

Wilderness House Literary Review 5/4

Dennis Vanwick
Jail Faces

"Sex is a great way to kill time during blizzards," she said. "Trouble is it didn't kill enough of it."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"I mean sex wasn't meant to be a marathon, more like a sprint, huh? No complaint, you understand – it was lovely - but what're we going to do for the rest of the day?"

So the two of them invented the First Annual Minneapolis Winter Olympics For Tiny Apartments – a conglomeration of board games, cards, and a mini-ping pong event set atop the kitchen table.

Hunger pangs hurried them through the closing ceremony – an unceremonious slamming of the Scrabble dictionary. He called Lupino's Pizzeria to find it open but definitely not delivering. They headed out into the dark streets from the apartment, clumsy moon-walkers clad in puffy down jackets, felt-lined boots, mittens, and wool beanies. Through four blocks of swirling snow and untrammelled sidewalks they trudged, past the Rubadub Laundry, a Holiday Station, and drafty old houses, most converted to drafty off-campus university apartments. Under the sign touting Lupino's Pizza – Home Of The Lollapalooza, they brushed the snow off each other before stepping through the door, trailed by a puff of snow.

Signore Lupino seated them at their favorite table and they ordered the usual Margherita pizza accompanied by the cheapest bottle of Chianti in the city. Holding hands across the checkered table cloth, they waited to be served.

"I hope we never get like them," she whispered.

He followed her eyes to the only other patrons, a middle-aged couple on the other side of the restaurant. "You mean old?"

"No. I mean look at them - expressionless with those 'jail faces' like what's-his-name wrote, you know, that Chilean poet."

"No clue."

"Promise me we'll never find ourselves sitting there."

"This table's fine with me."

"I was speaking metaphorically," she said, as she twitched a knife between her thumb and forefinger. "I'm talking about finding ourselves at the table of the silent, living dead dinner."

"Okay, I promise," he answered, chomping into a bread stick.

"I'm serious."

"Me too." Crumbs puffed out from his mouth onto the tablecloth.

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On the return trip to the apartment they argued about the afternoon's competitions.

"I should've challenged on 'q-u-a'," she said. "but I was hungry. Bet you don't even know what it means."

"I certainly do. It's some type of boating term."

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"That's 'q-u-a-y.' I knew it."

"Maybe, but you won at mini ping-pong because you're left handed. I'm used to right handed spin."

"Oh, that's rich."

"Hey, at least you'll never see my jail face. No zombie dinners. Promise."

"Consider yourself redeemed."

Years later in another Italian restaurant, on the other side of Minneapolis, a waiter uncorked their wine, poured it, and left the bottle in the ice bucket. Silently, they sipped from their glasses and perused the menus.

"They remind me of us and those dinners in Lupino's," he whispered, motioning to a young couple chatting and holding hands at a nearby table, smiling and content in their private world.

Her eyes appeared above the menu to track his, "Yes, but I hope they know more than we did."

"Like what?"

"Like they clearly haven't learned that you don't have to be babbling all the time and copulating like rabbits to be a reasonably happy couple."

"Right. So, what're the plans for later?"

"That's a negative. But morning might be good."