7/14/2021 Print page

ECHOES

MOST of my old friends have given up on finding a man who'd suit me, and in the same way they've adjusted to the fact that the men I always take up with prove to be unavailable for escort duty or else unfit for it. They're married, or they live out of state or out of the country, or are from a different milieu or from no milieu at all—unassimilable creatures, who've passed this trait along to me. And so I was surprised one day last winter when Daisy Lorch called and told me she wanted me to meet her dance teacher.

"What a nice idea." I said this out of a spark of real interest that suddenly flared in me. At forty I sometimes find the world more accommodating than I did when I was twenty.

"Can you come to dinner two weeks from Saturday?" Daisy asked. "We're having the Naylors, the Grants, and some other people. The Naylors can call for you and David—David Amato; he's divorced."

Punctuality has a terrible grip on me. The Saturday of the Lorches' dinner party I was ready to go and had been for a good half hour (during which I changed my earrings three times and my shoes twice) when Laurie Naylor arrived at my apartment.

"You've done the place up," she said. I'd bought new lampshades, replaced a couple of chairs with a love seat and an ottoman, put a skirt on the table. Laurie said, "You had your nerve, Connie—running a decorating business out of the old mess."

"You forget I make house calls," I said. "Nothing but, as a matter of fact. Is Billy double-parked?"

"No, we're in the bus stop." She looked around and asked, "Where's the phone? I have to call this man Daisy's got you 'fixed up with,' as she so quaintly put it. Bad enough to do it to you, without calling it that."

"Who knows?" I said. "He might be just my type."

Laurie said, "A dancer?"

"I think he just teaches dance."

She got a scrap of paper from her pocket, dialled the number written there, and began speaking in the slightly artificial voice people assume on the telephone. I took the moment to put on my coat and get my keys; when she hung up, I turned off the lights, and we went out into the hall. Laurie said, "Daisy Lorch is the only person I know who hasn't changed the least bit since college."

"That's hard to imagine," I said, "not changing." Then I thought of the watchful, lazy, shy girl I'd been and realized I'm still those things, if not more so.

"She called me yesterday to tell me what she'd be wearing tonight. So I wouldn't look out of it. She actually said 'out of it.' I suppose I should have passed the word."

I'd have been grateful if she had. These people's social lives are subject to sudden shifts in tone, and that evening I had doubts about the black velvet skirt and red silk blouse I was wearing. It's important to me to look the part, probably because the part I in fact play is ill-defined. Friend of the family, solitary, "single," "career woman"—I'm all those things and none of them. My life is more complicated than the shapeless lives of family friends I remember from childhood. I'm almost always involved with some man or other. I regard what I do as work rather than a career, and if events have led me into solitary ways, I have my sociable side, too. I was looking forward to the evening ahead. "What did Daisy say she's going to wear?" I asked.

Laurie shook her head. "I don't listen to clothes talk. I told her, 'It takes a lot to make me feel out of it these days—or in it, for that matter.' "

The flimsy glass front door of my building was rattling in its sash, and when we stepped outside, an icy gust blew us back a step or two. Laurie said, "I hate winter."

I said, "I love it less than I used to."

"Look at poor Billy."

He'd got out of the station wagon, looking nervous. Billy Naylor is the most tenderhearted man; when you tell him a discomforting story, he literally winces. He kissed me and said, "Why don't both of you take the back seat? Give me a chance to size this fellow up." As we were getting in, a bus turned the corner from Madison Avenue, and Billy dashed around front and slid behind the wheel of the car.

"There, darling, we made it," Laurie said. This wasn't an "I told you so" on her part but a way of sharing his relief. The Naylors are a happy couple, perhaps because they determined early on to make their life at least as pleasant as possible. As we drove off, Laurie said, "We were talking about Daisy."

"Dear old Dizzy," Billy called her, as people used to.

"What exactly do you mean when you say she hasn't changed?" I asked Laurie.

"You remember the way she used to be in class—taking down the profes-

https://archives.newyorker.com/newyorker/1981-06-15/flipbook/044/ 1/8

7/14/2021 Print page

"As far as I can tell, his name is Raswell, and he's in here on some kind of exchange program."

• •

sor's every word. It distracted me so, I couldn't sit near her."

"What I remember is the house in the Village," I said, "and the parties."

Billy said, "Daisy all in black—with the long blond hair."

I said, "She had real glamour, and at that age."

"She had to do everything to the hilt," said Laurie. "Be a real glamour girl and a real brain. And she still does things that way. Take this party. She'll have been weeks getting ready—making lists, shopping, talking it all over with her girl friends. She still has girl friends that she talks to on the phone for hours."

I said, "Where does she find the time?"

"Or the energy," said Laurie.

We crossed Central Park at Seventy-second Street, drove to Broadway, and headed uptown. Billy said, "O.K., you two, start looking for the house."

But it turned out that David Amato lived in a complex consisting of three buildings off a courtyard, and Billy had to park the car and go reconnoitring. The tall man he eventually brought back could, I thought, have used some of Daisy's clothes advice. Or had he chosen his cloth cap, sheepskin jacket, and corduroy trousers on the basis of suggestions from her? David Amato got in the front seat, turned around, and introduced himself. He and I used this couple of seconds to look each other over and take in the obvious (to me, certainly, probably to him, and maybe even to the Naylors)—that we were mismatched. Men with those liquid black eyes and full lips tend to lose themselves completely in the meal, or the song, or the face at hand—which it is seems immaterial. I like gaunt, ascetic-looking men, real sensualists whose refined appreciation of any given moment stems from the understanding that its pleasure will be insufficient. Over the course of several of them I learned that these men see my reserve as a task to be mastered; then I had to learn to make the task difficult—making myself into the bargain less attractive to the David Amatos, who require an expansiveness that's not my style, as the drive to Manhasset must have demonstrated. Laurie carried the conversation, which was mostly about the Naylors' four teen-age children. The latest in the chain of boarding schools and summer camps, student-exchange programs, bike and ski trips, language and cooking and music lessons took us from the streets of Manhattan over the Triborough Bridge and along the crisscross of parkways leading to the recesses of Nassau County, where there were still, surprisingly, sizable remains of the previous month's snowstorm.

"YOU made it! I was afraid traffic, or the weather, or something . . ." The sentence ended in the glissando laugh that has always been Daisy's trademark. She was in flowered chiffon—a floor-length skirt and a tunic with long wide sleeves—and this dress's fullness, together with

7/14/2021 Print page

BAR LEDGE

You lend your summer
house: you think
the screens are torn
and maybe voices will
undo the mildew, still
the rotting in the porches
underneath. Arrived,
I find that hemlocks
shield the shingled frame
above a squall-combed
bay. Silent as old
flaking paint, the door
limps in. The screens
are ripped; the golden
bees October caught
are dry and drift
more light than dust.
A shutter, single-
hinged, triangulates
the sea.

How safe a month it seems
only to see the well runs high
and watch the lamps'
chimneys perfect as glass
Baghdads of Aladdin dreams.
Those fears you recognize
in what is not my house
(I am so much
a stranger here, there-
fore care, beware,
and bank all fires)—
those menaces are not
my own.

A week has passed. I've learned
not to repair
the screens. I've come to share
this joy of summer
rain, of sunlight turned
to brown and meadow green.
I'll not disturb
one rotting thing. Allow
the tides' return,
and calibrate
by listing of the buoy's stem
the tug of cages heaving.

Imagine how the perfume morning
fogs release the moistened house.

Clumsily I practice
a perfection not my own.
Beneath the tinted shallows
on granite sand, some small
and pinkish crab I watch
remarks how prodigal
the sun, elaborately hesitates,
and stints his queer and stilted
dance. I see a premonition,
blame the faultless sun, avoid
the salt and reassuring mud.
At night the tidal moon
repairs Bar Ledge, restores
to other tones its green,
decrees a purple sky above
quiescent earth.

And then this morning
in the outhouse shed—the needled
pines around, and through
whose open door you see
one fat white peeling birch—
I heard my grandfather cough.

It happened that the cigarette
I smoked had filled
thin slats of sunlight
milkily. He coughed; the sunlight
twisted, rose to intricate
and ornamental scrolls
before it thinned, unwound itself,
and sank. Beyond he stood,
a grim Thanksgiving Pilgrim
Father, skullcap hidden
underneath the velvet hat
beside the birch.
Old *zeyde* hatted, stiff,
old *zeyde* turn the woods
into his Cracow photograph.

And stiffly, too, and awkwardly
I felt my sudden bareness
in your house, the bareness
of your house, and I
inside the unremembered
doorposts.

Whatever trespass surely
it is his; his gaberdine
however iridescent violates
this sun. Behind the birch
I know he's propped
his Law, usurped the maples,
and of each fir
carved fearful prohibitions.
Today again my son
will ask what people want
with lobsters. It might (it seems)
just be a grownup game
to him. To eat, I say,
and hesitate. He marks
each hesitation.
Do we?
he always says.

It is precisely so. Your house
is accurately placed
in green, weathered
in blue sky. The shingles
fall like perfect leaves
autumnally to earth.
How completely does
such wonder challenge me.

And how ridiculous I am
and maladroit Medomak
makes of me. At all the landings
launches stir, the trawls
surrender up their kegs
of sole, the claws are pegged
and whisper in the steaming pots
around me—dry, remote
as all Jerusalem.

I harbor here
such traces of my grandfather
as would not bear
his disbelief, dismay
at generations unpredictable,
for heresies of sunlight and of sky—
this beautiful and gentile Maine.

—JOSEPH MOSES

• •

its floatiness, made her appear to be waltzing around, which may have been a deliberate effect. Daisy was trained as a dancer and still takes lessons, though now she also gives them. Her long, slim body has a studied grace; she's naturally affected, which is to say that her bleached hair and her theatrics clearly stem from some authentically baroque strain in her personality. We all stage our lives, and Daisy's bold exercise of her flair for this amounts to a form of candor. By a process of laughter and pose she got us to leave our coats in the hall closet and follow her to the living room, which was candlelit. "Is it too much?" she asked. "I mean, is it enough?"

"No, it's not enough," Frank Lorch said out of the shadows. "Leave the hall light on."

But Daisy insisted, "That'd spoil it," and she turned the light off.

I've always felt that she's a strong person, that the laugh and the distracted air may be used to conceal just how strong, but perhaps I'm reading into her behavior something that's true of my own. I had a familiar sense of tucking myself in, toning myself down, as she brought us over to a group of early arrivals. They looked rather clannish, clustered together: a muscular woman, a colleague of Daisy's at the local ballet school; a

https://archives.newyorker.com/newyorker/1981-06-15/flipbook/044/ 3/8

7/14/2021 Print page

Our Spokesman

• •

redhead with a complacent manner, whom I took to be one of the girl friends. Recently divorced (Daisy whispered to me), she was there with a high-strung-looking fellow who reminded me of my friends' husbands at the time we all met, and for a minute or two I could feel what it was like to be young, how brimming with hope and confusion we all had been. The last member of the group at hand, a man with a startling suntan and a sullen expression, had once lived in the neighborhood, moved to California, and happened to be back East on business.

David Amato went to get me a glass of wine and when he came back, I said, "Daisy tells me you're a wonderful teacher."

His pleasure and surprise at this appeared to subdivide as he glanced over at Daisy. Was he a little in love with her? That meant there was no need for me to be especially ingratiating, and when he asked whether I agreed that Daisy was inclined to exaggerate, I briskly replied, "I honestly can't say."

"I thought you knew her well," he said. "I understood you were old friends."

"Are the two things necessarily the same?" This further attempt on my part to invest the small talk with some semblance of truth, or at least accuracy, was all too successful, and I was enmeshed in ramifications half an hour later, when a commotion on the other side of the room announced the arrival of the Grants—late, as usual. The crowd parted for them. Though Ted Grant is five foot seven and Nina barely five feet, they have the kind of presence ordinarily associated with impressive build; in their case it strikes me as an effect of the pleasure they take in each other's good looks and good taste. Ted gets his suits in London. Nina's clothes are up to the second—she's a dress designer, and the big Seventh Avenue house where she works recently gave her her own label.

David Amato said, "That woman resembles you."

"She's my closest friend," I told him.

"Does it follow that friends look alike?" he asked ironically, as if he'd decided to humor me.

I said, "We could never make up our minds, Nina and I. We were always having long discussions about whether similar backgrounds give people similar characteristics." He asked what were the similarities, and I doctored the facts a bit, making them more presentable. "Our mothers were pretty strong, and our fathers were unfailingly easygoing. Not that we ever came right out and said so."

"Why not," he asked, "if you were such friends?"

"Isn't everyone guarded at that age?" I still tighten up when I touch on the clash of personalities and interests that I grew up in the midst

https://archives.newyorker.com/newyorker/1981-06-15/flipbook/044/ 4/8

of. "Anyway," I said, "to me likeness never seems accidental."

Dissimilarity is what brings on the fear that we live more or less at random, and as David Amato began to extoll the small Massachusetts town where he was born, I had to fight down a violent sense of the pointlessness of casual encounters. The room had begun to be noisy, and it was hard to hear. I found myself trying less and less, looking around instead, wondering whether any of the nearby conversations was more worth having than the one I was caught in. And this went on for over an hour before Daisy breathlessly announced, "Everybody, listen—shall we start eating this food?"

THE elaborate antipasto laid out in the Lorches' small dining room looked to me like a cold supper, and I took larger helpings than I was able to finish by the time Daisy made another announcement: Dinner was ready downstairs.

The finished basement was twice the size of the dining room and well lit. After the candlelight the several lamps felt glaring, and when I'd got myself some beef stew and rice, some salad and a glass of wine, I retreated to the staircase, where the Grants were perched. "So," said Ted, moving up a step, "we gather."

"On the fringe, as usual," Nina said. That used to be her refrain in school, where we both tended to be observers.

"But at a different angle," I said. "Give us that much credit, Nina." I sometimes feel that the Grants suffer from the anomalousness of my present life, that they take it to heart. For one thing, Nina refers constantly to the safest frame of reference, the past.

"Can you breathe?" she asked me. A certain settled dampness in the air activates an allergy that has long plagued the pair of us.

I said, "I've been gasping for the last three days."

Ted said, "Ask me how India was."

I asked, "How was India?"

"Definitive." His conversation is stylized, suggesting superior powers of assimilation and judgment, making me wonder when I talk to him whether I'm falling into some trap.

I said, "I wouldn't mind seeing the Taj Mahal."

"Forget the Taj Mahal," he said. "The Red Fort is the place. Sumptuous."

Nina said, "When I think of how we grew up worrying about poor, starving India."

"No, we didn't worry about it," I said, and she laughed. We hadn't the social consciences that young people have now. The balance of our own lives was too precarious to allow us to venture into altruism. Once, when a social worker who'd come to lecture at the college laced into the student body for being selfish, someone stood up and laced back into her. They both had a point. That school was in transition, and a small percentage of the girls were heiresses, but the rest of us were scholarship students, enthralled by the possibilities for interesting lives that we found in that Georgian building on the East Side of Manhattan. We were even more fortunate than we knew most of us have become, one way o another, privileged.

I asked Nina, "Is that what we'll b wearing next month?"

"I hope so," she said. "Otherwis I'm in real trouble."

I said, "I'd certainly buy it if could afford you."

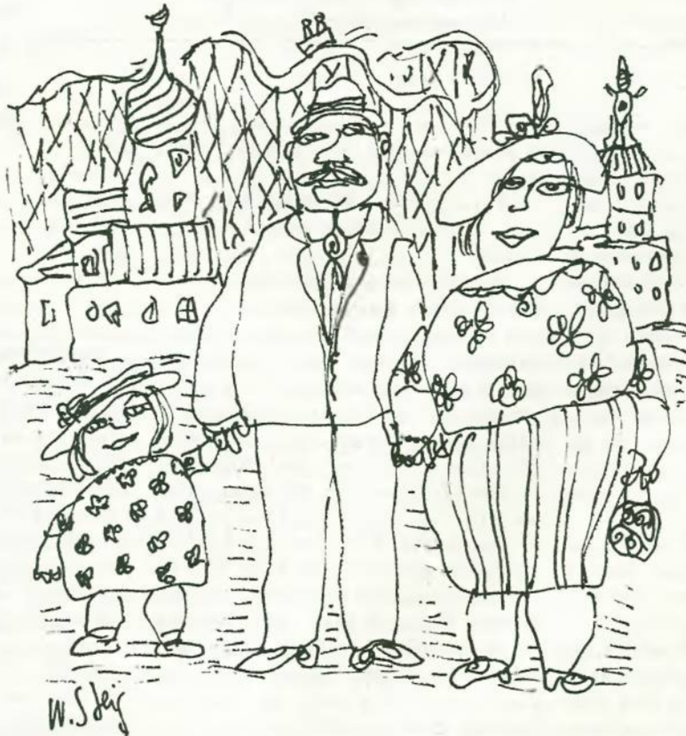
"Honestly?" An only child, Nina i burdened to this day with the simultaneous blind confidence and deep-seated self-doubt that's an aftereffect o growing up as the sole focus of attention. She said, "I wish I didn't thin of my clothes as the sort my mothe would have laughed at. The girl adore this dress, but then I'm not designing for teens." Her parents die shortly after her marriage. Her husband and four daughters are, in ever way, her family, her context, so closel knit as to eventually make me fee excluded.

I said, "I think I'll have mor stew," and got up and went over to th buffet, where I met Billy Naylor wit the man from California, who wa holding forth.

"When I got off the plane yesterday I was sick to my stomach. I started to remember shovelling the driveway, crawling along the Expressway or freezing my ass of for an hour and a hal at the train station I thank God I'm ou of all that. I mean it, thank God."

Billy winced.

I DON'T mind th inconvenience o buffet suppers—th butter sliding dow the edge of the plate the salad dressing seeping into the gravy What bothers me is th rootlessness that prevails in the absence o a dinner table. Withou that center of gravity people tend to los direction, and that evening Frank had troubl getting us away fron the dregs of the mea and back upstairs where—directionles himself, I suppose—h kept trying to fix everyone drinks. Part of hi trouble was Daisy



Playland

7/14/2021 Print page

"It's a little bit cramped, but you can't beat it for security."

drifting about waylaying people. "Did you hear about our vacation?" she asked me, as if it had been a scandalous affair. "We went camping across the country. I thought I'd never get past New Jersey, but we made it all the way to Montana."

"I suppose the boys loved it," I said. Daisy has three sons.

"I suppose so," she said. "Not that we exchanged more than a dozen words the whole six weeks. Still, we never have anything to say." The tragic import of this was voided by her laugh. "I drive them to school, I drive them to baseball practice and Boy Scouts, and it's just hello, goodbye, where will I meet you." She lowered her voice to ask, "How do you like David?"

"Awfully handsome," I said.

"I have to tell you something about him." She looked dire, and I wondered if he had an incurable disease, a criminal record.

But at that point Frank came along and said, "Honey, where's that ice-crusher thingamajig? People are asking for their Stingers on the rocks." Daisy went off with him.

Living alone has taught me to appreciate my own company, to depend on the long passages of reflection that are solitude's great luxury, and I went and sat down by myself on the sofa. The candlelight, which earlier in the evening had cast its famed romantic glow, now picked out unflattering highlights, making people look haggard. The divorcée's hair was dyed, I decided. Did Nina dye hers? That coppery tint struck me as new, but maybe it was just henna shampoo. Still, most women our age must dye their hair. That I've left the gray that's begun to show in my own is only partly vanity's boast of indifference to the passage of time; mostly it's the dread of acquiring troublesome and costly habits, which also stopped me, when I was young, from taking up smoking.

Across the room, Laurie began to shake her head in a deprecating way, as if she'd been called on to deplore something in herself—perhaps the fact that she's recently given up teaching. My friends talk, as women now do, about the pros and cons of work, though the pros were considered few when these people married—all for love, as far as I could tell then or now. Others we knew did the sensible thing—went from bad love affairs into the sort of acceptable and probably satisfactory marriages that I've resisted. Family life as I knew it was a crushing business, and the effort not to be crushed fostered in me a waywardness that was later confirmed by the emotional complexity of the men I was drawn to—perhaps by the aspect of intimacy I knew best, the hardship it entailed. Obstacles, which I'd expected to outgrow, became instead second nature to me, and now I sometimes feel entangled by experience. I'd like to be straightened out, to be simplified, and with some such notion in mind I was actually reconsidering David Amato, when Nina plopped down beside me.

"Any developments?" she said, referring to Joe Fletcher, who of the several puzzling men I've loved has proved the most difficult—touchy, evasive, eloquent, jaded, rustic.

I said, "I was out there last week. The same old runaround."

"Did you say anything?"

Nina wants me to force the issue, to tell Joe I'm sick of his fecklessness, and when she speaks this way I begin, in spite of myself, to picture a reconciliation scene: Joe docile and reformed; a new, composed me. The trouble is, Nina doesn't know Joe—or, for that matter, anyone like him. Parallel to her level of existence, where events—good and bad—work out in an orderly fashion, but different from the outrageous and intrusive tragic world, is this remote plane I've wandered onto, where life proceeds by fits and starts, sometimes grinding to a halt or going into reverse. And Joe is the epitome of

https://archives.newyorker.com/newyorker/1981-06-15/flipbook/044/ 6/8

this, someone for whom the decorum and consistency of my friends' lives would be hellish. I said, "Believe me, he's beyond that approach, Nina."

"No one's beyond the truth. It's human nature to respond to someone who tells it."

It would be wonderful to think that people can speak their minds in good faith and count on a like response. Absence of such truth has been a condition required by the mode of feeling most familiar to me—all nuance and innuendo. I said to Nina, "Maybe you're right."

"Do it. You'll see."

Maybe any pattern of experience must regularly be tested to see if the conclusions drawn from it continue to hold true. I said, "I just might."

"Just might what?" asked Ted, leaning over the back of the sofa.

"Have one of Frank's Stingers," I said.

"Sit there, I'll get it."

He went off again, and Nina nodded in David Amato's direction. "How's the ballerina?"

As if he'd overheard (though he couldn't have) or caught her nod (which was conceivable), David turned our way. Nina and I looked into each other's eyes—appalled and delighted, on the brink of the old, surreptitious convulsions that are so painful and so refreshing.

THE CORPSE OF THE INSENSITIVE

The mountainside or pasture hills
are gauzy green, and a few cows
sleep on the ground—a sign of rain
someone who doesn't know says. With tongues

the cows graze the body in the grass.

The woodsmoke from the house is soaked with rain;
the rain continues—low clouds,
wind, a chill, and so on.
Yet we stand on the crossbeam redwood patio

and discuss the body in the grass.

It has been summer here and now it's fall.
No one is ready to begin the climb into winter.
Nothing in government has been settled,
although a strike in Poland is over.
The moon spins in a socket, the young touch

through the filament clothes of the body in the grass.

End-of-the-season, turn-of-the-leaves,
so much left behind: summer pets, touch,
and one or two small things said once
and never said again, or remembered,

after addressing the body in the grass.

We rise in the first snow of winter
on the heat of woodfire,
our bodies partly spent in summer's slow decomposition.
We rise up on our own heat, simultaneous,

as if that body rising in the grass were ours.

—Daniel Halpern

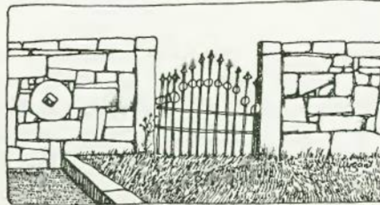
• •

LAURIE went to sleep sitting up in an armchair. The divorcée's boyfriend had too much to drink, and she was making an embarrassed and embarrassing running joke of it. David Amato seemed to have hit it off with Daisy's muscular ballet-school colleague, whose husband looked pained. Ted and Nina were dancing cheek-to-cheek without music. Frank was trying to sell me on camping. The man from California had got Daisy's ear. That was how things stood at two o'clock, when Billy Naylor said, "All good things must come to an end."

The tide of departure set Daisy off on a series of delaying tactics that amounted to a wan version of her welcome—slow flourishes, subdued gaiety. Helping me with my coat, but preventing me from getting it quite on, she said, "I didn't tell you about David." I thought, Here it comes—the disease, the homicidal tendencies; but Daisy said, "About a year ago, he broke up with a girl and hasn't seen her since; then just last Friday he rang her—when he knew he'd be meeting you. I could kill him."

I was slightly put out myself, and in no mood to make the best of the close quarters on the ride home, when Laurie took her rightful place up front with Billy and I had to share the back seat with David Amato. But putting the party behind gave us all our second wind; or maybe it was the fresh air that revived us and got the conversation going.

Somehow the subject of capital punishment came up, and the Naylors ran through the merry sort of argument that happy couples frequently allow themselves in front of others (as opposed to the quarrels in earnest that you sometimes glimpse or suspect from an abrupt remark or a quick glare). Then, with the best of intentions, Laurie turned around and politely said something about how ballet had broadened its horizons. "All kinds of mayhem get onstage now," she said. "Or philosophizing."



David Amato took an obtuse sort of offense at this, saying, "The subjects of ballet have always been universal."

"But look at people like Twyla Tharp," Laurie said. "Though of course her work is junk."

He disagreed violently.

I couldn't resist bringing Joe into the car. "Someone I know likes the ballet because nobody says anything, so nobody can be misconstrued."

"Dance pares the world down to essentials," David Amato said.

"It isn't the world without excess," said Laurie.

"You're mistaking the excess for truth," he said.

"Anyway, that has nothing to do with why I love ballet." No one asked

7/14/2021 Print page

"I didn't come to argue, sweetheart, but I must beg to differ."

• •

Laurie's reason, which she nevertheless gave. "It's a pretty dream."

He said, "Balanchine's 'Agon'?"

"Real suffering's ugly," she said.

And so it went all the way into Manhattan and down Broadway. Ninety-second Street being eastbound, Billy was about to turn on Ninety-third, when David Amato said, "You can let me out at the corner."

"It's no trouble," Laurie said.

"I insist."

Billy pulled over to the curb and sadly asked, "Are you sure this is all right?"

"Positive." David got out of the car and looked back in at us. "Nice meeting all of you," he said coldly and slammed the car door—clearly for good measure.

Billy groaned softly and released the brake. Laurie said, "I wish Daisy wouldn't get these ideas."

I turned and watched David Amato going down the street, past a string of shops that even from a distance looked to me very West Side—probably, I thought, a Mexican restaurant, a hardware store, a wild boutique, another ethnic restaurant. There were plenty of people out—winding up what sorts of evenings, I wondered; and if I'd put myself out, would my own have been more fruitful? At one time I'd have made an effort. David Amato and I might have had some meals together, seen some plays—no ballets. But the truth is I've lost whatever patience I once had with that kind of thing. I can tell in advance how flat such evenings will be, how lacking in resonance, for unless I hear, however faintly, the intricate theme that has moved me in the past, I simply can't pay attention to someone. I can't even try. I faced front again. "It was nice of Daisy to bother," I felt obliged to say.

"Diz gets carried away. Always has." Laurie shrugged. "How I hate outsiders."

"Oh," I said, "well, yes." I sat forward, folding my arms on the back of their seat.

"It's more fun with just ourselves," Billy said.

"More restful," said Laurie.

We—the Naylors and the others and I—had shared that critical time when lives find direction, and with each other now we recovered the sense of our former promise that no amount of fulfillment makes less precious. For me there was a bonus; my old friends gave me a part in the harmony they've managed to impose on life. But what did I offer them? Discord, I thought—a clear, persistent echo of the inconclusiveness of things. Probably, all things considered, it was an even exchange. "More something," I said.

—Elizabeth Cullinan

https://archives.newyorker.com/newyorker/1981-06-15/flipbook/044/ 8/8