

Richard Radcliffe

OUT OF THE CLASSROOM ENDLESSLY ROCKING

Out of the classroom endlessly rocking.
out of the thirteen-year public program, the four-year
state college syndrome, the cap and gown metamorphosis,
into the composition of resumes, falling into
the cadence of letters and interviews,
the slowpoke demand of buying new clothes.
Out of the classroom endlessly rocking
and rolling into the far-sighted world.

What are the items on today's agenda?
Shall we meet with the staff of V.P.'s over breakfast
to plan the week's production?
Shall we write objectives to manage the office with
efficiency?
Surely we will attend to the unspoken importance of
order without upsetting the unspoken order of
importance.

O, the precious minutes at the file cabinet,
stealing looks outside onto the long-stretched lawn,
the far-sighted world.
The time lost beside the water fountain, around the
copy machine, discussing last week's game and
next week's movie.
I too have known the inexorable sadness of pencils
neat in their boxes.
I too have seen the duplicate grey faces
carboned and stacked to be mailed.
But look, it's ten o'clock.
Would anyone like a cup of coffee?

Keeping on top all day, making sure I'm standing next
to the top notch at the right time,
lunching at the outdoor cafe in my best suit and tie.
Writing 'thank you' memos four times a week
for three uneventful events.

Then coming home at the end of the day, tie loosened,
a wrinkled copy of the 'Times' in my hand,
my scuffed brown loafers wearing a path in the sidewalks
of fortune.

On the way home, policemen at corners, shoppers and
commuters staring resigned at the bus's floor,
their minds on some past or future business,
concentrating on the meatloaf defrosting at home
in the automatic microwave.

Riding by truckers with their imprints of America's new
mythology, spray-painted Popeyes and Darth Vadars.
Motorcyclists, bicyclists, pulling for space on the
powerful street.

And the common denominator at every corner, the four
or five young blacks with \$300 radios slung over
their shoulders, playing that tune again and again:

Can ya do it can ya do it
Can ya do it can ya do it
You can do it you can do it
You can do it you can do it

I play America's tunes as I hear them, the last I heard
on the radio this morning, it doesn't matter.

Off into tomorrow, another day, another tune, another day.
The round trip through the week and into the weekend,
week, weekend, week, weekend, week, long weekend.

The days passing, hissing melodious, work, work, work,
work, work.

All this to anticipate, bringing up the family,
another car to drive, another view of countryside,
street names to learn.

New colleagues in some new outfit, new title, new tax
bracket, out of the classroom endlessly climbing
higher in the marketplace, the short-sighted market.

What's next? we ask. Speeches at the Rotary,
every tree in my yard counted in the census.

My kids fine outstanding young citizens like my parents
wanted me to be. (Where did I go wrong?)

Ah, the kids! The kids have merit badges, their names
in the weeklies.

The kids have paper routes, steady baby-sitting jobs.

The kids, they want to skip college and earn 25 G's a year
fresh out of high school.

They can crack up the car and still pay for the damage!
My adoring wife has by now gone through graduate school
three times, the study wall papered with diplomas.

Until, one chance day,
on a sidewalk in front of some enterprise, a pharmacy, say,
or deli in a suburb of Philly, Topeka, Seattle,
a familiar fellow (oneself I sing!) dissolves
into the brick wall when I pass by.

The next morning, when I bend to wash my face
in the bathroom sink, a stranger appears
in the steamy mirror,
wearing my new clothes.

Michael Chandler

REMEMBERING MR. MARTIN: A FARMER

The corn husk stands about a foot high,
the harvest bone picked clean. An Indian canoe
carries your spirit toward winter. A candle
turns sumac into rubies along the edge of your field.
Your corn feeds hogs whose hearts glow in the mud,
like your plow in the dark of the barn.
The rocks remember how you sat down.
Their lack of fear, a gift you held at death.
Your breath joins the wind,
praising the earth from the tops of trees.
Many times you opened the earth with your plow;
Now earth opens her arms to you.
Remembering each of your footsteps
she washes your feet for the journey ahead.