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To Ed Sissman

John Updike

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To Ed Sissman

JOHN UPDIKE

I

I think a lot about you, Ed —
tell me why. Your sallow owl's face
with the gray wart where death had kissed it,
drifting sideways above your second gin
in Josèph's, at lunch, with a what-the-hell
lurch you had commanded the waiter
to bring more poison, hangs in my mind
as a bloated star I wish to be brave on.

I loved your stuff, and the way
it came from nowhere, where poetry
must come from, having no credentials.
Your talk was bland, with a twist of whine,
of the obvious man affronted. You stooped
more and more, shouldering the dark for me.

II

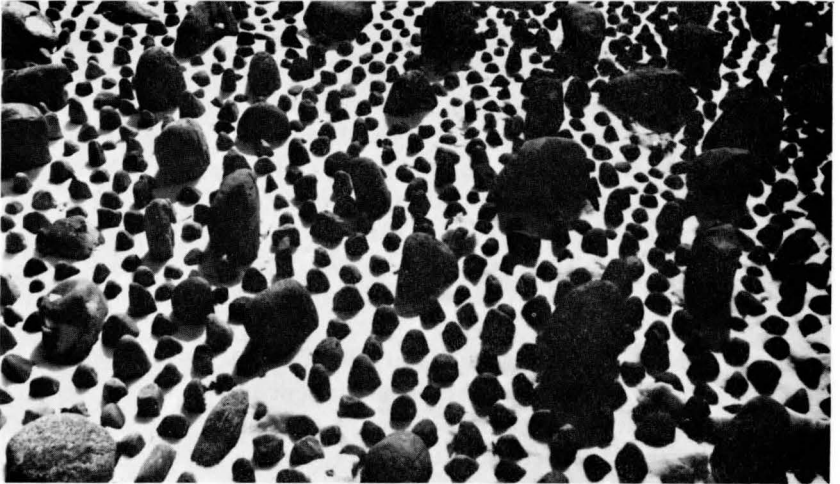
When you left, the ceiling caved in.
The impossible shrunk to the plausible.
In that final room, where one last book
to be reviewed sat on your chest, you said,
like an incubus, transparent tubes
moved in and out of your veins
and nurses with volleyball breasts
mocked us with cheerleader health.

You were sicker than I, but I huddled in
my divorcing man's raincoat by your bed
like a drenched detective by the cozy fire
a genial suspect had laid in his manor,
unsuspecting he is scheduled Next Victim.
I mourned I could not solve the mystery.

III

You told me, lunching at Josèph's,
foreseeing death, that it would be
a comfort to believe. My faith,
a kind of rabbit frozen in the headlights,
scrambled for cover in the roadside brush
of gossip; your burning beams passed by.
"Receiving communications from beyond": thus
you once described the fit of writing well.

The hint hangs undeveloped, like
my mental note to send you Kierkegaard.
Forgive me, Ed; no preacher, I —
a lover of the dust, like you,
who took ten years of life on trial
and lent pentameter another voice.



Bela Egyedi