

Electric



Broadsheet

publishers of semi-literate doodlings, scraps, & snippets

presents

Like Norman Rockwell's America

short fiction by Jacob Hound

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Like Norman Rockwell's America

Jacob Hound

The pizza loved Jim. The chair loved him. The people in the book of Norman Rockwell paintings loved him as he ate his loving pizza, sitting in his loving chair in his kitchen.

The wound on his chest had grown to more than four inches across. The sticky blood dried two days ago. Coughing sometimes opened the wound. Eating didn't bother it.

He had begun humming on the second day. They were old songs, no longer played on English-speaking radio stations. You sometimes heard them late at night or early in the morning on the Mexican stations.

This morning he had begun singing out loud. The pizza delivery woman had been frightened when he sang as he opened the front door. He determined the wound on his chest had frightened her instead of his voice. His singing wasn't that bad.

Now he was flipping the pages in the Rockwell book, wondering if anyone had been as happy as the happy Americans in the pictures. He could see himself now, reflected in the chrome toaster on the table. He didn't look like Rockwell material.

He smelled Patty's perfume before he heard her high heels. He could smell the crap even with the doors and windows closed. She opened the door and gasped when she saw him.

She ran up to him. He touched her face without looking up. "I'm OK. It's just a little cut." And then he touched his chest where the blood had dried. She quickly opened the windows. "You must be rotting, Jim. I swear to God! You smell like rotten meat. You need to go to the doctor."

"Opening up the window won't help," he said. "It stinks out there, too. Or can't you smell it? It's the stench of all the promises people make to themselves and their wishes about how life should be. But isn't. It's the smell of what could have been Norman Rockwell's America. But isn't."

"What a load of crap," Patty said, barely loud enough for him to hear.

"It's not crap!"

"I'm calling your doctor. You can't die without seeing a doctor!"

"People die without doctors all the time," he said.

She palmed his forehead and looked confused. "I don't want you to die, Jim." She walked around him and saw the inch of pencil point poking out from under his left armpit.

"Jesus! What have you been doing to yourself? How long have you been like this?"

Twenty colors of sunlight broke through the window. Jim meticulously counted each color, from the warmest to the coolest. When he closed his eyes, he could see only the color of black coffee, so he opened them again. Much better.

"Why haven't you seen the doctor? If you don't get to the hospital soon—"

"Even Norman Rockwell had to die," he said. "Hell, I can't even jack off anymore. Nothing happens. Limp as a wet sock."

He noticed she was now talking on the telephone. Better not be a doctor, he thought. No...she must be talking to a friend. Her voice is too emotional for a doctor. She's crying. Doctors know how to calm you down with a lollipop. They tell you it's going to be OK.

She hung up angrily and walked to the window, slammed it shut, then stomped out the front door, banging it behind her. The stench of her perfume danced in the kitchen's sunlight like marvelous ropes. The stink loved Jim. The sunlight loved him, too.