



Caroline Picard

AGEE BY THE
BEDPOST

In an episode of twilight, tea stood cold on a plain wooden table with three centripetal chairs. A doily lay equidistant. The doily had been tatted by hand. Winter light was fair where it spread through curtains of cockadoodle doo and mingled with the smell of pie. It was happy to come in from outside, as outside the trees were black and bare, absorbing without reflecting in a maze of hitherto. Out there the light was useless. There the wood was endlessly and tirelessly cold.

Unlike the tea, the kitchen was warm and the light was drawn to rest. It persisted in pastels.

A tea bag lay forgotten, lazing with its tail in a loop, while a napkin soaked up the essence of its head. Beneath, the tissue absorbed a cryptic fortune. Three mugs, one chipped from fondness, had been abandoned and stood at intermittent levels of English Breakfast. Butter sat on the doily under a porcelain cow. The butter was soft and the cow was smiling.

Intermittent moans pronounced the absence of children while the clock in the hall kept time.

Down the hall, in the bedroom, a grown man was weeping. His wife was, however, silent.



Sherrie Levine, "After Walker Evans," 1981



www.featherproof.com

Hey, Thanks for reading this featherproof LIGHT READING mini-book. For more swell stuff, pay us a visit at:

-This is story is based on an incident in the life of James Agee, as printed in "The Family Man," a book review printed in The New Republic by Christopher Benfey, October 31 2005.



Caroline Picard is the Founding Director of The Green Lantern Gallery & Press, a Co-Editor for the literary podcast The Parlor (www.theparlorreads.com) and Director of Publications at ThreeWalls where she acts as the Co-Editor for "Paper & Carriage" a new arts and literary publication. Her writing has been published in a handful of publications including the *Phildelphia Independant*, *NewCity*, *Lumpen*, *AREA Chicago* and she has a forthcoming essay in both *Chicago ArtJournal Review* and *Proximity Magazine*. She has shown her visual work nationally and internationally, most recently at Around the Coyote where she was written up in *TimeOut Chicago* and *ArtForum* on-line.



Occasionally her eyes flicked back, away from his; but she didn't like to look away. Her will forced an outside concentration; she tried to concentrate on him. She had strung a thread between their eyes, imagined again the smell of sweet grass and summertime.

His best friend was futile. One of her hands clasped his waist, cold with a cold sweat. She did not look at him. Her other hand gathered the corner of the bottom sheet.

She tugged to escape.

He watched her smiling brown eyes. They winced a moment, under another thrust that was not his.

In the absence of tragedy we make our own. Between tears, Agee was dictating. He rocked in his chair; it was not a rocking chair. He rocked of his own accord, his rocking discordant with theirs.

I remember thinking we might steal happiness, you and I. I remember looking into your eyes and feeling sure, with some sneaky delight, that you and I would escape the worry, harvesting a field of joy between us, the thing that nothing could touch, because it only existed in the meadow in which we lay, billowing with the seeds of enchantment and merriness. It was the thing that I loved most about you.

Because in your eyes I was sure to be safe and full.

Everyone else the fool.

"Go on and fuck," Agee said, stirring sugar. "I want to see." The spoon chimed occasionally against the boundaries of the cup.

His best friend looked at her quizzically.

She was sipping tea.

They could all hear the clock.

Against her will her eyes rolled back to the muted sky of the bedroom wall. They chose that color together, in preparation of winter's overcast.

She gasped in the back of her throat, swallowing something guttural. In a moment at twilight a woman came before a man. She swallowed it, conjuring instead the sound of a mouse scuttling in the cellar. Her coming she kept a secret. Though, unwittingly, the man followed.

He cried out, broke the forest into splinters and the shards fell, tinkling in a sheet of ice that scared the mouse away. Another secret she clenched in her hand as though to fold it into the sheet and press it away.

She looked terribly calm.

To everyone else the night was unresolved.

Light around the house was closing in and shrinking into a frosty lead that shrunk. A moan made a breach outside with a gasp and the gasp was a whale and the wood a bear. The whale sang in desperate

In a letter to Father Flye, Agee was weeping. The page was wet. He paused to breathe at three o'clock.

And then I drank the water and forgot.

You promised.

You took me to the end of the pier with flushed cheeks that I could not muster myself. My cheeks were sick, my blood wane and stingy. We looked at the cold black water, but you promised me. You promised me because you had to. You promised me beyond your belief that there would be something more, that I would endure. I clung to your hands. I tugged on your collar, I tore a button off your lapel. I was hysterical. I couldn't let go, I heard the wavering doubts in your voice but when you pried me off and held me hard I trembled. I nodded when you said we would go on. The button left an imprint on my palm. I believed more than you because I knew I had no choice but to go.

And then we praise the survivors

(for that little while before we take survival for granted).

resignation. And the woman was a savssat—the last hole in the ice through which the whale breached, sealing the hole with the wet gasp of its breath. The woman's restraint mixed with Walker's abandon when she looked away from her weeping husband. In the throes and faint from pathos, she gave up.

In silence the woman drifted. She drifted above the trees and listened to the sun as it set.

Her eyes were closed.

Walker died at twilight while thinking of Patrokles. In the evening he was bruised but reborn.

They would have pasta for dinner. There was some old tomato sauce in a jar and some fresh basil she'd bought that afternoon. She didn't have any meat. That would have to do. She had forgotten meat.

Agee still held the brass knob and his knuckles were still white.

And a salad. There were some greens. They were probably fine. Salad was always difficult this season. But there was always cheese and bread—

Feeling was stronger than a linear course.

—and so help me a bottle of wine.

For Christ—

She was sobbing also. Her face pursed with an inconceivable and unwarranted hurt. She was thinking: It is impossible to live and love and breathe harmlessly. It is inevitable that we should hurt. It is unacceptable but it cannot be helped.