

Bisbee's

"E.S. Bisbee." the wooden sign announced: general store. Also, the post office. A flag hung. At least one person leaning on the railing, Everett, or Burt were fixtures.

The glass said groceries; it was mostly canned goods and dry goods, also rubber boots and parts for cars.

And candy! Bubblegum cigars, red wax lips, wax mustaches, fireballs, pinwheels, and a long low freezer with popsicles and fudgesicles.

The competing smells made me giddy--cheddar cheese wheels, salami, and ham with pink and green-colored chunks in it, and some potatoes that still smelled of dirt. Apples or peaches piled next to animal cages or feed.

Somehow the smell of gasoline and kerosine mixed with the scent of dry wooden floorboards.

The post office part had little boxes that you could peer into the glass. The doors had brass filigree and a button with numbers to know the secret code to open. I knew Gram's, and she'd let me open it for her while she did her trading. Once the door was open, there was a "post-officy" smell of paper and glue.

It was the community's heart until one cold night in April of 1976 when the furnace failed, flames leaped out, and started hungrily consuming the contents. Fire Chief Johnson said that the building walls were moving in and out-almost like it was breathing. Said he'd never seen anything like it. It burnt to the ground. Ruez Bisbee, the proprietor, was in his 70s tired. heartbroken for his antique brass cash register and the life that was rubble. Rebuilding would be too hard.

I'm pretty sure that if I remembered the secret code, I could get it all back—that vanished world that meant everything.

My Neighbor's Cows Are Loose

The cows are loose, standing in my neighbor's field.
I groan. I need to bushwhack
that field for my neighbor, who is coming up this weekend.

Honey, call Marilyn. Her cows are loose.
I trudge back to the cows with a white pail, empty,
but they don't know that.

Marilyn arrives with Bob.
Where are the calves?
We see no calves—just cows.
Wait. These aren't our cows.

Whose, then?
Cubbie? He's in town, says he'll get there soon.
Only one problem. They aren't his.

I feel my day evaporating. Who else
might be missing cows? Ruth?

We got rid of ours in the spring. But Wilber is using our field to pasture his cows. I'll give him a ring.

Finally, Wilbur drives up, and they really are his. We show the cows
a white pail that has some grain, and the cows begin to slowly
walk back home over my neighbor's land.

It's good to have good neighbors.

Beth

Everyone thought of my mother as “sweet.”
No one saw the rages, the tears. I knew.

I remember hearing about a mother who killed her child
and saying to my mother that I couldn’t imagine
how someone could do that.
-I could. Mother didn’t smile.

She was in college during WWII; it was a different time.
Betty became Beth. She was a changed person.
Then it was over, the men
came home, women were supposed to go back
to being mothers without careers.

She was pissed.
Every mother I knew from that time
was pissed.
No one discussed it.

Mother wanted to be a doctor.
She was an honors student,
did all the pre-med classes and
became a physical therapist.
Even that stopped when she had a child.

My father had a career and was away
four nights a week.
Mother was stuck at home with a kid
who had frequent earaches.

A lock was put on the outside
of the door of my bedroom.
When I got to be too much,
Mother sent me to my room.
And there I stayed
until my mother had calmed down.

I was actually relieved
when my fibroid tumors
and endometriosis
precluded having children.

I was so amazed when my mother
asked me where
her grandchildren were.

And I will never forget the shock on her face
when I told her.

Situationship (Donna's Lament)

My friend Patsy told me there's a term called "situationship."
It happens when you are in that funny spot
between friends with benefits and a committed relationship,
often lacking in true intimacy.
Apparently, it's a pretty common thing.

Is there a term for people like Glenn and me,
who have been together, married with kids, for ages now?
They call it "bed death" when a couple drifts into sexlessness,
but it seems even worse for us.

How do you go from that heady head-over-heels
infatuation to feeling stuck and wondering what you should do?
No telling what we're capable of in that mindset.

I had vivid dreams of Glenn when two states
separated us in college,
now I dream of my lanky, puppy-dog smitten
high school chemistry partner,
minus his deal-breaking breath,
or my tree-hugging English prof.
My old roommate told me he came out recently.

You can't help but wonder what else is out there,
who else is out there. Still, you stay.
For the kids, for retirement, for the house.
Usually, it is a thousand little deaths;
suddenly, you don't feel a thrill.
They always say, be careful what you wish for.

And if you are honest, you are afraid,
and time has passed. Everything is much harder.
Still, you don't want to lose out.
You have a certain comfort;
old habits die hard, and if you
began with someone else, it would be a lot more work.

He knows how to dance your dance, doesn't step on your shoes.
There is a shorthand that saves precious time and energy
—good old Glenn. You don't want to end up alone.
But sometimes, you can't help but wonder.

Passionless. My Dad always said, love it or leave it.

Slow Living

Life in the country.
Nine months so far,
of COVID
enforced changes.
It feels like the Nineteenth Century
except for the internet.

No television or cable,
radio reception is wonky, too.
We cook meals that last for three days,
often in the slow cooker.

We're back to re-reading favorite books.
Instead of Sunday dinners, we have regular
gatherings by zoom. We miss each other,
but there is something to be said for not having
to travel the backroads in the winter.

The snowplows go past our house twice a day.
Other traffic is scarce.

Just four years ago, we were living in New York City,
Across from Lincoln Center,
close to a hospital,
the song of blaring horns was constant.

Sanitation trucks worked all night.
Now we hear the wind.
At my old school, you needed to plan
half an hour into travel if you needed to go from
The North Building to the East or West Building.

Now we stroll the driveway with ski poles
and enjoy the pure blue snow.

There Was an Old Woman

I live with my husband and three cats in an old farmhouse.
It used to belong to my aunt's aunt. No relation, and I didn't
know until after we'd bought it.

Woods on three sides; the farm is long gone,
the trees have reasserted themselves. Birds and deer visit.
Tommy from FedEx, Trevor from UPS, Cody from the Post
Awful. The trucks pass on my back road, and they wave to me
and to each other.

Books jam my library. And half-written poetry.
Did I say books? There is a chaos of stacks. Someday, I am
going to trip and break a leg.
At least that's what my husband says.
Half of the books are his.

Before, my artist friends and I would have a Tuesday
lunch and talk about art, upcoming shows, politics, food, local
gossip. I miss that. Then they would go off to do
their craft, and I would go to the library to sort books for the
book sales. We'll do it again, we tell each other.

My gratitude list is long, unwieldy

