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 oft times 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.