



The Strait-jackets
by Pascale Petit

I lay the suitcase on my Father's bed
and unzip it slowly, gently.
Inside, packed in cloth strait-jackets
lie forty live hummingbirds
tied down in rows, each tiny head
cushioned on a swaddled body.
I feed them from a flask of sugar water,
inserting every bill into the pipette,
then unwind their bindings
so Father can see their changing colours
as they dart around his room.
They hover inches from his face
as if he's a flower, their humming
just audible above the oxygen recycler.
For the first time since I've arrived
he's breathing easily, the cannula
attached to his nostrils almost slips out.
I don't know how long we sit there
but when I next glance at his face
he's asleep, lights from their feathers
still playing on his eyelids and cheeks.
It takes me hours to catch them all
and wrap them in their strait-jackets.
I work quietly, he's in such
a deep sleep he doesn't wake once.

Pace
by Jay Bernard

I have seen the light you've seen
and my body has been where yours has been
some part of me resides where you reside
we've swapped presences and parting –

I have seen what you have seen
become the part of you I stood beside
passing friend with green eyes
I now reside where you reside –

hello, you standing there to the left of me
you in the heart of those hearing me read
further ahead on the road we are walking
there in the shadow performing in front of me –

you in the rhythm that's always unfolding
you are a question that's always been asked
who are we now and what are we wanting
from the voices you heard, the presences there –

how do we ask the quiet you've left
what voice you recalled
whose hand were you holding?

Our Town
Iris DeMent

And you know the sun's settin' fast
And just like they say, nothing good ever lasts
Well, go on now and kiss it goodbye
But hold on to your lover
'Cause your heart's bound to die
Go on now and say goodbye to our town, to our town
Can't you see the sun's settin' down on our town, on our town
Goodnight

Up the street beside that red neon light
That's where I met my baby on one hot summer night
He was the tender and I ordered a beer
It's been forty years and I'm still sitting here

But you know the sun's settin' fast
And just like they say, nothing good ever lasts
Well, go on now and kiss it goodbye
But hold on to your lover
'Cause your heart's bound to die
Go on now and say goodbye to our town, to our town
Can't you see the sun's settin' down on our town, on our town
Goodnight

It's here I had my babies and I had my first kiss
I've walked down Main Street in the cold morning mist
Over there is where I bought my first car
It turned over once but then it never went far
And I can see the sun's settin' fast
And just like they say, nothing good ever lasts
Well, go on now and kiss it goodbye

But hold on to your lover
'Cause your heart's bound to die
Go on now and say goodbye to our town, to our town
Can't you see the sun's settin' down on our town, on our town
Goodnight

I buried my Mama and I buried my Pa
They sleep up the street beside that pretty brick wall
I bring them flowers about every day
But I just gotta cry when I think what they'd say

If they could see how the sun's settin' fast
And just like they say, nothing good ever lasts
Well, go on now and kiss it goodbye
But hold on to your lover
'Cause your heart's bound to die
Go on now and say goodbye to our town, to our town
Can't you see the sun's settin' down on our town, on our town
Goodnight

Now I sit on the porch and watch the lightning-bugs fly
But I can't see too good, I got tears in my eyes
I'm leaving tomorrow but I don't wanna go
I love you, my town, you'll always live in my soul

But I can see the sun's settin' fast
And just like they say, nothing good ever lasts
Well, go on, I gotta kiss you goodbye
But I'll hold to my lover
'Cause my heart's 'bout to die
Go on now and say goodbye to my town, to my town
I can see the sun has gone down on my town, on my town
Goodnight
Goodnight

The Parting Glass

Of all the money that e'er I had
I have spent it in good company
Oh and all the harm I've ever done
Alas, it was to none but me

And all I've done for want of wit
To memory now I can't recall
So fill to me the parting glass
Good night and joy be to you all

So fill to me the parting glass
And drink a health whate'er befalls
Then gently rise and softly call
Good night and joy be to you all

Of all the comrades that e'er I had
They're sorry for my going away
And all the sweethearts that e'er I had
They would wish me one more day to stay

But since it fell into my lot
That I should rise and you should not
I'll gently rise and softly call
Good night and joy be to you all

So fill to me the parting glass
And drink a health whate'er befalls
Then gently rise and softly call...

Thank you to Sean M Whelan for listening to our stories and speaking when we couldn't.

Eris O'Brien
•1951 - 2023•