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Happy Hour with Grady

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Happy Hour with Grady

In the middle of distant conversation Grady winks and lifts his Chivas and a tiredness settles into his voice. For once I am fully there, listening. He talks about the sea, his tour with the Merchant Marines, he remembers the money hidden in his sock, and the late-watch—looking at city lights wavering on the black water. He explains how his wife was a good mother, attentive to the details of comfort, intelligent and fair, but how whatever once held the center dropped away the minute their son kept silent in his room, their daughter flew off to school. And his wife would not say what she wanted and he could not guess or, later, care. He had drifted into his work—Facilities Management, a section so forgotten by the big boys that the house in Greenwich had to go and he moved into a decent, bleak four room condo in Stamford. He was not unhappy: What good’s ambition, he said, ambitious for what? He had his books, real ones, and could afford
the theatre once a month,
a Day Sailor harbored in the Cove,
the best scotch. Then he paused,
wiped his mouth with his hand,
leaned back in his chair. He ordered
another drink and toasted
my new family, my new book,
continued success! . . . Ireland,
he leaned in and whispered,
that's where I breathed
easy . . . His grandfather lifting a colt
at eighty, sneaking shots in the
shadows of the feed room . . . He went on
from there in a small voice
and good, I thought, it's
good to hear, to see a man speak
in the lean heart of the business
day. The waitress brought our check
on a black tray with two foil-
wrapped mints. Grady opened one
with small pale hands and chewed
as he continued—
he was back at the sea, trying
to explain precisely how it felt
to approach the port of Oslo in May,
seventeen years old, not even the need
to shave yet every morning . . .

Beauty and the Spider

Once women were the beginning and the end of it,
and why a man would rather paint than touch
such skin beyond me. This lasted much too long,
and with luck will continue. At least, the idea.