

Gin Rummies

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To find a friend one must close one eye.

To keep him—two.

—Norman Douglas

for Rodney Formon

Friday nights, a fry-cook,
arms scarred by sizzling fat,
Rodney bangs on my door.
We like to drink together,
shoot the breeze, and laugh.
Drunk enough, we sing!
It's karaoke with CDs scattered
on the table, improvisational
shandygaffs and combinations
you can't enjoy with your relations.

It's good to have a drinking buddy.
I've used up two already—
one who fell down a flight of stairs
and one, who was much older,
who died of his warrior life.
But now I've got Rodney,
who is very different from the others.

The other two were quite and somewhat
intellectual, and where the one

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could talk history or science, art,
music, or just about any subject
in just about any language and come back,
being polyglot, and polymath,
even polymorphic, after hooch;
the other was a man of action,
a war hero with many medals
tucked away in drawers locked
by indifference, but still would tell of
weapons, arms and the man, and such
with fervor—my Heraclitus—
and also with disgust, with
fatalism, believing nothing
changes in man's fighting nature,
disposed to think the worst;
but enthusiastic over chess,
which he played in earnest
as if he were at war again.

But Rodney is another sort:
He knows I write but will not read
a word I write, nor much else either,
but likes the Internet so much
he slides crabwise in thought,
toward what depth of cyberspace
I often cannot fathom until zing
I see it for myself, or am I drunk?
I see with Rodney that the other two,
complimented first my young and then
my middle-aged delusions
of a deeper self-knowledge

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than available to most. Yes, Rodney
shows me to myself, or shows me
to my youthful ghosts, as ego-fed,
but did and does this unintentionally,
whose wonderful indifference makes me shrink
like a cock in the cold, and chug my drink.