

The Secret Life of Ernesto

Cathleen F. Greenwood

I.

If you're still at school at 5pm, you'll probably run into this guy pushing his cart piled with toilet paper and rags and mops and a bucket.

Empties the trash cans into the big container on the side of the cart.

Wheels the cart slowly, careful not to bump teacher desks.

Holds fire doors open to push through to the hall,

uses the cart to prop open the Ladies' Room door while he cleans.

This is so we know he's in there, so we don't get embarrassed running in to use the toilet.

His face is blank paper, clean sand, dry unpainted wall.

Later he wheels the cart to the closet wrings the mop, rinses the rags, dumps the bucket into the janitor's sink,

empties the trash into the hallway container. Door shut, he changes his shirt, "Larkins

Cleaning Service" on the pocket.

Permanent press gray blue, worn collar, now gone to

stiff white, crisp long sleeves, black leather belt in navy pants.

Brown tie shoes. Hair still damp from wet comb,

walks slowly to car, shoulders back, head up, eyes moving to see side to side, sensing

honeysuckle, mowed grass, roses, dry warmth of wood chips.

II.

In the car, he starts the engine, carefully maneuvers out of the parking lot, once past the school shifts

into third, then fourth onto 684 and travels north.

Windows down, breeze flows around him, more honeysuckle, now wisteria, short puff of pine.

Speed, wind, eyes ahead, alone on the highway. Right hand on the top of the wheel, left arm resting out the window,

tape switched on, the lover's tragic farewell from La Bohème begins. He sings along with Pavarotti,

matching the Maestro's cadence, lowering his voice, pausing, moving into the glissando with

growing strength, knowing what will come. The words flow, liquid, warm wine he has tasted before,

singing as one so the voices weave, blend, together they are him.

The final movements grow into burgundy tones, deep purple words, chords of mauve,

green velvet, blue oceans of sound until soft, last, long syllable of loss.

Eyes still full, he parks, leaves motor running, waiting for the chords, final coda.

Deep sigh, opens the car door, shuts and turns the key in the lock.

III.

Walking up the four flights, warm with peppers roasting, garlic softly lacing through

oregano and basil and escarole, he still hears the Maestro.

Chords of love, warm fragrant nights of fingers and bodies and moist mouth on his, dark hair, smile,

rose, sweet honey breath.

He starts to hum, then full blown his deep voice begins the coda,

Oceans again, mauves, deep greens with the air and smells of night.

On the landing the door opens, glow of light flows to meet him, she is singing the reply.

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accused observation of stranger person you see by locker every morning, woman at coffee shop; neighbor...

I. Person from E.) en route to somewhere in transit (i.e. imagined details)

III. At destination; contains unexpected twist (again, these are imagined details)