

MOVIEHOUSE POEMS
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LABYRINTH

Perplexity, not relief,
is the vindication of film.
Our first time in the moldy movie
palace, we catch anticipation's
crackle: live silence
of the soundtrack before music
washes over us and recedes
under the title. Our tendons strain
and hands close like claws
around our knees, shaking
with the dynamic tension of curiosity,
our need to see things go
the way we want.

After a thousand viewings
we still trip over our ignorant
feet in the dark of the multiplex,
eyes adjusting slowly
in the same way the heart, squeezed
by secrecy, opens
to what's playing in the world.
We find again how a film
can clip our expectations
and send us wandering
through its passages arranged
in blind walls and cavernous
echo chambers, and we are confused
until the path becomes the exit
and we cannot see
how we failed to understand.



MOVIEHOUSE NEUROSES

A woman shuddered and failed
to muffle her scream each time
the darkness laid its hands on her.

A man, a lawyer in town,
sneaked into the condemned balcony
and all during *Jaws* used
the blowpipe of his pen
to shoot unpoped kernels
at the necks below him.

Another man
wouldn't let you leave
the auditorium during crucial
scenes. His wife evicted children
from the first row
where she sat through every
matinee. Once she sued the theater,
claiming *Sensurround* was driving her crazy.

Paul Feemus the usher
threw them all out in his quest
for a better viewing public.



PAUL FEEMUS JUGGLES

In 1971, during an intermission,
crowd gathering on the threadbare
rug before the glass box
of popcorn, Paul Feemus
juggled whole boxes of candy,
sending up Good and Plenty, Goobers,
a Chunky, the moviegoers' jaws
falling in fascination as they tried to read
the blurred penmanship the objects left
upon the air, watching until the arcs
and plunges grew erratic and collapsed,
and the usher drew a Coke
and changed a twenty.



PAUL FEEMUS LOSES VISION

The day a trio of kids
sneaked into an R-rated film
Paul Feemus went on the skids.
He'd been at the helm

taking tickets, and he'd let them in.
 Worse, he couldn't call
 his manager: the humiliation!
 He'd catch them next time, was all.

His character's tragic flaw
 lay in not being awake:
 the brats clogged every stall
 in the restroom during his break.

The little meatheads, he would grind
 into paste every kid their age!
 He ran outside and, blinded,
 hurled curses in a rage.



LEGENDS

Long ago Paul Feemus
 left the theater like some famous monster
 creeping off to nurse
 his wounds. The younger ushers
 still wonder about his departure,
 their whispers growing so urgent
 not even the fluted lights dimming
 for a feature command a hush.
*He beat up some kids he caught
 vandalizing the bathroom.*

*What? He caught the principal
 in here with a cheerleader
 and blabbed about it. They chucked
 him out of school and ushering both.*

*I heard his old man owned this place,
 and he fired Paul for patting
 down customers for smuggled candy.*

Last movie's running
 when they file in the projection room.
 I was there, I say, during a storm
 you could hear over the Dolby.
 It was a Kurt Russell, after he
 turned too old for Disney, and you
 would never expect a woman
 sprinting down the aisle followed
 by a guy who grabbed her in front
 of the screen. *You move*

she gets hurt the guy's body
 told Paul, who was close.
 I ran for the lights and put
 them on too fast, they burned
 like phosphorus flares,
 and we saw Paul
 wrap his arms around an empty chair,
 muscles popping like rocks
 under his skin as the metal screamed
 and Paul pressed the seat over
 his head, the velvet shining
 like old wine, and the guy
 let the crying woman go.

Wait a minute. The youngest one
 stands and steps close.
Next you're going to tell me
Paul threw the chair
and killed the guy.



PAUL FEEMUS TRAINS A NEW USHER

The theater's the thing
 is what you can't forget.
 Show people their seats and smile,
 sure, but keep order and you're set.

Manager will never put you on trial
 for keeping the place clean as well.
 Here's the plunger, broom—you'll learn
 to use them tonight, sure as hell.

If you came to watch movies, return
 the vest and flashlight now. I don't care
 if Raquel and Sophia are on the screen
 together, all bouncy and bare:

you're here to sling sodas, not dream.
 Why am *I* leaving? Movies are dead
 to me. Just like cooks can't eat
 in restaurants. It's all in my head

you say? May your sneakered feet
wander these aisles for ten years
before your shift is over. I'm also departing
because I saw something the manager fears

will cost *his* job. He's starting
to look for reasons to let me go,
all for blowing the whistle on a cheerleader
and her principal in the back row.

No, I'm not the kind of creature
to give notice. I'll just cut myself free.
Won't show up for work one day, forever,
what my daddy did to me.



OPENING ACT

The dancers enter
the old moviehouse
one builds a fire
in the projection booth
the drumbeat rises as the lights dim
the men wear masks
the women breastplates
of hammered metal
they dance slowly
down the aisles
as two elders
before the screen
begin to juggle
tossing each other
the blunted knives of history