



SCRIPT

VOLUME 2 SPRING 88

MOLLY BARHAM

September

Children, brightly dressed in fresh clothes and smiles,
laugh and wave today's class project
high above their heads.

One glances upward at an impossible sky,
sees a bunch of birds,
and wonders how
they are able to fly in a line.
But he never asks.

A large sheet of construction paper lies abandoned
on the ground: wrinkled, foot imprinted. dirty. But
still the colors shine up at the trees — mimicking, mocking.
And the trees, in answer,
cover the children's work with the real thing.

CHRIS BERG

The Questioning

When I awoke the desert was at my feet.
Dry heat burned my nakedness.

I fell to my knees, and gulped the sand.
Though my stomach burst, He was there,
watching and loving,
while the ants consumed me.

GINA JOHNSON

Honey Song

Humming merrily, merrily hum bumblebee hum.
 Piano plays a peony cacophony.
 Hear O Iguana! I wanna iguana lovely lizard
 Pomegranate sprays sprinkling Shasta soda
 into macrame mouths,
 fizzling giggling gargling fuzzy effervescence.
 Barry Elkin buttoning buffalo plaid.
 Pandemoniously, lambs are massaged,
 thanks to mermaids
 masticating the penultimate crumbs of helium.
 Insomnia masquerades as Marcus Aurelius toasting
 bass or baritone in periwinkle blue,
 Humming merrily, merrily hum bumblebee hum.

Stained Glass

A warm wonder:
 the ruby reds and
 butter brickle gold
 of church light
 Joyburst:
 a prism
 discovered
 catching the worldshine
 throwing back
 electric ribbons
 at ticklish vision
 Latelights:
 never surrendering
 to the dark
 painting their portrait
 on the sea
 impressionistically
 passionately
 dazzling
 brightly Awake.

KAREN LEH

In the Tower

The click of Jerry's step was the sound of singular nickels dropped on tile. He emerged from the dark, empty hallway to a stairwell and entryway flooded with light. Standing at the base of the stairs, he looked up through the open, rectangular space created by the winding handrail. He placed his hand on the wooden bannister and began to ascend. The second step groaned beneath his weight, and he smiled.

After five stairs, the first landing. Many years ago, there had been a guest book and stand shoved against the wall. He remembered staring over his father's shoulder at the plume of the pen used to sign the book.

The sunlight became brighter. As soon as he rounded the curve of the banister on the third landing, he looked up. The pattern in the window was a dove descending — bright, jagged fragments of blue and orange, fanning out before it and behind it. He could only stare for a few seconds. It was that time in the late afternoon when the sun hit it directly.

As he moved up the steps, he could see the doorway of the little room at the near-top of the tower. The door stood open, and a light whirring sound came from within.

The air was thick with light; it lay like heavy drapery over his head and shoulders. But even so, he felt a certain weightlessness as if he'd shed something nameless at the last landing.

The sound coming from the room grew more defined as he neared the top of the stairs. Click swish. Click swish.

It was more like a closet than a room, and opposite to the doorway, an old man, seated with his back to Jerry, was feeding paper into a machine the size of a desk. The old man paused in what he was doing, walked over to a white, cardboard box pushed against the wall on the left of the machine, and pulled out a thick stack of paper. As he returned to the machine, he noticed Jerry, standing in the doorway. The old man nodded his head in greeting, and Jerry, taking this nod for an invitation, entered.

"Lucas. Jerry Lucas," he said, holding out his hand.

The old man nodded again and shook Jerry's hand. He sat down before the machine and placed the stack of paper on his right. One piece at a time, he fed the paper into the machine by a thin slat. Click. Then the paper returned through this same opening. Swish. Jerry peered over the old man's shoulder.

"Does the machine do that?" he asked, noticing the printing on the paper that had just come out.

"This?" the old man asked, pointing at the printing.

Jerry nodded.

"No," the old man said and handed the paper to him, turning it over. This side was blank except for a square of print.

"The address?" Jerry asked.

"Mm," the old man responded.

Jerry screwed up his mouth. *All that for an address*, he thought. But he was still fascinated by the machine—its sound, its worn finish, the little drawers that fit snugly under the desk-top on the right—and he was intrigued by this odd man who sat in the near-top of a bell tower, feeding paper into it. Jerry stood, transfixed.

After ten minutes, the stack of paper on the man's right had been fed through the machine and restacked on his left. He reached beneath the machine and unplugged it. The whirring ceased, and Jerry suddenly felt awkward with the old man. He stood, watching him return to the cardboard box to fix the flaps in such a way that they would not open. But after a few minutes, Jerry was overcome by curiosity and began to run his hand over the top of the machine and its metal slat. Then he fingered the knobs on the drawers.

"May I look in these?" he asked.

"Yah," the old man grunted his assent.

The top one held a tiny, gold key and several short pew pencils. The second one contained many small, tarnished plates with upraised letters. Black ink was fixed in the indentations of the plates.

"What are these?" he asked.

The old man had been straightening the stack of addressed papers.

"Plates from the machine," he replied, matter-of-factly, cocking his head a bit.

"Did they wear out?"

The old man breathed a subdued laugh out through his nose and smiled. "Naw, the people did."

"Died?"

"Mm. Some."

"What about the others?"

"Oh, divorces, separations. You know, people want their addresses changed as fast as they can. Can't get a newsletter with Joe and Mary on it if Joe's moved out. It upsets 'em."

Jerry nodded.

"Course, there's marriages, too, and kids all grown up and going off to college or getting their own place. I s'pose I should throw 'em out, but I don't know . . ." He shrugged and looked past Jerry.

They stood in silence a moment.

"You live around here?" the old man finally asked.

"No. I grew up here, though. I was just passing by on the interstate and saw the bell tower, like I always do. For some reason, I just had to come see it again."

The old man smiled. "Been up top yet?"

"No."

"I'll walk up with ya." He left the stack of papers on the machine and moved to the door. Jerry followed after him into the entryway lit by the one magnificent window, and together, they ascended the last set of stairs. Above the top steps, was a trap door, which opened onto a platform. They pushed this door open and climbed through easily. The sun shone brightly, but a light breeze made the tuft of white hair on the old man's forehead flutter. The platform was wooden and surrounded by a white guardrail. Above them was the bell and its huge clapper. A thick, worn rope hung down and brushed the boards at their feet. Jerry moved to the railing and leaned on it, looking out over the dusty, little town, its neat small shops, the post office with its square, trim lawn, the gas station and its two pumps, house after house with window boxes and front porches; he saw his

mother in a blue-checked apron, his brother coming down Front Street on a bicycle, his father, squinting his eyes at him as they fished on the pond, his own face, ten-years-old, and the bell, the bell, the bell.

The old man had joined him at the railing.

"Whaddya think?" he asked.

"Huh?"

"Same as ya left it?"

Jerry smiled. "Sort of."

"Ya wanta ring the bell?"

"Uh," Jerry paused. "It wouldn't really be right. It'd just confuse everybody, wouldn't it? I mean, since there's no wedding or funeral or services going on?"

"Mm. Reckon so."

Jerry remembered the deep sound of the bell, and his thoughts suddenly went back to the drawer. He knew his family's name would be on a plate there, and an ache ignited his chest. But the old man had not cast away the contents of the drawers, and this thought offered him a consolation of sorts.

He returned to the trap door and lifted it. The old man followed after. They walked down the stairs in silence. At the door of the little room, Jerry turned and held out his hand.

"Well, it was good to meet you. Actually, I never caught your name."

"Henry Seiler," the old man replied.

"Seiler? Wade Seiler related to you?"

"Yup. He's my grandson. Got a wife and two kids now."

"How come I didn't know you?"

"Oh, I lived out on the farm then, a good twenty miles out. Hard to get in most times, especially in the winter. Unless ya want to drive a tractor in." He laughed a deep, hoarse laugh. "We did do that a couple times."

Jerry smiled. "Well, good. Nice to meet you, Henry. Say hi to your grandson for me."

"I will. Jerry . . . ?"

"Lucas."

"Got it."

Jerry turned and headed down the stairs. Behind him, the stained glass window shone, the dove ever-descending in the sun's late-day fire.