

THE SCRUTINIES

Hidden in that lock-box were papers
I was never meant to see.
Certificates of some kind.
Maybe birth, maybe death, maybe
something they knew I couldn't deal with.
Whenever they opened it they gave me
a look that said I should leave the room.
The box bulged. Policies of some sort.
Old photos with water damage.
They liked to look at them
and become sad at the sight of them,
reshuffle and restack them
and wrap the thin black ribbon around.
It was a ritual. And when it was over
they were kinder to me than at any other time
because they knew I would never know
the secrets contained there.

CAPRICORNUCOPIA

My horoscope keeps telling me to be more open to new
experiences, to worry less about blowdarts from the bushes,
worry less about everything, buy some tropical fish
and take up fencing (as in swords), force romance from the
cinderblocks all around me, dodge the exploding chunks,
that's only Neptune colliding with some runaway moon of
Saturn. Don't give it a second thought, by the end of the
week you'll be scuba diving in a bay of pink champagne with
an impressionable Miss Universe contestant. It's only
inevitable given these dramatic planetary shiftings, all
of which point to wonderful developments in your favor, if
you can just open yourself to them, become so busy with
them you don't check back next month to see how tellingly
the new instructions depart from the old.

GAINING ON ME

The van in the left lane keeps pace with me,
whether I slow down or speed up. There's an official
crest on the side: the state correctional facility.
I wish the windows were tinted a deeper green.
As it is I see men with weight-lifter necks looking down
at my gear box, and the other overrated features in
my car. It's fairly clear the radio isn't playing in there,
another little form of institutionalized punishment,
no doubt highlighted in yellow in some policy book
authored by a warden long dead. I start to press the
cigarette lighter, then think better of it. What am I

going to do, torture them even more by smoking when it's obvious they can't? Well, they're murderers and civil miscreants after all. I hit the accelerator hard and feel my unseen captors gaining on me.

— Peter Morris

Lansdale PA

CHILDISH

— to Martin

A stoop-shouldered English professor once forced a senior out of registration and made him go back about three hours in the process because his trial study schedule was not "neat." It was barely legible, but such schedules are for the student only, and the student seethed. A year later the new graduate student was whistling his way to class when in a crowded hallway the professor came out of his office, remembered something and set his leather briefcase with brass initials on it by the open door to his office, then a pretty sophomore girl in a red dress followed him in and shut the door. The usually timid new grad student picked the case up confidently, realizing with every step that he was risking a life sentence in a gas station or selling encyclopedias and hurried out the front entrance, then delicately balanced the case on the narrow concrete rail by the steps. Now, thirty years later, almost at retirement age, he is still pleased and unrepentant.

GOOD DAYS

Today we have lived in the same house for twenty years. Married for thirty-two years. Our sons are twenty-eight, twenty-five and twenty-three. They are kind, confident and analytical. Two of them will be doctors soon. The youngest is studying for the LSAT. Tomorrow I intend to buy two or three sets or packages, or however they come now, of toy soldiers, the best I can find, and a b-b gun. I will place the soldiers under the big tree in the back yard, some on the bricks, some partially hidden in the grass, and shoot at them from the garage until I knock them all down.

— Cleatus Rattan

Cisco TX