
NON-FICTION | FALL 2016

Old Men

By John C. Mannone

9 a.m. and the four old men
line up on the red barstools—

Homer, slurps
his coffee, black with a packet of
Splenda stirred in; his lip curls

while reading 17 Down
in the daily crossword puzzle,
asks Ben next to him.

He has to ask twice
not because his hearing aid
was turned down, but because

Ben is ogling the waitress
(all of them much too young
for his age). And he smiles

bright as sunshine. But Charlie
on the other end of the counter,
having heard the challenge, yells

the answer to the question
—a certain entrance—“Try *adit*
I doubt *door* would be right.”

“It fits!” Homer thanks him.
(Charlie would know. He worked
the coal mines in Kentucky with Roy.)

Roy isn't saying much
this fall morning. He got a letter
from the lab yesterday afternoon.

His Texas bacon egg and cheese
getting cold on the gray green plate
like the color of scrubs.

Gwendolyn hits him
with a warm up, "Is there anything
I can do for you and Beth?"

Roy nods, "Thanks, Gwen,
but no." He swirls the coffee
in a worn ceramic cup; takes a good swig.

#

9 a.m., the old men
line up on red barstools.

Winters are sometimes rough
on old men. And usually
the menu doesn't change.

Charlie sees the bright
plastic mat spread with pictures
of ham and eggs, toast and coffee,

hashbrowns and orange juice,
on the shiny counter in front
of the empty barstool, Roy's.

Charlie keeps quiet. Forces
down a scoop of hot grits, swallows
hard the unsweetened tea.

Homer pencils the numbers
into squares of a Sudoku. Hope
things add up; doesn't ask Ben,

who's checking out
the new waitress, though some
may not give her a second look.

Homer says, "I feel like
a waffle this spring morning,
with butter and maple syrup."

John C. Mannone, three-time Pushcart nominee, has over 500 works in venues such as the Drunk Monkeys, New England Journal of Medicine, Inscape Literary Journal, Acentos Review, Windhover, Artemis, Still, Town Creek Poetry, Poetica Magazine, Arc-24, Artemis and Baltimore Review. He's been awarded a 2016 Weymouth writing residency and has two literary poetry collections, including one on disability, Disabled Monsters (The Linnet's Wings Press, Dec 2015). He edits poetry for Silver Blade and Abyss & Apex and he's a college professor of physics in east Tennessee. Visit <http://jcmannone.wordpress.com>

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