

# Guru

The wise man spoke

I listened with big ears and open heart

Everything made perfect sense until

He mentioned offhandedly that he was married to

The hottest woman on the planet

A singer 38 years his junior

She was away on tour and he was very sorry to say

His wife would not be joining us tonight

On the glamour corner of Sunset Boulevard and No More Hope Street

Where I found him at the bus shelter

Orating sagely and eating donated cheese

## Adoption Story

The dog was easy. The homeless man somewhat less.

We adopted them both.

The dog, the shaggy little mutt, was living on a rambling foster ranch,  
so we're not going to say "rescued."

Altruism was hardly involved, not when a sweet puppy would lick away tears  
still fresh from the death

of another sweet puppy,

a sweet puppy I loved completely and protected poorly.

When she was struck by a truck

in a crosswalk, close enough I could have dived on her,

I died with her, instantly ghosted by grief.

All my illusions, all my lies, shredded in gnashing teeth of self-recrimination

*It was my fault. It was my fault!*

I cried until dehydrated. Because it *was* my fault.

And then we found Billie, three-months-old, looking for a friend, and she saved me.

A rescue after all.

Now she scampers through the autumn garden, crackling Sycamore leaves beneath  
her bounding paws, turning prematurely grey already, at five months.

She's on her way to visit Uncle Mike. Fisher King Mike they call him on the streets.

Current name: Caretaker Mike.

He lives in our cabin, the backyard cabin tucked into a corner of tangerine and gardenia,  
the little wood cabin once used for trysting and hosting friends and vagabonds.

Weed Hollow Cabin, it's called. Uncle Mike calls it his home.

Modest, yes, but palatial compared to a bus shelter or a park bench.

"What people don't understand," he'll start his story,

the kaleidoscopic starburst of improbable tangents

that somehow, miraculously, all returns home

to Weed Hollow Cabin, where Uncle Mike adopted

a woman, a man and a puppy, who mistakenly thought it was they who were adopting,

and made these confused angels his family.

Altruism was hardly involved, not when a sweet puppy would lick away tears

still fresh from the loss

of another sweet family,

a sweet family Mike loved completely and protected poorly.

When he left them, whenever he left them, wherever that was,

he died with them, instantly ghosted by grief.

All his delusions, all his lies, every alternate narrative

silencing the persistent soliloquy of self-abnegation

*It was my fault. It was my fault!*

And then he found Billie, and Charmaine and the other Mike,

looking for a friend, and he saved them.

A rescue after all.

## Salmon

Salmon sounded acceptable somehow  
when he put it like that, when the man no one ought to trust suggested that  
“Salmon” would be the perfect shade to rehabilitate the tired white railings  
delineating our back deck, drawing a perimeter around our privilege.  
Never mind that everything around the garden is green.  
“Forest Green.” “Seaweed Green.” “Apple Green.”  
We sagely avoided “Summer Sage,” and paddled past “Caribbean Coral.”  
The person with our dream job, she who names paints,  
described a particular shade of orangey pink we found hiding in the basement.  
Called it “Salmon.” No qualifier. No evocations.

And that’s the one we spread like cream cheese smear  
on pliant posts and pickets, two zealots convinced  
this bold new color choice was simultaneously funky  
and inexplicably in harmony with the general scheme of Nature.

When the paint mottled dry and looked like “Salmon” in the same way salmon in a can  
looks like a simulacrum of salmon,  
maybe vaguely the mind color you picture when you read the word *salmon*,  
we discovered that our tired white railings had in fact been dappled  
with a concoction called “Evening Peruvian Ivy”  
and all our calculations and confabulations, all could be forgiven, eventually,  
a comprehensive catalogue of our misdeeds and misnomers  
splashed over and obscured  
and one day blissfully forgotten.