

HOWARD GOOD

Married Scientists Battle Killer Cockroaches

1

My heart has a hole in it. Sometimes I wad up paper towels and stuff them in the hole. My heart leaks regardless. I visit the doctor. The examining room smells peculiarly of mint. “Hmm,” the doctor says as he peers into the hole. He decides to give me a shot. He says it’s to numb me. It doesn’t.

2

“Tickets!” the conductor shouts. My heart is riding the train into the city. It glances out the window at the river that knuckles alongside the tracks. The river was once a great commercial highway. Today it’s only scenery. At least the seats on the train face forward. Traveling backwards always makes my heart feel sick.

3

It’s perfect bombing weather. Angels are continually taking off and landing in the big, empty field next door. “Love is the world’s greatest democracy,” my heart declaims above the rumble of air traffic. Later, when I repeat it to her in bed, she doesn’t argue or object. My heart shakes hands with her heart.

4

“Next, please,” the barber says. My heart trots in from the outfield, chewing a handful of sunflower seeds. The barber is holding what looks like a letter, but if it’s a letter, it’s not the letter on blue paper the government says I need. I fight down the confusing feeling of

drowning and then talk about last night's dream. Women with half-smiles finger the fabric noncommittally.

5

I huddle around the trash barrel with a jury of my peers. Although spring, the days are gray and shabby, and the police overtly suspicious. My heart holds its hands out toward the fire. There's much to say, but no one speaks, afraid to upset the silence following upon the collapse of the great newspapers.

6

Friends forget to call. Forget they're friends. E-mail threats without signing their names. Change their names without telling me. Snap the heads off birds. Leave headless birds on the doorstep. And when I'm near, drop their voices and whisper into the phone. My heart remembers now how it developed a hole, which was once covered in brush and dirt and just big enough for hope to escape through.

7

Let others be the dull former children sleepwalking down the aisles of box stores, the married scientists battling killer cockroaches on TV, the apparent suicide who trespassed along the railroad tracks. O frightened beneficiaries of the incidental! She moves under me, and as the police congregate just south of the train station, my heart spreads like a crime spree across four more states.