



Happy Sunny Jade

Elizabeth Atterbury

Like a fire in the sun.

It wasn't supposed to be forever, just a chance to slow his mind. But, life was about change for Paul McCobb. After a long beautiful marriage, Molly passed. He was dazed and broken and exhilarated by the prospect of melting away. He wanted no pity, just to be alone. New Orleans had potential. Behind every door was the great unknown. Those that heed the call of the wild can vanish away, popping in and out of the obscurity of the blank shadows as they see fit. No longer fixed to any-place, Paul wanted fire and flood; he headed south. He settled into a classic shotgun double in Irish Channel. Despite the oppressive summer heat and humidity, his house was dark, cool, and calming. He'd read and sketch well into the night, wake in the early afternoon, and walk the under sheltered canopies of mulberry and oleander trees. He wanted to melt in the humidity. He loved the neighborhood's history of immigrant ruffians: St. Mary's Market Gang, Shot Tower Gang, Pine Knot Gang; the defunct slaughterhouses and the abandoned sugar refinery along the river. For an old modernist, New Orleans was perfectly, perpetually in the now.

Now he was as far as he could be from the textiles, the wallpaper, the dinnerware, the lamps, all the lamps, and even the televisions. Far, far from Feinman's Modernage Furniture. Paul did keep a stylish little radio he designed and found himself instinctively turning up Jelly Roll Morton whenever he hit the airwaves. At a diner the other day he looked up to the tv only to see familiar birch, maple, and iron, desks and chairs from the McCobb Planner Group that made up the set of the Today Show. Paul was atomic age hip, the American Bauhaus mixed with Shaker lines, the king of Bloomingdale's, but now he just wanted to walk.

Tracey's Bar had whiskey shrimp over a cheddar potato and cold beer, as well as a cast of gamblers, jazz musicians, politicians, and prizefighters to chat with. Taking a stool, there was suddenly a hand on his shoulder; it was Max Goldman who previously ran Alexander Girard's studio from back in NY. Alexander and Max were doing great work for George Nelson and the Eames, but Max traded it in for racy loose shirts and swill beers at noon. Max wanted to live in a haze like a blur of jabs. He wanted off the treadmill and to live in a foreign country, but New Orleans became his island. Max and Paul knew each other from trade shows and department store galas. They were both on Block Island for Warren Planter's bachelor party. Max told Paul that old cuts heal faster down here. Together they were a pair of old acquaintances floating towards the end of time.

Paul's daily walk started at the blue house on Constance and back down Tchoupitoulas. Strangers would wave hello. His heart would nearly burst with love watching the symphony that is the Port. On the way to Tracey's his steps were light. The streets were always littered with outer space feathers and glitter. He thought about taking some Marine Biology classes at Tulane. He thought he might write a long letter to the editor of the Times-Picayune. He wanted to punch the chess player with the mustache from the bar. He avoided art deco shops on Magazine Street. It wasn't part of his pressing pause. He'd knowingly smirk at the attractive cowards hustling from shop to shop, preparing for Thanksgiving or New Years, or a wedding, or christening. He wanted to borrow a .22 to shoot up the sidewalk. To put the match to the fuse. A dull thud and a bold lesson. The line in the sand was crossed when, after a night at the bar, he and Max were blinded by the artificial glow radiating from the Design Within Reach. They stood up straight, sober, faces pressed to the window, fuming in silence.

From there forward Paul's walk turned into a crawl when he would cut across Magazine, lurking, peering sideways like an owl through the storefront windows into another world. He felt unfaithful. DWR reeked in vanity, an insecure overstatement of lights, consumption, and action. After a life punctuated by bringing modernity to the masses, he was confused by their claims of "educating America about modernism." He didn't understand the fashionable visual appeal of the showroom. Ev-

erything was obscured by the vulgar lights. It was crowded and erased all wit and beauty. It felt like an endpoint. Yet all day, large cars swooped in carrying new money women with large checkbooks. Philistines.

During one fly-by, the door swung open and Paul knocked over a little prick wearing nearly the same outfit as him. The kid was carrying out a sandwich board announcing a clearance sale and invited him in to their "studio." Paul was inquisitively amused, ready to laugh at his own jokes. A young woman approached and asked if he would enjoy a glass of champagne or sparkling rosé while he browsed. He didn't answer and they looked at each other like both were batshit. Paul took a seat in a white Pantone chair (\$260) under several Arco floor lamps (\$2,995) as customers began pouring in. Gentle house music played on a stereo made of Legos (\$979). The world forgot about him again. The next day Paul was back, this time in the Arne Jacobsen Egg Chair (\$7,500). He was a well dressed fly on the wall.

Max was full of bemused concern. It wasn't their scene. DWR was appealing to women with bad hairdos and nut jobs with impaired sexual potency. The duo traded insults and dismissals, and they drank. Max preferred just sitting in the sun, getting lost in the here now. Paul explained overhearing a smug saleswoman tell a customer that the LeCorbusier Chaise Longue (\$4,555) was made with bison skin from right here in the USA! That a rudderless Tulane student working there part-time explained to a young couple that the Eames brothers were revolutionizing design. It was a perfect appetizer to a good drink. They went for a walk to plan their one-sided, playful feud. A gentle declaration of war by two old men who previously had nothing else to fight for.

Paul and Max ran a perfect at a two-man weave. It was a busy Saturday and Max puffed his chest and struck up a meaningless conversation with DWR team members about why most Danish-designed furniture was produced in Italy, or if buying a young American like Jeffrey Bennett (Flight recliner, \$2,800) was a good investment? With the staff distracted, Paul was hiding in plain site dissuading customer consumption, a righteous anti-ambassador telling naive customers about sales and higher quality elsewhere. He bade a young Baton Rouge couple fit with pocketfuls of honeymoon money hello and then dove headfirst into why DWR's unscrupulous "inspired-by" knock-offs would never appreciate in value. Shoppers were wary, confused. Paul was a self-assured shark lounging in his favorite Arne Jacobsen Swan Sofa (\$18,400 in leather), calm and cool, always on attack. He whispered loudly about poor construction and problems with mass production. "The concrete floor was the only thing sturdy in the showroom." He told a Punky Brewster old-teenager that they severely underpay women designers and to get back to the Marigny. When talking to a young lawyer from the Quarter he looked down at her hand, noticed the lack of a ring and went for the kill raising concerns over jagged edges with kids, or someday kids. He chalked up a point as she called him an asshole. A handsome pulmonary doc from University Med told him to "fuck off." Fair enough. Score. He simply declared that DWR was selling reproductions of reproductions whose souls had been lost along the way. In the face of a scornful look, he said "Where y'at!" and laughed. He and Max were no longer putting off till tomorrow what we should have done yesterday. He and Max would never be lonely again. The war was over. The good old guys felt victorious. Like that, the customers were ghosts, sulking down Magazine right alongside Max and Paul, two old friends heading to their reward themselves with another round of beers.

- Daniel Fuller

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Elizabeth Atterbury (born 1982, West Palm Beach, FL) lives and works in Portland, Maine. Recent solo and group shows include The Colby College Museum of Art, Waterville; kijidome, Boston; Document, Chicago; TSA, Brooklyn; Bodega, Philadelphia/New York; KANSAS, New York; and The ICA at Maine College of Art, Portland, among others. In the Middle, An Oasis, a monograph of her work, was published by Bodega Press in 2013. She received her BA from Hampshire College and her MFA from MassArt.