

Five Poems by Myrna Stone

Myrna Stone

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MYRNA STONE

H. L. Describes His Recent Near-Death Experience
to the Newest Member of His Sex Addiction Therapy Group

Chicago, Illinois, October 1975

Imagine fright created not by blood
but by the striped impression of a grate
burning up your backside, no tunnel, no flood
of light, no mother, father, friend, or mate
in sight. Your goose is cooked, you're DOA,
chum, and there's fire below. The dire plight
of skin on sear can force a man to pray,
recanting every traitorous carnal night
until a finger, poking through the mass
of smoke above, then a hand and forearm
so stout they must be God's, plucks your ass
back into life. You're bridled, pal, and charm's
a bygone jig, but you've been good and rooted
inside Him. It'll keep you clean, stupid.

H. L.'s Former Wife, Mary, on His Checkered History

Palos Hills, Illinois, November 1976

His mama warned me when I married him that Hank was like a big dumb dog who needed stroking day and night. "And that's a shame," she said, "because he's apt to roam." Needling was what his mama always did best, but sure enough, she was right. Turns out he schmucked around for years—his charm on steroids tour—until I'd had my fill. . . . *It's clear I'm fucked*, he said when he came to, up out of a coma and back from Hell, *unless I change my views on marriage*. Then, in a blink, his mama swept in and whisked him away. What news I have of him now is from his sister, Constance, who swears he loves his new life of abstinence.

The Rev. Donald Cargill's Brother, James,
on Following a Merchant's Path

Glasgow, Scotland, 1682

I am not now, nor ever was, my brother's
keeper, and furthermore, the threat of Hell's
enduring fire, or the mayhem of his martyr's
end, hath for me no glory. Glasgow's bells,
in truth, doth merely call me to the haunt
of my living, bins of woolens and leathers
and homely trinkets beneath a leaky vault
of wattle and thatch beyond old Blackfriars
Church. . . . I earn there only coin enough
to sup each evening, and to nurse my ailing
wife and daughter. *They* are my own rough
religion, my safest refuge, my highest calling.
What need have I of any other, for they
offer me salvation. It is to them I pray.

Elena, to Her Second Husband, Niccolo, on the Failings
of Her First Husband

Rome, Italy, 1716

Though I was there but once, the air inside
his filthy, ill-lit surgery was malignant,
the posies in my bodice lame as walleyed
bowmen against a foe. Was I indignant,
love, at the iron odor of blood he wore
that day upon his cuffs, rusty as cook's
befouled pots? Need you ask? As sorely
as I oftentimes recall his face and bookish
blather, 'twas the day-old herring stench
embedded in the furring on his tongue
that I remember best. A lover wrenches
a whit of sugar off the cone with a tug
persuasive and delicate. Not my Antonio.
Croaker or no, he was all braggadocio.

Paul Novak, Mae West's Long-Time Lover, to Attorney Melvin Belli Before the Reading of Her Will

Los Angeles, 1980

I'm not here to argue with those who think
I stayed with her only for her money.
I can talk and talk, but they won't blink.
No, I've come to say she was a glory
out of which, I swear, a sort of light shone
onscreen and off. Take a look at her
at nearly forty in *I'm No Angel*. Anyone
can see why Cary Grant adored her,
as I did, for I swear I was put here on earth
to care for her, to kiss, calm, and cosset
her. So tell me, what old spleen gives birth
to this gossip that beneath her corset
were hermaphroditic organs? . . . Melvin,
you know she was every inch a woman.