

apropos of nothing

i am no sooner at my desk than hartz is standing in the doorway. i look up from grading papers. hartz is the sort of guy who drives one towards a trust in racial stereotyping. "what is it, hartz?" i ask. he says, "come over to my cell."

we go across the corridor. "there!" he says, pointing to a large dead fish upon the floor. "it must have jumped out of my officemate's aquarium. his pride and joy. an oscar. he nursed it from a caviar."

"it stinks," i say. "i know," he says. "why don't you just call bill?" he shakes his head, "he doesn't have a telephone."

"why don't you call the janitor?" "i'm scared," he says, "i'm scared that bill will say i could have saved it." "are you prepared to administer mouth-to-mouth resuscitation?" "no," he says, "but sometimes if you put them back and kind of walk them around"

"call the janitor." "what if bill wants to keep it?" "look," i say, "you don't mount goldfish, even oscars. marlin, sailfish, swordfish, fine -- but goldfish, no. for christ's sake, hartz. when did you ever see a goldfish up on some dude's wall next to the family moose?" "i'm scared," he says.

"then take it down to the department office. have them freeze it for him." "what if someone eats it?" "no one eats a fucking oscar." "why me?" hartz says. "my whole life, why me?"

"the wind is changing." "yes," he says. "i just don't want to get involved," he says. "i learned in new york city not to get involved," he says.

he tells me then about the price of parking tickets in new york, and rockefeller is much worse than regan. he once knew someone taught at stony brook, they didn't get promoted. and why does no one ever ask, what about the rights of the victim?

i take the papers home with me.

-- Gerald Locklin

Long Beach, California