

Whimsical Logic

For as young as I remember until mid-adolescence, Mr. Rice lived across the street from us. He was a tall thin man who stood as straight as the birch tree claiming his front yard. Many summer afternoons I would walk across the street, approach his front door and “yoo hoo” into the screen. He’d then invite me into his back yard to glide on his rickety two-seater swing covered by a faded canvas canape of bluebells whimsically floating above. We’d drink chocolate milk and dunk Lorna Doones. I often would lean my head back in the shaded cover welcoming the delicate slices of sun, or drops of rain that snuck through the worn cover. Mr. Rice and I would swing back and forth for what seemed to be hours, and this became my first introduction to the world of reading.

Mr. Rice loaned me books, mostly collections from Seuss, throughout the summer months. I was a child, trusted by my parents to be alone most of the summer as they worked full time and to be introduced into a world where I could go to fantastical places. Mr. Rice, although he never appeared to tire of me, had his hands full with a highly inquisitive child. He talked to me with a cadence that made me feel safe. He’d talk to me in rhymes, and I would mimic him, straining my brain to make logical sense out of what I stumbled over syllables to say. That was the first time I ever heard the term *Whimsical Logic*.

Whimsical logic, according to Mr. Rice, meant anything was possible if you could think it. We spent several summers, four to be exact, hovering over canopied, make-believe worlds.

As I grew into my height, accompanied by teenage priorities, Mr. Rice and I started to see less of one another. I became less interested in canopied swings and old man bachelors. Reading became something I did on rainy days. However, I would occasionally spot a shadowed Mr. Rice standing behind his front screen door as I jumped on my bike and peddled away.

The following summer Mr. Rice crossed the street to my house around 10:00 o’clock in the morning. I was entering my teens, the vampire years, where I routinely slept until mid-afternoon and stayed up until the breaking of dawn. Mr. Rice handed me three tattered hardcover books yet new to me, collections of stories from southern writers. In a groggy state I reached for the books, thanked him, closed the door and went back to sleep.

Several weeks later Mr. Rice gracefully crossed the street in search of the books he’d loaned me. I had misplaced them. I told him I would look for them and return them to him soon. Before I could do so two men in black suits carried his body incased in a black vinyl bag weighed down by a long silver zipper the length of the bag. I watched from the other side of the street as one man was at his head while another at his feet. The bag was long, straight and although in contrast to the white birch in color, I saw this as the beginning of feeling uprooted. I would never be able to return his stories to him.

That’s when I became immersed with southern women writers like Eudora Welty and Flannery O’Connor, Harper Lee, Carson McCullers, and, eventually, Ellen Gilchrist and Dorothy Allison. Their narratives enriched me, and in a strange way comforted me while grieving Mr. Rice. Mr. Rice was my only adult connection to books, and to this day I remember his made-up language that I was privy to, and the whimsical logic they enriched me with.

Whimsical Logic (as a poem)

My yoo hoo singsongs through Mr. Rice’s screen door,
the old man bachelor who burrowed across the street.
Tall, thin, straight as a birch tree
I’d climb upon his rickety two-seater swing covered
by a tattered canvas canape of bluebells whimsically afloat.
We’d dunk Lorna Doones in chocolate milk, read stories swaying
to the hiccup of the swing.

He talked with a cadence of rhymes while I strained my brain
to make logical sense over stumbled syllables.
Whimsical logic, anything was possible hovering over canapés make believe worlds.
Rested, secure we settled into a routine of swaying to words for several seasons.

Until I grew into my height, accompanied by teenage priorities,
Mr. Rice and I saw less of one another.
The following summer Mr. Rice crossed the street
and knocked on my door. He handed me three tattered
hardcover books new to me, collections of stories from southern writers.

Eudora Welty and Flannery O'Connor, Harper Lee,
Carson McCullers, Ellen Gilchrist and Dorothy Allison.
Several weeks later Mr. Rice gracefully crossed the street
in search of the books he'd loaned me, but I had misplaced them.

The following spring two men in dark suits pried the screen door open,
carried a tall, thin black vinyl bag weighed down by a long silver zipper
reflecting the mid-morning sun.
Although in contrast to the stark white birch, things were uprooting.
The language that I was privy to, the whimsical logic I once embraced
keeps me looking for what I misplaced.