

Switz City Anthology: The Plumber and the Painter

by
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I
And O, the Road goes ever on.
This Bilbo sang to the Plumber.
The Plumber was a girl with big hands
and big feet.
Once she had tried to give up plumbing
and had served old ladies wearing
Mercedes Benzadrine
Over their mink coats:
Hills, like dunn elephants
contrived of gourmet chicken salad
Over roast.
But since she was only a plumber
— and, therefore,
a plumbing image —
She put on Thomas Crapper's
Wax wedding ring
that welded her to craft
And dedicated her life
to the Municiple Building Code
of Plumbing.
And she grew deaf ears of Chicken Salad
With extra amounts of Mayonnaise.
So much Chicken Salad,
With so much Mayonnaise
That the old ladies couldn't
eat it fast enough to
keep out the
Ptomaines.
The Plumber smiled,
For she knew about the Ptomaines,
And the old ladies.
They wore the same perfume
As the faggots on Pennsylvania Street
In 1975.
And later she saw them hitch hiking
On the Road to Switz City
But she never stopped
to pick them up.
She knew where Switz City was,
But she never Stopped.
She had driven past Switz City;
But never through it.
And that made all the difference.

II

She had been successful at getting the car started again. She was unusually mechanically inclined. Automobiles seldom proved mysterious to her but her specialty was plumbing. But years of skillful plumbing had given her big calloused hands and big feet. She felt that she was too tall, and even this she had blamed on plumbing. "Just like Pinocchio," she thought. "Use some that you shouldn't and it'll just get bigger on you."

She called the Painter. "Let's go," she said. "It's time to get out of here, and on the Road."

"Okay," said the Painter.

They drove down the highway, and the real estate passed under them. They drove south like going to the principal's office for a paddling for not doing her homework. The Road unfolded.

Black asphalt,
Flat and fresh,
With yellow lines of mascara,
Cosmetically covered the chuckholes of long ago.
The Plumber knew them well,
But the Painter didn't seem to notice.

They drove on State Road 67.
They passed at least
67 Billboards
displaying
67 Lies
on which
67 Fortunes
were Made
off of People
Who could not go home anymore.

And the two travelers on 67
Equaled 69
Two opposites
Yet alike
One leaden, one hunting;
One driving, one riding;
One hardboiled, one over-easy;
Both traveling.
O, what a long Road it is to Switz City:
To find out the dream
Is not in the Road,
Or in driving,
But in your eye.
And by keeping
Your eye on the Road,
You can drive to Switz City,

Where grandmothers
 Will stand on the back porches
 Of their country homes
 And watch,
 as satellite tv dishes
 bloom like daffodils
 to put us
 in
 touch;
 to bring us
 closer
 to—
 get—
 her.
 And to pick up MTV
 Among the soybeans.

III

The two travelers continued on their way to Switz City.
 On the right was Observatory Road which led up a hill to the Goeth-
 Link Observatory. It was built in the twenties, and now little used.

"It was bound to be here," said the Plumber.

"Let's have a look," said the Painter.

They turned off and drove up the hill
 To the Citadel
 of those
 Who would watch
 the stars
 All night long.

They would sit
 behind great instruments.
 And the light
 of stars
 and the planets
 would fall
 on their retinas
 only.

And then they would name them.
 Name them all;
 With small hand whittled pencils
 They had manically kept
 To write in their notebooks;
 To name the name
 they had named them,
 And number the number
 they'd numbered them —

Like stray cats or dogs
 or lost bicycles
 Getting a registration
 and putting them all
 IN ORDER

as if the chaos of the universe
 Wasn't orderly enough
 For mankind

And the watchers would say,
 To their wives and other lovers,
 "There.... right up there that star right there that's MY star I
 named it.... that's the one right there C7861FGH/871KCH-01
 that's it, tha's the name of it tha's my star

But there were no watchers there now. They had all gone home and
 so there was nobody to help the Plumber and the Painter.

But there it stood. Ready.

"I wonder where the watchers are?" said the Painter.

"I'm afraid they've used up all the stars," said the Plumber.

"Nobody wants to name something that's been named already."

"I can see their point," said the Painter.

They stood and looked at the observatory.

But it didn't look back. Its great eye was closed with a
 mote of obsolescence. The building stood there, waiting, like a ship
 in dry dock, or in mothballs, ready to sail the skys of united.

"United we stand," thought the Painter.

"Divided we don't show a profit," thought the Plumber.

And since there were no stars left to profit with, the observatory
 mothened in its mothballs and would not let them in.

"Let's get out of here," said the Plumber.

"Okay," said the Painter.

IV

The Plumber and the Painter drove back to the highway that led
 south to Switz City. The Plumber continued to drive. She had learned
 plumbing in the south. Now she had big hands and big feet and was
 too tall. "Plumbing," she thought. "That's what did it. And now I've got
 to drive to the goddamned south.

She drove.

It seemed to her that she drove a lot. Driving and
 plumbing, that's what did it to her. That's what.

Outside of Worthington they turned onto State Road 57. They had
 turned the wrong way.

"It was bound to happen," said the Plumber.

"Oh," said the Painter.

"We'll turn around by the Bridge."



When they reached the Bridge, they left the car on the northern shore, and walked out over the water. They stood in the middle of the Bridge and looked south. The Plumber did not like the south. There was nothing down there that did not leak. All of the houses were full of bad pipes that seemed to run the wrong way.

"It'll never work, I told 'em," said the Plumber. "It ain't according to code."

They stood in the middle of the Bridge and the Road ran to the leaky south and it ran to the dry north.

The Painter wondered what the south was like. "Are there houses to paint down there?" he asked.

"Yeah, but they ain't built to code neither. Your paint won't do 'em any good. It won't hold 'em together."

The water flowed under the Bridge. And in the water they saw their shadows dance like trolls who live under bridges. And the shadow-trolls reminded them that the Bridge was not theirs and they could not stay there without paying. And since the Road ahead went away from Sitz City they turned around and headed back to the car.

"Let's get out of here," she said.

"Okay."

V

And so they found the road to Switz City.

O, it is a long road to Switz City.

"There must be a place for us," said the Painter.

"No there's not," said the Plumber.

There wasn't. It was all a lie. A hoax. A story.

The Painter knew better. He knew that colors were good, that he could make things clean and fresh and new again. All you needed was a gallon of Sear's Latex indoor/outdoor.

But the Plumber didn't understand latex novelty.

"Pipes leak or they don't. It's either to code or it ain't. You can lie with paint. You can't lie with plumbing."

The Painter sighed.

The Road stretched forward ahead. And the Painter thought how the Road was like his life. Coming. Being. Going. He saw. He was. He remembered.

He closed his eyes and laid back in his seat. "Soon we'll be somewhere. Soon this life and trip will take on some profound meaning," he thought. He looked at the Plumber. She was sniffing some Poppers.

"They're fun," she said, "just part of the trip."

He thanked her much for that.

The car moved.

The Road moved.

The Earth moved.

Every thing was moving around them.

"Actually we're doing the moving. They're just standing still," thought the Painter.

"And that makes all the difference," thought the Plumber.

VI

The wheels turned.

The Earth turned.

The observatory turned.

Their grandfathers had turned.

And their fathers had turned.

Now it was their turn.

Some will turn onto State Road 67,
but others will turn on State Road 57
(Outside of Worthington)

They will all go to Switz City.

"They're bound to," said the Plumber.

"And when they get there, they'll say:

'Let's get out of here'

They'll do it 'cause it's according to Code."

—Coda—

Soon they came to the hitchhikers. They were all lined up along the side of the Road. They all stuck out their thumbs and smiled. In the group were some bridge trolls, Drs. Goethe and Link, some building code inspectors, and several unemployed star watchers with full notebooks.

The Plumber pulled over and the Painter rolled down the window. The group of hitchhikers ran up and smiled into the window.

"We all want to go with you," they said.

"Where are you headed?" asked the Painter. "Switz City?"

"Yes, yes! Give us a ride! Give us a ride to Switz City!"

The painter looked over at the Plumber.

"Let's get out of here," he said, and he rolled up the window as they sped off.