

Sonnet for My Comrade in Room 11 of the Whitman Motor Lodge

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MICHAEL MONTLACK

## Tryst with a Former Self

Don't you wanna be seventeen again,  
sorta stoned with your friends, eating  
dollops of whipped cream off the cake  
your mother said not to touch, already  
hearing her yell *You stupid ignoramus!*  
like she was just setting you up to ask  
*What other kind of ignoramus is there, Mom?*

Don't you wanna look like a swashbuckler  
in front of them all when you say *Let her  
have her conniption*, you've had it with  
this bumfuck town anyway, so ready to bolt  
for California or a Caribbean island  
come graduation, your father's frequent  
flyer miles at your disposal like  
you were all jet set and espionage.

Yeah, don't you want some of that raw ego  
you once toted around as easily as your pot  
paraphernalia, stashed in a mismatched  
sock or backpack pocket, always there—  
a clumsy charisma you exhaled, invisible  
but loud like the poltergeists you swore  
you heard after playing with a Ouija board  
on someone's ratty basement couch.

Don't you want that? To be a connoisseur  
of nothing again, so casual yet so grand,  
with enough time ahead of you to fool  
yourself into thinking you could afford  
to fool around, big plans and big ideas  
a private smorgasbord, your mouth  
so full that when asked what the plan is  
you can't even say *Man, don't ask me*.

ANNIE WOODFORD

## Southside

Long, sere ridgelines lead me home to Henry County,  
where I look at a book with a picture of a lynched man in it.  
I can't face his face but I do see his feet, barefoot and curled  
backward like bird claws, suspended above the ground, caught  
by the view camera's careful, silver plate to be sold as souvenir.

MARTÍN ESPADA

## Sonnet for My Comrade in Room 11 of the Whitman Motor Lodge

*Now, dearest comrade, lift me to your face,  
We must separate awhile—Here! Take from my lips this kiss.*  
—Walt Whitman

I see the traffic of Long Island, and the fumes of Jericho Turnpike,  
and the shoppers invading the Whitman Mall like a lost city of gold,  
and the tartan carpet in the lobby of the Whitman Motor Lodge,  
and the clogged Raisin Bran dispenser at the breakfast bar,  
and the hair in the nose of the desk clerk bickering over the AAA discount,  
and the burnt lampshade, and the bath mat like a black rubber waffle,  
and the floor luminous with Lysol, and the cartoons on television,  
and I say this is good, and Whitman would have said this is good,  
since you are here with me, dearest comrade, at the Whitman  
Motor Lodge, and would brave the fuming traffic of Jericho Turnpike,  
and the army of the bankrupt stampeding away from the mall,  
and the spirits haunting Room 11, stubborn as cigarette smoke,  
to call me your bearded poet, and tug on my gray beard,  
and lift me to your face, and take from my lips this kiss.