

Richard Tillinghast

Savannah, Sleepless

A bell has rung twelve times.
 A bell has rung once.
 A bell has rung twice.
 Could I be the last non-sleeper in Savannah?
 Elevators have been upgathered
 and then, with me in one, sent down again —
 to the hotel lounge,
 pictures of duels and steam locomotives
 on its baize walls.
 Billiard balls stand expectantly
 in their round way.
 Stooping over the green field,
 a sharp eye swoops over them like a hawk.

Two people begin to become musical.
 Powder-puff, honey-dark skin —
 pink gown with springy straps —,
 she can kiss a passing cheek and still sing.
 He fingers the ivories and looks like Nat “King” Cole.
 A machine plays the beat for their song:
 she swishes a wire brush anyway
 across the conga drum that attends there,
 then flicks the brush across her shoulder
 at some unseen irritant.
 Two men discuss two women.
 Chairs are drawn up.
 “Tables” are formed.
 A notebook sits apart,
 entranced by the yin-yang of brandy and cigar.

No, I am not the last waking human
 in the Hilton Hotel.
 The singer is explaining she doesn’t want
 to set the world on fire,

she just wants to start a flame in the heart
of some unspecified "you."

Outside, the million tongues of the city sleep,
and the blue Atlantic draws a breath.