Walter Mitty '74

Frances E. Fitzgerald

Grand Valley State University

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/amaranthus

Recommended Citation

Available at: http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/amaranthus/vol1977/iss1/13

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks@GVSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Amaranthus by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@GVSU. For more information, please contact scholarworks@gvsu.edu.
My body is paralyzed. I concentrate on my fingers; they will not move. My voice is trapped and I can't cry out for help.

A sudden movement shocks me out of a frightened sleep. I glance beside me to find a dark-skinned stranger turning over and mumbling incoherently. The room is unfamiliar, cluttered with the man's blacklight posters and stereo equipment. His watch says 5:40 a.m.

The big party last night happened after Daddy called.

"Well Honey, how are your studies coming along?"

"I'm having some trouble in French."

"Trouble? You're no dummy; it could be laziness on your part."

"It's really hard for me, Daddy. I don't know why."

I heard my voice constricting and turning shrill. Relax, relax.

"Another thing, Honey. You haven't been home in over three months. What keeps you so busy on the weekends?"

Jesus Christ, the suspicious questions creeping in again.

Well Daddy, I've been drunk every night for the past five weeks and need the weekends to sleep it off.

or

I've gone into prostitution for some extra spending money and it's really very time-consuming.

or

It's like this, man, like, I'm really into acid and last weekend I turned into a telephone pole.

"I spend a lot of time in the library, Daddy."

I cut the conversation short after a tactful plea for money and gratefully escaped. The music as well as the conversation unintelligible. Someone had put a shower and there was plenty to smoke. It had been a lot of fun; I can't remember. I wonder, indifferently, how I ended up in the sheets with a stranger.

Stumbling out of bed, I gather up my dress hurriedly and haphazardly. I search for my cigarettes and discover them on his dust-laden windowsill. I leave while the stranger still sleeps. I jot down a quick thank you note and remember whose idea it had been.

I walk across campus in the rain recalling the old saying; "Red sky at night, sailor's take warning." I turn to my room. There is a marijuana plant on his dusty windowsill and a small colorless rubber raft on the window ledge. Somehow the familiar smell of smoke and stale socks comforts me.

I lay down, fully clothed, on blankets and try to sleep, but then I haven't checked the mail in the morning. I light a cigarette and walk to the window to check for mail from Daddy. Reluctantly I open it.

"It appears to me that you may be head... I'm going to take a look... spring term grades before I decide you back this fall... played golf with Dr. Flannigan and won." Well you old bastard. Outside it begins to rain.

I fall into an uncertain sleep and out of consciousness.

I am a gopher and my home is the eight hole of the Warw golf course. Daddy carefully watches his golf club and swings at it. It sails through the air,
ALTER MITTY '74

paralyzed. I concentrate on my leg not move. My voice is trapped out for help. Vement shocks me out of a daze. I glance beside me to find a bed stranger turning over and gently. The room is unfamiliar, he man's blacklight posters and walls. His watch says 5:40 a.m. I wonder, indifferently, how I ended up between the sheets with a stranger.

Stumbling out of bed, I gather my clothes and dress hurriedly and haphazardly. I frantically search for my cigarettes and discover them finally on his dust-laden windowsill. I leave quietly while the stranger still sleeps. I consider jotting down a quick thank you note, but I can't remember whose idea it had been.

I walk across campus in the red light of dawn, recalling the old saying; "Red sky in the morning, sailor's take warning." I unlock the door to my room. There is a marijuana plant on the windowsill and a small colorless rug between two beds. Somehow the familiar smell of cigarette smoke and stale socks comforts me.

I lay down, fully clothed, on top of my blankets and try to sleep, but then I remember I haven't checked the mail in the last few days. I light a cigarette and walk to my box; a letter from Daddy. Reluctantly I open it and read: "It appears to me that you may be in over your head ... I'm going to take a gook look at your spring term grades before I decide whether to send you back this fall. ... played golf this morning with Dr. Flannigan and won." Well good for you, you old bastard. Outside it begins to rain.

I fall into an uncertain sleep, slipping in and out of consciousness. I am a gopher and my home is under the eight hole of the Warwick Hills golf course. Daddy carefully chooses his golf club and swings at the ball. It sails through the air, lands on
the green, rolls toward the hole, lands in the hole--I stick my fist out and it swerves past. I listen to Daddy wheezing and waddling up to the green, then beating his club in frustration against the marker. The sound of my chuckling pulls me into full wakefulness. I tear out a piece of notebook paper and write: "Daddy, right now I'm in the campus library doing research for a paper in my Philosophy class... went to the language lab this morning to bone up by French... glad to hear that you're golfing so well... weather's fine." I address and stamp the envelope and push it through the mail slot. So much for that. I vaguely wonder where the campus library and language lab are located.

The bearded Philosophy instructor pompously struts back and forth in front of us, running gray fingers through his stubby white hair. "Here's a question for you. If a tree falls, and there's no one there to hear it, is there sound?"

A disheveled young man frantically flings his arms into the air. "There are vibrations! The vibrations are present regardless! It doesn't matter if there's no one there to hear them!"

The question sounds rather absurd to me. Why can't someone bring up something relevant, like, is there a God? Is there a God?... I walk into Daddy's carpeted den. I ask him: "Daddy, is there a God?" He looks at me in puzzlement, and then his deeply-lined face begins to purple. "Is there a God?!?" He bellows. "Is there a God?! Of course there's a God!! I've spoken to Him!!" He opens his safe and takes out a gold telephone with angels engraved on the receiver. His face takes on a look of awe. "When I was in the seven the Pope sent this to me from he speaks in a hushed voice for giving the best recitation St. Thomas Aquinas' five proofs of existence of God. It is a di to the Almighty." His lips move in silent prayer, and he dials z Whathappened! a good Catholic! I've paid my He drops to his knees and starts cursing furiously in Latin. I leave, the door behind me.

A fat, middle-aged woman with a voice shakes her finger furiously. "But it takes the ear to transform into sound! Without the ear present are not sound!"

I yawn, rather obviously. The instructor raises his string gives me a grey patient smile. The Without me. I look down at my green Nice outfit. Very expensive. Daddy pretty clothes for his pretty daughter thing, money... We have inherited millions Peabody, the illegitimate son great great Aunt Maggie. Old he had struck it rich in the boo business back in the 20's..."
a, rolls toward the hole, the hole--I stick my fist at swerves past. I listen wheezing and waddling up then, then beating his club against the marker. of my chuckling pulls me into full

a piece of notebook paper and write: I'm in the campus library doing paper in my Philosophy class... mage lab this morning to bone up glad to hear that you're golfing other's fine." I address and stamp push it through the mail slot.
I vaguely wonder where the and language lab are located.

Philosophy instructor pompously forth in front of us, running grey his stubby white hair. question for you. If a tree falls, there to hear it, is there young man frantically flings his vibrations! The vibrations are It doesn't matter if there's hear them!"

sounds rather absurd to me. Why ring up something relevant, like, Is there a God... into Daddy's carpeted den. "Daddy, is there a God?"
I look at me in puzzlement, and deeply-lined face begins e. "Is there a God?!?" vs. "Is there a God!?! Of there's a God!! I've spoken ' He opens his safe and takes out a gold telephone with angels engraved on the receiver. His face takes on a look of reverent awe. "When I was in the seventh grade, the Pope sent this to me from Rome", he speaks in a hushed voice "as a prize for giving the best recitation of St. Thomas Aquinas' five proofs of the existence of God. It is a direct line to the Almighty." His lips move in silent prayer, and he dials zero. He pales, then gasps. "The line is dead!" he shouts. "What happened! I've been a good Catholic! I've paid my 10%!" He drops to his knees and starts praying furiously in Latin. I leave, closing the door behind me.

A fat, middle-aged woman with a high pitched voice shakes her finger furiously. "But it takes the ear to transform vibrations into sound! Without the ear present, vibrations are not sound!"
I yawn, rather obviously. The instructor peers at me in annoyance. "Well?"
"Uh--well?"
"What's your opinion?"
"Uh, well, actually, I--um--wasn't really listening."
The instructor raises his stringy eyebrows and gives me a grey patient smile. The debate continues without me. I look down at my green velvet pants. Nice outfit. Very expensive. Daddy likes buying pretty clothes for his pretty daughter. A funny thing, money... We have inherited millions from Old Peabody, the illegitimate son of my great great Aunt Maggie. Old Peabody had struck it rich in the boot-legging business back in the 20's. He hid the
bulk of his fortune behind the secret panel of his library wall before he drank himself to death. Daddy has bought an old Southern plantation including the slave quarters. We hold a party, complete with caterers and real silver, and invite all the important people of the social world. I even shave my legs for the occasion. In the course of this posh affair, I suggest to Amy Vanderbilt that she try LSD as a means to the expansion of intellectual creativity. I watch Daddy's sparse grey hair stand on end as he swallows his cigar.

The Philosophy instructor interrupts my train of thought as he looks pointedly at me and strongly urges students to take notes, something they should have learned in elementary school. After class he takes me inside and tells me he would like to talk to me about my grades. I agree without resistance, anxious to escape his grey, rutted face and musty breath. I write down his office number and the appointment time, and toss it into a wastebasket on my way down the hall.

I sit beside the psychiatrist's desk. He hands me a piece of cardboard with an ink design. "What do you see in this?"

"Uh... I don't know. Nothing."

I see Daddy tearing up his twelve year old daughter's artwork because she sketched a nude and nudes are dirty. I see Daddy racing after his nine year old daughter with a belt. I see Daddy dragging his five year old daughter to a specialist because she said she hated him.

With short, pink fingers, the doctor turns his chair toward me and smiles. "I don't know, in his notebook. We'll see what the rest of the ink blots; each gets a forced smile on his healthy pink face. "What seems to be the problem, uh... I light a cigarette and clear my throat. "Um... I'm kind of high strung, you know."

He stands up and hands me the prescription.

"Tranquilizers will take care of this. Take these tablets three times a day and you'll notice a tremendous difference.

I get up to leave. He says: "If you have any more problems, you've got an appointment to see me."

He flashes a polite professional smile and ushers me out of his office. I leave the cigarette burning in his ashtray.

The weekend has come, and I am in the kitchen drying his Waterford crystal. I knock one of them over. The breaking has a pleasing, harmonious sound. I have a different pitch. With deliberation I drop one glass after another to the floor until each piece of delicate crystal has its own death rattle as it shatters on the shiny linoleum.

Daddy walks in, his nostrils flaring. He looks at the broken glass scattered on the floor and points to it with a trembling finger. "What have you done, you little--"

"I--I broke the crystal, Daddy."

"Well, you'll pay for every last one of those glasses. Those glasses were imported from Ireland."

Oh god, why can't I keep back the tears?
she said she hated him.

With short, pink fingers, the doctor writes
Uh I don't know, in his notebook. We go through
the rest of the ink blots; each getting the same
response.

He turns his chair toward me and faces me with
a forced smile on his healthy pink face.
"What seems to be the problem, young lady?"
I light a cigarette and clear my throat.
"Um... I'm kind of high strung."

His face brightens and he starts to write out
a prescription.
"Tranquilizers will take care of that. You
take these tablets three times a day. In a week
you'll notice a tremendous difference."

He stands up and hands me the prescription.

I get up to leave. He says:
"If you have any more problems, just make
an appointment to see me."

He flashes a polite professional smile and he
ushers me out of his office. I leave my cigarette
burning in his ashtray.

The weekend has come, and I am in Daddy's
kitchen drying his Waterford crystal. Accidentally,
I knock one of them over. The breaking of glass
has a pleasing, harmonious sound. I wonder if each
has a different pitch. With deliberate movements,
I drop one glass after another to the floor. Yes,
each piece of delicate crystal has its own music
as it shatters on the shiny linoleum.

Daddy walks in, his nostrils flared in rage.
He looks at the broken glass scattered on the floor,
and points to it with a trembling finger.
"What have you done, you little fool!"
"I--I broke the crystal, Daddy."
"Well, you'll pay for every last one of these!
Those glasses were imported from Ireland!"

Oh god, why can't I keep back the tears?
"I know. I'll pay. I promise."
"What's the matter with you? How can you be so clumsy?"
"I don't know. I'm sorry. I'm really sorry."
"Sorry?? You're sorry?!? These glasses are practically irreplaceable and you've destroyed them."
With that he storms out of the kitchen to his den. He finds his office adding machine to figure out how much I owe him.
I sweep up the Waterford remains and start up the stairs. Daddy walks out of the den. His voice is controlled, but his cold blue eyes are still angry.
"Another thing. Don't you own a bra?"
"Yes Daddy."
"Then wear one. From now on you're not leaving this house without one. Men notice things like that."
Gee Daddy, I was wondering about that rise in your pants.
I go to my bedroom and close the door behind me. I turn on a Cat Steven's tape and close my eyes.
It is my college graduation. I have a four point average, and I am valedictorian of my class. Daddy sits proudly in the front row. Someone calls off my name for the planned speech, but I've disappeared without my diploma. I'm not there. Ha, ha, Daddy you sonofabitch, I'm not there.

/ Frances E. Fitzgerald /

UPROOTED
Over the rivers, islands stretched out under the light's end, I am terrified. The Jet in a vibration of aluminum forces us along whirring mute.
The clouds lose all perspective and the sun comes hot, hot through the window.
Detroit to New York is not a reality yet so I lean back too, too terrified to sleep.
Below, the land laid in patches seizes my longing to crawl under its gauze and hide.
Inside up here comes lunch. How anyone can eat in the air is beyond me.
I am not a night hawk I do not catch my meat in the sky.