

hair tonic—1897

by jim kay

Gramps and the rest, that is, all his friends, used to sit on the back porch and blow smoke rings. Some would just sit and spit on account they couldn't smoke no more. Had to chew.

Conversation would slide by me as I was a sittin' there on the floor. Slide by like a slow movin' train way into the black of night—till Maw come and drug me off to say my prayers. Didn't tell no one, but I could lie there in bed and still hear the voices a risin' and fallin' and a laugh would float by my window now and again. Old Bucky's high whinny laugh and a little bit underneath it would be Cooney's bass-like chuckles. And the others, too.

Women is supposed to be the talkers but don't never believe it. An old man is the best talker on earth. It's the best thing he

can do when he reaches 80 or 90 or more. He could tell you to the very hour about Jim Ramsey finally breaking that old gray in '02. Couldn't tell you what he had for dinner though. Unless he looked at his shirt or his chin.

"What was the name of that feller that come through sellin' hair tonic about the time old Wilson sold his place the first time?"

"Bout '97?"

"Nope. Not '97. More like '95."

"'95?"

"Yup. It's when old Wilson first sold his place."

"**n**aw," comes a third voice. "Old Wilson first sold in '97 cos' it happened same time my Caroline birthed the twins." " '97?"

"Yup."
"Zat so?"
"I'd bet my teeth on it."
"You ain't got any."
"Then I'd bet these here in my pocket."
"What the hell you got 'em in your pocket for?"
"Can't chew proper when they in my mouth."
"What you chew now, anyway?"
"Red man."
"Hoo-wee. No wonder yor breath always smell so bad."
"Dickerson!" would come another voice.
"How's that?"
"Dickerson's the feller that come through sellin' hair tonic in '95."
" '97."
"Then too?"
"Nope. Just '97. Anyways he weren't the feller."
"He weren't?"

"**n**ope. Dickerson's the feller that come through sellin' bath perfume in '98."
"Smelled the same as hair tonic."
"Tasted the same too."

Short pause

"How's that?"
"I says it tasted the same too."
"Lord, Clooney. No wonder your teeth fell out like they did."
"Luckier still they didn't grow no hair, Clooney."
"Hell that stuff didn't never grow hair on no one. My Paw was rubbin' his head daily and it never did him no good."
"Helped the chickens though."
"How's that Bucky?"
"Hair tonic helped the chickens. Used to put it in the feed and they'd lay bigger eggs."
"Stop it. Your curlin' my toes with them lies."
"That's sworn truth!"
"Danielson!" came the fourth voice again.
"How's that?"
"Danielson's the feller that come through sellin' hair tonic in '95."
" '97."
"Nope, weren't Danielson neither."
"What'd he sell?"
"Nuthin'. Except his sister to old Tom Gregory."
"Sol' his own sister?"

"**y**up. Worked out though cos' she and old Tom got hitched. Moved up there north of the canyon and had a whole wagon load of kids."

Short pause

"Say whatever become of old Tom."
"Wife shot him."
"How's that?"
"Yup. Took old Hickory Johnson's shotgun and blooey. Here tell it they had to bury old Tom in six different parts of the country."
"That was a fine piece old Hickory Johnson had."
" 'Cept Hickory's so blind he couldn't never use it. Use to wear them funny specs ..."
"Bifocals."
"How's that?"
"I says theys called bifocals."
"Zat so?"
"Bet my teeth on it."
"Don't start that again."
"DAVIDSON!" came the voice again.
"Davisson?"
"No, no. Davidson. Davidson's the fella that comes through sellin hair tonic in '95."

Short pause

"Yup. It was Davidson awright."
"Why 'dja wanna know?"
"How's that?"
"I say why 'dja wanna knew?"
"No partickuler reason. Just wonderin' ..."
Then Gramps and the rest would all lean back in their chairs on the back porch and blow smoke rings. And there was voices as I fell asleep.
"Poor Davidson."
"How's that?"
"Bald as an acorn. weren't he?"



movie theatre

(only in the movie theatre)
i tried these elegant words out
one night
and they blew all over the room
and hit me in the face
so I guess it's no use or it's pretty funny
trying to act like everything is supposed
to work out like a screenwriter's script.
I decided that if someone were to put my life
on the movie screen,
many parts would be boring and some parts would be
funny and then sometimes my vains would bleed
in dispair.
It is no good for the soul to be happy all the time.
You need a little pepper with your salt.

cindy coglianese

three o'clock

three o'clock goes one log after another
i have
to stop this
(but i'm just having the time!)
all those other
words and pages
are waiting
for me
to attention them.
i am an addict
for a
new word.
i am tired of
all this
conventional
(shit)
they
are forcing
down
my head ...
making me an illiterate
nit-wit
know-it-all.
i'm stoned cold
on page
398
(can't go on,
can't go on)

cindy coglianese