

A Good Life

A man in an archaic ascot, heirloom cufflinks & manicured salt & pepper
Moustache converses with his dead wife who, of course, isn't sitting across from him.
The waiter removes the second set of utensils; with a sleight of hand
The extra wineglass seemingly evaporates. The man requests, almost shyly,
They be returned. No need to look at the menu—& for dessert he orders a ripe
Avocado which he fork-mashes with a sprinkle of cane sugar & a pinch of pink
Himalayan salt which he carries in a sterling silver tin, like a snuff box,
In his inner suit pocket. Across the room, a young couple peruse the menu
In its minutia & point to particulars. The waiter's impatient, slightly agitated,
Like the younger waiter in Hemingway's "A Clean Well-Lighted Place"
Which he read in college but did not quite get the point of,
So a waitress, who he's been trying to sleep with, says she'll take over
The old man's table. When he excuses himself to his wife's ghost
The waitress refolds his linen napkin as though it were a cloth diaper
On an invisible baby. Her name was Tess but he called her Kitty Cat—
His wife, not the waitress & they never had children.
It's the kind of dark old-world restaurant that requires reservations
Whether they're booked or not & the wait staff would never think of revealing
Their names to the patrons. It's awkward to be demanding to servers who have names.
Some people want the nameless to be simultaneously invisible & infinitely available.
The young couple whisper, pretend they are not pitying him—
An anniversary perhaps—no—the first night they left their newborn.
They couldn't trust just *any* babysitter—her divorced mother was visiting from Montana.
The old man sends over a bottle of wine, a Burgundy from an obscure vintner,
An overlooked vintage, with an ephemeral finish.
They seem embarrassed when the sommelier reveals the unrecognized
Label from under the white napkin & insist they did not order the wine.
The sommelier points with his head to the man. Comfort & discomfort
Co-exist & make the world palatable. The man only eats half of his avocado.

While the waitress combs the last crumbs off the couple's tablecloth,
The young man strolls over to the old man's table to acknowledge
The vibrancy of human generosity. He said it more simply of course.
The man tells the new father, whose name he learns & begins each sentence with,
It was a wine he & his wife had wanted to try but could not afford.