

light reading series

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By Heidi Laus

OUR PILGRIMAGE TO DOLLYWOOD

I didn't I didn't know what questions to ask when she called and told me the news. I will never have a baby. I will never have a child. I will have no one to spend Christmas with in twenty years. I will die alone in an old folk's home.

I cried for a minute or two. My boyfriend didn't really react. It took him a while to stop the work he had taken home with him to come over and try to hug me. By then I was dried up. And I went on a drive up Adams Avenue. I drove in the slower lane. I watched Lestat's Coffeehouse go by. There was only one smoker out on the patio. They must be inside ordering their drinks. I saw that the Fiesta Market had brussel sprouts on sale. There must be a surplus somewhere. It must be brussel sprout season. I noticed that Mr. Lazary had his hot dog stand out on the corner. He must be back from New York. He must have found someone to feed his fish. I should have fed his fish for him. I should have made the extra effort.

He waved at me as I drove by. I smiled at him. I pretended I was singing along with the radio even though it wasn't even on. I tapped the window of my car and watched him fall away into my rear view mirror.

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1



Heidi Laus has moved from the desert to the beach to the hills, all the while keeping one foot in the other. She like music, conversation, wine, and food. And wrestling accordions.



The bathhouse, Pecs, has its doors open, too. But no one is there yet. They air it out about this time. It must still be early. It feels late. The sky has that late afternoon gummy quality to it. Whenever I walk my dog, I have

and beer just as quickly. They turned back to their television to get a look at me. The men all turned the only female in the entire place. The men all turned. The air felt like cheap sheets. It was humid. And I was in there. It smelled like semen-crusting shag rug in there. And that was all I ever did. It smelled like a dirty motel walked by in the evening and decided to pop my head in. I tell the TV is on a sports channel. I remember the time I can see that Rosey O'Grady's has its doors open. I can be out so I don't have to beep and wave.

I don't know why I did that. Why did I tap the glass? What must Mr. Lazary be thinking? He must just think I was being goofy as usual. Making my surreal jokes as usual. He never understands my jokes, but he laughs anyway. He says I belong up East with my raunchy sense of humor and fake cynicism. I helped him sell hot dogs a few times. People are always beeping and waving at him as he stands there in his khaki shorts and yellow polo shirt. Sometimes, I drive the long way if I know he will

to cross to the other side of the street before I pass Pecs. I can't stand the smell coming out of that place, either. Like barn animals. It growls into the street. Invades the fresh air outside. Gentleman's Bar it says on the door. Gentleman's Bar. They must have it easy, the gays. Eight dollars to get your dick sucked. Just stick it through a hole and for eight dollars you can have it sucked. Easy as can be.

I slow to a stop at the red light. The clock next to the 7-11 is wrong again. It is not one nineteen in the morning. It is not dark outside. That clock never reads the right time. How hard can it be for someone to make sure that it's set correctly? Don't my tax dollars pay for that? It's a city clock. Some people probably depend on it to get them to their shitty jobs on time. I see the bird's nest on top of it. The light turns green. The person in front of me takes an eternity to accelerate. Let's go, fucker. You have the slowest reaction time I have ever seen in a human being. Fuck you. Fuck you.

I drive by Betsy's Bookstore. I strain to see if she has her sign out. I can't tell, though. It is handwritten and just says, "Open when I get here." Last week I came by twice in one afternoon and she was closed both times.

the fourth of July. I couldn't think of a more fitting place to be an American, I told her. There is a sign with Dolly on it and she is saying that her one wish is for the Smoky Mountains to touch our hearts. Her one wish. Just one.

There is a Flannery O'Conner she has that I want. Some of her short stories. I don't know about her novels. I heard they are awful, just awful. But her short stories are some of the best examples of modernism I'm aware of. Betsy is old and thin and has seventies bangs and a mole on her forehead. Above her eyebrow. It is a very large mole. Sometimes, it pokes out from behind the bangs. She is not even speckled anymore. She is just white. White white. I don't do mornings, she told me. I don't do them anymore. I like her because we hardly talk. She isn't very friendly. We hardly say three words to each other when I am in her store. She never bothers to help me find anything. She barely looks up at me. I don't do mornings anymore.

The Rite-Aid comes up on my left, and I pull into the parking lot. I find my wallet. Might as well buy cigarettes. I guess I can give into the cigarettes, now. I told Ambrose that I would drive up to New York in June and pick her up, and we would go on a road trip. It has to be this year. This year or no year because I am turning thirty this year and that means I have to stop smoking. This year or no year. I can't go on a road trip and not smoke. The plan is to arrive to Dollywood for