

## Seeing Stars

I'm buying used records again. It can be a cheap way to shop for old music, and I found a decent turntable and amp at Salvation Army. *Cocaine & Rhinestones*, a podcast, deepened my appreciation for country music, especially from the 1960s, and now I must be hooked on the stuff. I've pored over album art, devoured videos, and immersed myself so thoroughly into the genre that I've begun seeing likenesses of the stars wherever I go: Kitty Wells at iWash Laundry, Merle Haggard at Rural King. At a noon meeting the other day, I saw a man in a cowboy hat looking like Johnny Paycheck—same prominent brow and chiseled jawline that always distinguished the famous singer, even as a young man performing with George Jones and the Jones Boys. The resemblance to Paycheck was so striking that I wanted to say something or introduce myself, short of asking a complete stranger for an autograph.

## Between Meetings

Today, I caught and released a spider.  
Nothing heroic, just came to believe  
that the distance between us required  
a minor adjustment. I was in the kitchen,  
glass wear all around, and within reach  
of a small, clear vase about the size  
of a salt shaker. All I needed was  
a makeshift lid, like a sheet of copy paper,  
which seemed as far away as another town.  
But I did spot on the tabletop  
a District 26 Meeting Schedule  
from the Western Kentucky Intergroup—  
*Serving Christian, Logan, Muhlenberg,  
Todd, and Trigg Counties.*  
Perfect.

I enclosed my eight-legged friend,  
sliding the new dome of his happy destiny  
across the wall and brought the model  
of a world upright. He showed no panic,  
seemed no more resigned inside than he was  
outside, and he went straight to the paper sky.  
You'd be forgiven for thinking he'd fall  
from a surface so foreign to him, but he  
held an adhesive if fuzzy grip  
on the Serenity Prayer and peered at me  
up-side down with all of his terrible eyes.  
Time passed, how much I couldn't say.  
The moment seemed longer than it was—  
the journey of a few steps, an encounter  
at a God's eye-level, a door flung  
wide open, and for each of us  
a new beginning.

Thank You, Darlene,

for taking such good care of your Loretta Lynn records. They recently arrived—*Loretta Lynn Sings, Before I'm Over You, Blue Kentucky Girl, and I Like 'Em Country*. The seller on eBay had noted and documented with pics that the previous owner had put her name on the cover of each album, as if it were tantamount to a scandal, as if nobody but Loretta herself ought to put ink on these. Something familiar about the way your name loops like a rope of kin along the edge of each cover makes me wonder if we have met in one life or another. All the disks are shiny, though, the way you kept them, with no scuffs, scratches, or signs of excessive wear, and none of them recorded since 1966, all of them original pressings. I traffic in enough vinyl to know how rare that is and what a bargain it is for me to buy all four albums for 12 bucks. What was he thinking, the seller? He was no fan of yours, I know that. All I can tell you is that I have them, Darlene, these records of yours, and that I plan to keep them, unless we cross paths and you want them back. Because they are the coolest things in my house on a hot summer day, making it seem like it's always 1960-something, a record shop around every corner, and at least one dear friend named Darlene.

## What I Can Use

We had a guest speaker at our meeting last night. Husky and stout, he looked like his dad or his uncle or his neighbor or like most of us menfolk hereabouts, including a tobacco dip, which swelled his lower lip like a bee sting. He didn't bother spitting it out before he spoke. I figured he would mumble in low tones full of gravel, as if he were shoveling gravy or talking to cows. My twisted take on things, I guess. But I was wrong about that—his voice was high and lonesome, like Ralph-Stanley-singing-a-murder-ballad-lonesome, as if he's inviting us to follow along like a feather in the breeze while he sings of poison and bloodshed and betrayal. That kind of thing. He talked for the better part of an hour and got himself sober toward the end, thank God. Lord knows we all need motivation, some living proof that life down the road may include roses of our own, but I felt like I'd been riding shotgun on a garbage truck, and but for the sobering part at the end, I could feel a serious hangover coming on. *A drunkalogue*, my sponsor, an old timer, later called it. *Mighty hard giving something away*, he said, *if nobody wants it. But that's his experience; take what you can use, he suggested with a wink, and leave the rest.*

## Devotion

I keep a picture of Tammy Wynette on my wall. It's a framed album cover for *Stand by Your Man*, where one side of her face is in shadow. I love it because she's winking at me when the light is right, which is all the time.