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# Loquacious Placemat

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## THROUGH THE WALL by Hugh Fox

"I don't want him to die, I really love the guy, but...."

"Love the guy? You're not gay." "You can love someone without being gay."

"OK, but he's got liver cancer and...."

Sitting on the hill-terrace overlooking the ocean that's maybe a tenth of a mile away beyond the forest. It was best this way. So the waves never got to you even in stormy weather.

"I feel so guilty feeling the way I do about you. At the same time it's the most, I almost said 'spiritual,' part of my life. It's where Korans and Torahs and New Testaments and the Hindu sacred books ought to be...you in the center of my altar."

"And you in the center of mine."

"But what about the flesh, desires, my orchietomy. I'm post-meno -- accent on the MEN! -- pausal just like you."

"We're like two angels, all wings and haloes."

"All ghosts, you mean."

2.

"Dogs do their thing, birds, rats, but they don't build churches."

"Neither do I, but....," he gets up, windy, the sea, something coming in across the pacific, "It's so hard to

explain. I don't want to die. There's a thousand things I want to hang on for. I walk around in Old Town and I'm in love with the river, the older, I almost said ancient buildings, old restaurants and art galleries and candle stores. I don't know, I was raised to believe in God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. You know, the creator, the whole schmear, God was everywhere, every time we went out into the country, up to the mountains, even in downtown everywhere, and then slowly it drifted away, I was a Buddhist for a while and then that drifted away too, and then I met you and all my...waddaya call it, transcendentalism got involved with you. You became life after death, the garden of Eden, a cathedral to walk into and find a medieval altar in. Baruch atta Adonai, Elohainu Melech haolam....."

"Stick to the Latin, I can get that. I'm still in the fifteenth century."

"The fiftyth century B.C., Holy Art Thou God, God forever King-Queen of the universe...everything forever sacred."

"We're like two books on theology on the same shelf next to each other."

3.

"I don't really want him to die and I don't really want to leave Solange. If there could just be two of us, you married to him and her

married to me, and then ..."

"There are our other selves living eternally in never-ever-land, Eden-Anaku, our walrus-selves, super-egos, I don't know what to call them, not Mister/Mz Everyday but our Afterdeaths, our Never-Die-Selves. That's what we've been from the first, not flesh and seduction but our super-selves....do I ever really 'leave' you?"

"Do I ever 'leave' you?"

"You're like my Dream-Me..."

"And you mine."

"Anything else else comes in, canes, walkers, wheelchairs, deaths of any 'others,' and we're still ONE...even our own deaths..."

Sun almost down now, but it never went down inside them, the moon never vanished, they didn't ever have to touch but just sit there now, let what else happened happen, the little sylph girl and Mr. Keyboard their ghost-angel, neo-real selves expanded out into the Eternal everything-to-yet-come NOW.



## BEST PRAYERS

by Matt Dennison

He could stand it no longer, had almost crushed his one black hat in his hands. Crushed his desire to stand and dissent. Salvation was good and fine, he was all for it, but this was too

much. He saw the stiff women gazing straight at the new boy-preacher from Boston, nodding their heads in blessed agreement, their smiles relaxing into masks of final, redemptive victory. Hell, didn't he drive his old buggy a good seven miles to make church? He, a full-grown man with a ranch but—thank God—no wife of his own?

And for what? To hear some wet-eared boy from Back East rail against that which had elevated his thoughts many a time and many times higher than contemplating the next church social with its gaggle of man-hungry women?

Why, this boy-preacher was no better than your average woman! Had obviously never spent a long night coaxing life from a suffering mother, to say nothing of partaking of that which he berated as the common cause of all sin.

He slowly unfolded his lanky frame until he towered above the rest of the flock. Heads turned. Women whispered. As the boy-preacher's beady eyes widened behind rimless spectacles, he remembered how these dried-up creatures had run Reverend Hanes out of town as reward for his one moment of fleshly weakness -- as if any man could resist Ada Parkins in her silk nightdress -- looked at the hat in his hands, the brim rolled into a sweat-stained mess, and thought of his mare in need of a little matrimonial salvation in regard to the shy stallion in the far field.

He had seen salvation at work, had held it in his hands; had fought for salvation, of man and beast alike. The salvation of life, here, now, in which Eternity played no part, did not matter in the least when the life of a prize bull or a snake-bit man hung in the balance

of your earthly hands.

He studied the stained-glass windows, the flat, white ceiling that he had painted, and thought of the cattle, wild horses and the hard, unforgiving skies of his ranch.

"Brother Simpson, have you something to add?" The Bostonian was speaking to him. Had he something to say? Something that would be understood by the women, backed up by the men? "No," he stammered, looking at his hat. "No," he muttered as he marched up the aisle he would never walk down.

Outside, he saw the great day, full of life, color, and—for a while yet—the clean, wide-open feeling of freedom. He breathed hard, turned and straight-armed the door, oblivious to the faces more fearful than condemning which lifted to his.

"\*Why, then\*," he thundered, "if the Devil be drink, are my best prayers drunk!\*"

## The Shift

by Indira Chandrasekhar

The water shifted from grey-brown to slate-black in choppy, circular motion. As Kay moved she recalled the wonder of seaside holidays when she would lose herself in the brilliance that surged underneath. Today's water drew an opaque veil over the world below. Not even Nasir's feet were visible, feet that had floated so tender and loyal alongside hers. He was no longer beside her.

Nasir was not a good floater, couldn't let go as Kay could. She gave herself up to the movement, didn't fight and flail and strain her neck to keep her head above the water as Nasir did.

