

2007

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Nancy K. Pearson

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Recommended Citation

Pearson, Nancy K.. "From the Motel-by-the-Hour." *The Iowa Review* 37.3 (2007): 45-48. Web.
Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0021-065X.6260>

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NANCY K. PEARSON

From the Motel-by-the-Hour

1.

I lost my straight shooter, a sawed-off sparkplug
somewhere in a cheap motel.
All night, I search for pipes—
tire gauge, rusted beer can, hollowed-out cigar.

Months ago, I drove across the country,
left my home in the wet hills of Tennessee,
found the unfolding pageant of billboards,
squashed possum, tugboat clouds,

hills repeating hills, freewheeling leaves going insane.
Thought I could drive my past away.
I'm here now & hunched over,
searching for a boost.

Behind me, that red suspension bridge
sinks into the deep fog,
leaves this bright world behind
for another.

2.

Strung out, Silva and I need a bump.
The wind, spring-loaded and snap-buckling
through the cypress creeps in,
splinters the stash thin across the motel floor.

We are crawling and picking through the carpet.
Silva says stop pushing my head down, Reggie,
my knees got seeds mashed in them.
Night is a rerun re-run. Fight over a pebble high:

that long five minutes. Reggie watches us buck and kiss.
Silva on the floor again. (Stop pushing my head down, Reg.)
The shag hooks her silver hoop—
ear snagged and hanging off

like old fish bait. Stuck down there,
someone just cover her up.

3.
Silva's in the hallway bathroom.
She's clawing up her face again.
Reggie is laughing real loud,
Silva, you a god damn puller now.

I don't want to see her face,
her skin peeling off her cheek bone,
pores torn bigger, a face on hinges.
I'm high and want to feel her tits,

put my mouth on her hard nipples.
Fuck Reggie's laughing.
I don't want to think about the scabs,
the other night, me with my panties

twisted up in my crack,
biting down hard on her,
getting up quickly
with blood in my teeth,

peeing in the free-standing sink
in the middle of the room,
my thighs shaking
like the hind legs of a dog.

4.

I carry my index finger in my hand.
I cut it off earlier, straight through the bone
just to see if I could.
I cup it warily

as if the bone could beat free,
a broken bird with fluttering wings.
The hospital is down Fillmore Street.
I walk with a spring, kick an old donut

eaten out by ants, shoot it right into a drain.
God, I'm good. Good god.

5.

Jimmy has a tattoo of a beet on his left arm.
People often mistake it for an organ.
I like the idea of a person who loves taproots so much
he'll suffer an afternoon under the needle

for a swollen red stem. That Jimmy.
I want to see him again and the other gay boys from *Greens*
with their clean haircuts and brilliant skin.
Tonight, Silva yells, *honey git me my wig* and I do.

Her left arm is swollen up like an udder,
her silver rings cut deep into her ashen skin.
Somewhere, young Jimmy chops onions and parsley,
his tuber tattoo beating like a purplish heart.

6.

Silva runs down the hallway after Reggie
leaving with the stash. Her feet sound like stakes
shoving into the floor.

Silva, eat something for god's sake,

I yell and I don't know why I'm yelling this right now.
I think of an old cow, wobbling on thin ankles,
spine like a curtain rod, skin in the breeze.
*Baby, she says later, throat full of smoke,
open your mouth.*

The sweet crack flows into me.
I touch her teeth with my tongue.
They are cow-licked & scoured out.
Baby, she says, you've got it bad.