

David Sapp

O Comrade, My Comrade

O comrade, my comrade, years ago you played the Bolshevik; that workers' poster, a hammer and sickle, hung in your office. We indulged your feigned idealism. It was endearing, your collar a chameleon, blue to white to blue. What now, your convenient politics, your suburban proletariat? You stumbled upon your level of bungle, enticed into the office of chief obfuscator, a headline in *Pravda*. You saw the fall before the ledge, yet perversely, your toe tested the abyss, the peril, the thrill, the truth. Imprudent arrogance. You will likely suckle upon adoration. Didn't you know?

O comrade, my comrade, the cheap suit of autocrat does not fit. Admit it now before you are lost in pockets and sleeves. The seduction! You were compelled, so you say, by baubles, the flattery, the prestige, an inexorable momentum of events. Stop the engines! Was it the money? It was the money. At your coronation, you aped the countenance of authority. Now you wallow in frippery, the aroma of sanctimony, pretending at absolutism, the tin trinket pinned at your lapel, the strut upon the stage so fleeting, until, until, until unbearable wretchedness overwhelms conscience.

O comrade, my comrade, the sacrifice, the crown! You bemoan, so heavy is the crown. The weight breaks you and yet you know the fix. Please, do not delude yourself nor insult your subjects. The chink of hope: you don the trappings sheepishly. Obvious to all, a fracture of confidence. Is it too late for humility? Will we believe it? We will want to believe it. At a distance, you are laughable sir, the puppet of emperors. Close at your throne, you compound the catastrophe for the hoi polloi. Usually blind, they are shocked at the coup. They need, they want, they need they want, they need they want a prophet, thrive upon following, a palpable desperation.

O comrade, my comrade, how long shall you dupe them? Wake up from your coma! How long shall you mimic divinity? Caesar or Savior. Dismantled, stripped of all embellishment, we shall take pity. This is my hope as you are any one of us, o comrade, my comrade.

Two Letters to Adam

Dear Adam, I shall be a woman when you're finished with that rib. I suppose it can't be helped that it sprang from your chest, a spare part, God's afterthought, last on his Genesis list. Dear Adam, when I am a woman, do not presume demure. Recall Lilith, your equal in wit, like you, fashioned of clay, who fled your obstinacy, your sovereignty.

Dear Smarting Cuckold, when she ran off with that badboy, Archangel Samael, you shamed her as incarnation of lust, witch of the night, slayer of infants. Such petty spite! This, I shall not abide. When I am a woman, I'll stroll through Eden brazenly naked, no skins or silly leaves for me. I shan't be cloistered in your hut. I'll wear burka or bikini if I fancy the fashion. Gown or trousers, whatever shall I wear to The Fall?

When I am a woman, I'll allow my figure to grow hairy. To my knees, it'll catch in branches, briar and snare your limbs. Then, capriciously, I'll shave it all, bald again for fun (and to shock Mother), as smooth and slippery as the serpent. When I am a woman, be wary. My audacious mind shall be the forward-most part of me. Surely, my breasts will follow, swinging through the garden, my nipples avid for our sucklings or your ogling, as I am beautiful, in God's image.

When I am a woman, my sex shall be my enigma, my whim, my possession. Unlike you, poor man, I'm delighted nothing bobs between my thighs, begetting, enslaving every thought and action. Dear Pardner, when desire suits me, I shall ride you till you pray, "No more!", my moans waking Eden's beasts, until I split you into symmetric portions of Adam and Eve. And in our ecstasy, I shall love you fiercely, just as soon as that rib is mine. Love, Eve.

Dear Adam, it was so long ago. I'm not surprised you didn't mention me to Eve. I was not keen on your screwy rules (Too damn many!), your insistence on domestic sovereignty, dubbed the friggin' emperor of Eden. You know, we came from the same virgin dirt, with water, vessels molded of the same clay, at first, equipollent in God's eyes.

Actually, I felt sorry for the mousy little twit, Eve's predicament, a perfect fit, slavish for your rib. Ever the housewife, I heard she spent her days tidying the garden, running beasts here and there, and on Thursday afternoons, screwed the serpent (the slimy bastard) at a motel near the airport. Oh, she was good. Her fickle pout sent you on endless, pointless errands. Didn't you know?

I ran off, shackled up with Samael, my lover, God's indulgence. (You see, God couldn't help but coddle him after failing miserably with Lucifer. And there was the likeness around the eyes, in the jaw, an easy swagger, reminding God of his own youth before Genesis, before his big screw-up, the separation of light from dark.

Screwed up in the head, I fled the garden one night (So many stars!), straddled Samael's bike, his warm, revving engine, pressed my crotch into his cut, my thighs gripping him like a vice, whispered in, then bit his ear. My hair, usually caught on every branch and a dangerous entanglement for any man (Ask Faustus.), now flew free as we roared across the desert.

Samael and I got matching tats and black leathers; raised hell and screwed at every dive along the Euphrates; drank, smoked, popped and snorted every kind of shit. Eventually, reluctantly, we grayed, settled down (our little ranch on the Tigris) and reminisced, “Wouldn’t change any of it.” Dear Adam, unlike your disasters, Cain and Abel, our boys loved each other and went into business together. Regards, Lilith.

Old Clyde and Mrs. Hill

When I was a young man, Dad lost everything to the bank: Jet Cleaners, a marriage, our home on Glenn Road, our predictable, idyllic, suburban routine. When we moved to town, my little sister and I were decrepit, worn out after the catastrophe. Now everyone was too close together. We staggered up the broken, treacherously icy stairs, careening like Laurel and Hardy in winter to the apartment, the sagging, exhausted house on West Gambier Street. Jo's Chateau of Beauty was in the back, Hyle's Typewriter Repair in the front, Kenyon and civilization five miles east, the flat, monotonous Midwest five miles west. It was there I became acquainted with Old Clyde and Mrs. Hill, though I failed them both.

Clyde was "Old Clyde" as we only knew him as old, and we never wondered if he was ever young. Clyde rarely drove his long, wide, black Oldsmobile he named "The Machine." We worried for him and pedestrians in general when he fired up its engine on cold mornings. Clyde was a frail, pale but dignified gentleman (neither "spry" nor "geezer" applied) who shuffled alone through his white house. Once Victorian, once modestly grand with a little gingerbread embellishment, the porch leaned as if it said, "Give me a minute." His wife loved the view out the kitchen window.

Clyde looked forward to saying "howdy" though half his resources for the day were expended in one greeting. As Clyde was essentially deaf, the entire neighborhood knew his narrative. We were never sure if his volume was for our benefit or his. When Clyde wanted to accomplish one last home improvement, he hired me to paint his dining room ceiling. I wondered who there was to entertain. But brittle wallpaper peeled beneath the new, white coat, rolling with the roller, the task a disaster. I gave up on it. After forty years, the image remains crisp: Clyde's crestfallen expression, the defeat in his shoulders. Dad offered no wisdom for me when I failed Clyde, when I refused to take his money.

Mrs. Hill was the only old black woman I knew in our town in 1978. We never knew her first name, but imagined Esther, Agnes or Helen. Mrs. Hill lived in the faded, green house, a hideous pea green of army fatigues, one particular patch of jungle camouflage, but surely a left-over, unwanted hue. She was next to where we tore down the garage for more parking. Tools still hung there. Clyde must have borrowed hammer, pliers or saw from the previous owner. They might have been friends, their wives gossiping and cooking together. Both widowed, Old Clyde and Mrs. Hill shared a fence.

Mrs. Hill sat in her housedress in her lawn chair on her concrete stoop, waiting for her sons to stop by and looking out for my sister circling the block on her bike. There was nothing there but Mrs. Hill and her stoop. Mrs. Hill was missing a few teeth and seemed unconcerned and unselfconscious with their whereabouts. She was balding a little on one side, and her voice rasped and wheezed from long, luxurious drags on cigarettes. But her laugh was easy, generous, and frequent, though it cost her a spasm of coughing. Her whole body shook. I thought she would topple out of her chair, and I noted the location of the nearest telephone for an ambulance. I'm sure, when she was a silly girl, young men were taken by her bright laugh and fell in love.

My identity was nebulous at nineteen, under construction; still, Mrs. Hill listened to me. She relished my youth, my impatient plans. So why did I frequently avoid her porch and walk a different street? I wish I'd noticed Mrs. Hill listening to me and paused at her stoop to fill and shorten her afternoons just a little more. However unlikely, I wish I'd somehow finished painting Clyde's impossible ceiling.

David Sapp is a writer, artist and professor living along the southern shore of Lake Erie in North America. He is a 2018 Ohio Arts Council Individual Excellence Award grant recipient for poetry. His poems have appeared widely in a number of venues across the United States, in Canada and the United Kingdom. His publications also include articles in the *Journal of Creative Behavior*; chapbooks *Close to Home* and *Two Buddha*; and his novel, *Flying Over Erie*.