

Old Women Clustered Like Rotten Cauliflower in Metal Baskets

by Anthony Brandt

Somewhere,
They're leaning on a brick wall,
Casting shadows like black chalk outlines
And letting smoke drift into the place a poem goes
When its author is dead

And they're watching a foamy ocean
Lean lovingly against a beach of beer cans
And hypodermic needles with smiley face stickers
Like the pier is a sponge
And the world is a dirty dish

And somewhere,
The impotent old men with liver spots
Like bruises on an apple that fell a bit too close to the tree
And snapped every branch on the way down
Sprawl out on hospital cots
And wheeze like despondently deflating demiurges

Years ago,
They all fell in love with someone like you
Someone who looks a person in the eye
And lets a Cheshire grin slowly split her face
Like her lips are folded maroon curtains
On a Broadway stage

And somewhere,
The people like you are smiling for strangers
And applying mascara in the neon reflection of a jukebox
As a generation huffs about some North Country fair
And a waitress who still wears black for Vonnegut
Trades sepia-toned teeth with the mechanic from Remembrance Road
They're knocking on the windows of closed liquor stores
And digging anchors into a thousand hearts
Like they're ice fishing for self-esteem
Anyway, I heard old Calvin took off with the
Cash from the crematorium lawsuit
To some motel with a rose-petal carpet
And a coin-operated bed he never quite figured out how to use
I hear he's got a three-legged dog now
And his granddad's old corduroy suit
I hear you wouldn't even recognize him anymore
I hear he talks like Dylan Thomas now
And only sleeps when people are looking

And somewhere,
Tires screech like a little girl's first viola lesson
And raindrops pound on colored glass
Like repentant Catholics trying to talk to God
In the hours when even He is asleep

And somewhere else,
The old women described in the title
Are wheeled into the men's ward
And softly reminded who they used to love

Last drag of the day,

Kiddo.

Better make it a good one