

these books, but for me they just don't deliver the same pleasure.

i even know what the problem is: it's a matter of identification. for my pleasure reading, i want a protagonist that i feel very close to, such as scudder or morse; i don't want to have to expand my empathetic capacities — i do that in the rest of my life, as teacher and father and writer and even, sometimes, as husband, not to mention as citizen of long beach, america, the world.

as i close out the day and prepare to slip into dreams, i want to be able to sympathize with myself.

#### MY LAST AUNT

my aunt has lived as many years, fifty-seven, in the same apartment, as heinz had varieties of soup. her doctor would like her to move because there are no places nearby to walk to anymore, and it's not a good neighborhood for walking anyway. the friends she has left either don't drive at all now, or don't like to. a couple of years ago, she fell getting off a bus and injured her foot, though not, at least, her hip. but she can't face moving.

i don't blame her. i dread the possibility of having to relocate from my office in humanities building, what with the ramshackle shelves of books, the boxes bulging with manuscripts, the drawers of correspondence. we are an easily addicted species, even to wallpaper and the shape of our surroundings. hers is an awfully small place, though, one bedroom with tiny parlor and kitchen. the building smells, not noxious, but as musty as its years, its threadbare carpeting. the neighbors are nice but don't visit. her eccentric fifty-year-old niece who stays with her on weekends mitigates the social benefits by smoking up a hurricane.

i think my aunt just turned ninety. she might live a little longer in a newer roomier place,

in a suburb, or she might not.  
she's not rich, but she could  
afford to move. probably she'd rather  
save the money for my grandkids — she  
had no children of her own. i don't  
tell her to move; i don't tell her not  
to. if i were a betting man, i'd  
wager she'll stay put.

#### GOOD NEIGHBOR PETE

twice a week my neighbor saves  
all of us on the street from sweeper tickets.  
when i hear my doorbell ring  
at noon on a thursday  
i know i've forgotten to move my car  
to the other side of the street.  
when it rings on friday, i know  
i've forgotten to move it back.  
i rush out in my stocking feet  
to save myself the fine.  
up and down the street  
others are doing the same.  
i tell pete i'd sooner put a match  
to a twenty dollar bill  
than contribute another cent to the city.  
and nowadays the meter maids of both sexes  
will write you up from a distance  
as long as they can read your license plate  
even if you're in the act  
of moving your car,  
and naturally the one thing the state  
is doing better is making  
the license plates more visible.

pete is retired but it's not as if  
he doesn't have plenty to keep him busy,  
including seemingly dozens of kids and grandkids,  
not to mention the inevitable jobs around  
the house and yard and garage  
that he's good at and i'm not.  
it's just that he also believes  
in being a good neighbor.  
if that's a middle-class, republican value,  
i hope it spreads to other factions as well.

— Gerald Locklin

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