

John Engman

Epigraph To Be Repeated In A Steambath

Tonight I want to set the house on fire.
It has been a long day of venom and sludge
and my mind is ablaze:
stalling the onrush of my sunset years
I invent a cocktail meant to cure dismay,
tequila cut with milk of magnesia, a Pepto-Dismal.
I am never strong enough to bless or kill
but the shot-glasses I ignite flare suddenly
like new disciples. Walls sway and burning
sensations come and go like seance
ghosts. Forbidden emotions
I keep alive in some male underzone
build heavens and send me an angel named
Little Richard, radio blaring
his ode to joy.

Fifty years from now I'll be a snoozer
in woolen slippers. In whirlpools
I'll sing the old Little Richard tune
about Miss Molly at the house of blue light.
Deaf and flimsy, I'll give my grandchildren
nightmares. They'll feed me prunes and shy away
as if I am a zoo animal. Mornings I don't die
I'll holler come rub the cold from my bones,
bring more Pepto-Dismals,
bring more pills and balms, more everything.
I will exude helplessness and see fireballs in the dayroom,
make eyes with *Playboy* centerfolds,
read prophecies of doom in oatmeal
and without effort become wise.