is leaning back and away now, not in the sense of avoidance and defense, but to appraise me better. And I am looking at him, sucking my lips, knitting my brows, finally smiling, offering the one stately nod. Twelve or fifteen seconds have passed. I pull the cord to request my stop. He follows me when I get off the bus, and we go up to my room to kiss properly and fuck. Nothing has happened, but nothing, after all, has happened anyway.

