

Edward Benz, 27 Times

La Dispute

I heard the old man's voice break, stutter once then stop it. I heard
A sentence started confidently halted by the sudden absence of a word.
Stumbled and he sputtered trying to find it back, something once so simple gone now.
When he finally gave up told me, "Aw, it's like hell getting old."

When you came into the store, did you know you'd show me your scars?

I had a heavy heart, he carried a door, it's shattered pane all wrapped in plastic and he asked if I could fix it, come by a little later help him put it back on hinges. "See, I'm far too old to lift it and it's not for my house, It's my son's."

When you opened up the door, what is it you thought you'd find?

(Nobody flinch)

Later I came by and backed into the driveway. Got out to find him waiting there to lead me through the side yard to back behind the house where the door frame stood empty and helped me keep it steady while I hammered all the pins in then later on the porch we somehow got to talking, he told me of the house and how his son is schizophrenic so they purchased it for him, the medication working and they figured it would help him fit in—help him lead a normal life.

But the pills made him sleep too much. And he couldn't keep a job as a Result so one day he just gave up on taking them. And that day she had called you, he'd locked her outside of the house.

How quickly did you get there? And what were you thinking while walking up? What fears flashed in front of you, taunted you, walking to unlock the door?

I remember it, Ed. That story you told me came back clear tonight here while writing. And you should know the feeling never left me—the weight of my heart—when you showed me the scars on your arms, when I looked in your eyes and I heard what you said how you probably would've died were it not for to care for your daughter and wife. How he drove in the knife, still your son.

How you seemed to look through me to some old projector screen

playing back the scene as you described it on a movie reel, as real as the minute when it happened, that memory moving behind me. That moment that changed you for good.

And he drove to the house and pulled into the driveway. Got out to find his wife waiting, frantic. She'd come by to check, found that pillbox was empty, went out to the pharmacy to fill up his prescription and came back to a locked door and could not get back in. She'd knocked and she'd knocked but he wasn't responding.

You put the key into the lock and turned it. Felt the bolt slide away. Slowly open. Went into the hall, his son held a knife, standing off in the shadows, lunged forward and tackled him. Strabbing him over and over and breaking that window. He fled up the staircase. The ambulance came, stitched and filled him with blood while the cops took his son with his wires so tangled his father was a stranger.

And I sit in my apartment.
I'm getting no answers.
I'm finding no peace, no release from the anger.
I leave it at arms length.
I'm keeping my distance.
From hotels and Jesus and blood on the carpet.
I'm stomaching nothing.
I'm reaching for no one.
I'm leaving this city and I'm headed out to nowhere.
I carry your image.
Your grandfather's coffin.
And Ed, if you hear me, I think of you often.
That's all I can offer.
That's all that I know how to give.