
Sent : Monday, October 18, 2004 2:22 PM

Sketch – for Scott Hocking

Once, our village bustled. Schools, shops, centers for worship; youth who went off to college, or to serve in the military, then came back. We worked hard, learned well, were patriotic. Then they moved our border. From a plane or spacecraft, our town, any town, appears as a speck. But it is our place, home, cradle, and now irreversibly deformed. Citizens did not anticipate this rupture. But did contribute by voting bad leadership into office. Faulty business practice, combined with poor political experimentation, crippled our grain-based economy. I am not waxing nostalgic, looking ideally back. We had stormy town troubles before they roped us off, but what is newer, uglier, is the isolation. One ex-resident portrays it in a piece titled, Sketch.

Her portrait breaks us down into objects. A hat stands for the mayor, a rolling pin for the baker, a bell for the school, a stool stands for our music cafe on a quiet night; broken boards and splintered glass represent the place on a rowdy one, one with shouting and shoving matches breaking out.

We hear her in a radio interview, saying that our population has changed from being a melancholic, to a downright depressing lot, unhealthily intertwined, because of the imposed border. Intertwined is different from the kind of unhealthy we dealt with before we were cut apart from other villages. Battles over zoning, curriculum, worship, - petty and serious crime, literal and figurative stabs in the back.

Our town remains internationally noted for bread, but we enjoy eating it less ourselves, having lost access to the equally prized dairy products produced on the other side. We miss their milk and butter with our breads and grains. This fall morning the window is open, in blows an unpleasant smelling draft. There's been a lot of discussion about polluted air and soil, a lot of back and forth; forth and back. Pollution does not recognize our politically imposed split. In that sense, we stand united: one soiled region. Airborne toxins, and those thriving in our soil and water, evenly rot both sides of this border.

Our mayor, once erect, powerful, lithe, is now is frail, badly groomed; he walks deeply hunched over, sometimes has trouble discerning the borders of what he imagines to be real and what is real. It is sad to witness that great frame diminish to a tiny speck. Disintegration, in part, generated by the destruction of our village, destruction he must wonder if he could have blocked. But now he is certifiably ill, it is his lungs; we treat him at the cafe, stand him a shot, a bowl of soup, a draft. Or 'days for celebration' a champagne split. Two examples of things we'd celebrate: hearing an ex-resident talk on the radio; one of our former citizens navigating the logistics of a visit back.

Return visitors are shocked at the manifestations of strain; we have gone from busy to idle; from a population of vertical postures to sagging backs. We're incomplete without our neighbors, and hear from all sources they are sick too. They miss our grains, our music, our conversation, all lost because of the split. Crime is the new economy on both sides: organized infractions, money laundering; shady companies now manage their dairy, our grain. Citizens, feeling ill equipped to make decisions, have dispirited discussions over cups of coffee, drafts of beer and cider. The ex-resident who depicted our village in Sketch wrote at the bottom:

Be Brave; Dream your future.

In a lucid moment our mayor responds, Her words are intended to inspire, but what does she know any more of our village, when was she last back? She lives abroad, consumes all the grain and dairy she wants, visits places and friends freely, drafts her notion of our pre and post border village to the world from tilted memory specks.

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Lynn Crawford