

LIFE ON CHARLES STREET, FALL 1963*

Just a bit larger than a toddler's playpen,
my first studio apartment in Greenwich Village
was across the street from The Lion's Head
(which later moved to Christopher Street,
and which, like a lot of us, is now dead).
This tiny village pad is where I lost my virginity
and where I watched the world rumble by
on old pavements of Belgian blocks and memory.
Traffic spilled from my ears, my eyes, maybe
the same cars even now are still circling,
bearing New Yorkers up, up to Broadway,
to assignations at nice hotels, to little restaurants
narrow as coffins but no reservations needed,
then back to the Village for jazz. Maybe
you caught me staring at that cornet player
who had a loft in Chelsea. Let's see,
you could say it's all up from here, or falling,
as I went giddily down, fresh from the country,
in a young woman's boot camp of sexuality
and sound. I bought a stereo and played
the Beatles and show tunes and got laid,
and spent hours proofreading and writing ad
copy, spending it at Bendel's, when I got paid.
I saw a rat not far from my front door, a rodent,
you know, urban vermin. Romantic. This
dump, er, my first home in the big city
was not far from the wharves. Luckily, close
to the police station too. When a thief
broke in to steal my typewriter (a Royal),
a cop with a heart of gold showed up
to give me gentle advice about city life and locks.
«Get a Segal», he said, and I did. My castle
was now secure. I lay alone there at night
listening to ships, the cabs on Hudson Street,
and the guy next door making loud love
to his girl of the week. Think about that.
Up and down Charles Street people were
writing and humping. I was free to decide.
I spent the very next freelance check
on a little black and white TV and thus
was able to watch all the up-to-the-minute
coverage of the sexy President's assassination,
and ponder the motivations of rats and men.

Mary Kennan Herbert

STILL MORE JUICY GOSSIP*

Get this: she dumped all her tranquilizers (Librium)
down the toilet, with a gesture of moral righteousness or possibly opprobrium,
depending on the slant of autumnal sunlight in those fecund afternoons-
or maybe one's current point of view.

They wanted another baby. That was the plan. She wanted to get pregnant
that fall,
and insisted with fervor: it's not good to be taking these. Any or all pills would
be bad for the baby. Yes indeed.
Thank you.
So the lady agreed to live with demons for a while, if it would be better for
the child.

Capsules swirl away down the drain. Smile.
With a high-minded goal, it is easy to flush away pain
with panache, with style. Those black and green containers of mercy, bye
bye.
Rock-a-bye, baby. God of fertility, have mercy on me.

Maples shed their leaves in the meantime.
She watched the calendar, prayed and bled.
Kinda funny how toilets anchor our lives, how they provide the patience
one needs to do the kinder deed.

All offerings are accepted at the porcelain throne. Bring me your tired turds,
your party excess, your barf-o-rama. Morning sickness, pills and potions,
too much beer and barbeque, all welcome here. The palette reveals: no baby
yet for the class of 2020. A darling child the size of a shrimp gets
flushed away with bad memories

of a day much hated. Hyperplasia, the womb overgrown with tenets of desire
and excess,
is saying enough, enough. Yes, the body says enough,
you're bloody well done with childbearing. And not only that, reports the grin-
ning ob/gyn:
you've got a yeast infection.

Having a baby would be a final star in the crown the aging queen longs to
wear.
Why should teen-agers procreate all day long while she stares down into
murky depths

Life on Charles Street, Fall 1963 - Still More Juicy Gossip

regarding her last chance as the water swirls around the tank and
GARUMPPHFffllliisshhhhh-
flushes hope into the sewer, hope and reams of dreams.

And any other day, a week ago, a decade ago, this thought would have taken
wing to fly
far beyond all this crap into an incredible dazzling light, out of harm's way.
Look: a light undimmed by regret or envy, or recent politics. Life is a gift.
Wings lift from the sludge. Look: a monarch butterfly, Cupid, angels from a
children's picture book.

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