

Words, Images, & More

Meta/ Phor(e) /Play

Dawn's Playground by Paul Rabinowitz

As the long, hot days of summer wore on, something new began to churn and build inside me. It had been there for a long time, but now it made itself impossible to ignore. I lost interest in characters with singular purpose in favor of those with multifaceted needs and desires. I moved on instinct, and importantly, found I was becoming better able to trust my instincts.

The last time we met she told me she could feel pain in my characters as their bodies twisted and fell to the ground. She liked how they crawled through mud to arrive at some kind of resolution. With this new knowledge, and gasping for air, they stood and looked out from my pages at the reader, at her. Something was changed forever in the process. She said I was turning the corner and heading in the right direction toward something meaningful.

Something meaningful, I thought. Everything was meaningful.

"You're getting there," she said.

But it came at a price.

Everything else in my life became secondary as I diverted my time and focus to get there. It all fell away but this, my singular priority.

Something meaningful.

"Don't we need to transfer money today into the kids' college funds?"

"Not now, dear," I said, shutting my eyes tight to shield me from the distraction. I continued typing out the final scene before the resolution. I was so close.

Like the natural evolution of seeds pushing through moist soil after an early spring rainstorm, this new style emerged and spread through my pages, rooted itself there, and in my mind. Before sitting down to write, I would step outside to watch the sun rise and dawn's playground come alive. Robins and squirrels twitched and leaped as they scoured the earth to satisfy their hunger.

I'd close my eyes and inhale the sweet morning air until her eyes and body appeared. My imagination felt to me to have the accuracy of a photograph, capturing every line and crevice and dark space as it set the image into the accessible and well-traveled lenses of my mind.

Today the composition was filled with magnolia trees and hungry pollinators as a gentle wind danced over my skin, awakening my senses. Wearing a yellow cotton sundress, she looked down in approval on her garden as the first spear shaped leaves of a tulip bulb emerged from the dirt after a cold winter. I set my coffee on the desk and rolled my fingers over the smooth plastic keys. I closed my eyes for a moment, willing forward whatever needed to emerge from the moment.

As precisely as if I'd pushed the button of a camera, a vision sailed from the back of my mind to the front, through the open pores of my skin, before arriving through the tips of my fingers. The screen slowly filled with mass, with particularity, in the form of a garden gate and a watering can. The woman lifted the bright copper vessel and began watering the beds. She appeared like a shadow at first, but as I went deeper, the enigmatic figure changed, acquiring sharper definition. I decide to illuminate her just enough to give the reader a hint of her form. She was tall and lean, with auburn hair that fell around her bare shoulders. When she bent down to remove a twig, her bright yellow dress spread across the dark soil of the earth.

Her hair spilled forward to reveal bare shoulders slightly burned by the sun.

With the ticking sounds of the wall clock counting off cadence, I wrote until I was overwhelmed by hunger. I pushed away from my desk, stretched my arms and back, and read my closing lines one more time.

The front door slams shut, shuddering the house's foundation and loosening the pinned train schedule that hangs from a corkboard on the wall. It falls behind the desk into a deep crevice. I quickly print the pages and run out for the train. I know I've forgotten to close the gate but I don't want to make her wait.

I arrive on time and unpack my story. I wait.

"Sorry I'm late," she says once she arrives, unhurried, before reaching for my pages.

"Everything alright?"

She gave me no response, as usual. I ordered two coffees and watched her eyes move across the pages.

“What d’you think?”

She appeared to be lost in thought and not present with me.

“I have to go.”

“Wait, what? We just sat down.”

And just like that she was gone.

I thought about running after her, but decided against it. She stepped briskly, decisively away, as if trying to get somewhere on time, despite the fact that the time had been prearranged as ours, that she’d arrived to be there, had the intention to be there, albeit late. Albeit unhurried.

As she crossed Grand Street, she slipped one strap of the canvas bag from her shoulder and looked inside. Like a person without sight, she dug her hand deep inside trying to find something. I turned away from the scene, sipped my coffee and noticed her wire rim glasses on the pavement under the chair where she sat. The wire had come undone and the lens had fallen out. When I looked up, she had disappeared. I wondered then if I’d been giving her too much credit for seeing, for vision. I wondered if her compass had faltered.

I don’t know if I would have followed her even if she hadn’t. I don’t believe that should have been part of the story, my care in the face of her strange dismissal.

I dropped her glasses into my backpack and took out my writing pad. As I sipped my coffee I jotted down ideas for a novel, new ideas, deeply my own. I brought them forth onto the page. Knowing she would not return today to retrieve her glasses, I ordered pastries to fill my stomach and prepared an outline for the chapters to come.

I can’t say how I knew she wouldn’t return, but I was right. She didn’t.

I wrote through the afternoon.

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