

5-1-2004

Untitled

Mallory Hellman
NSU University School

Follow this and additional works at: https://nsuworks.nova.edu/uschool_litmag



Part of the [Creative Writing Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Hellman, Mallory (2004) "Untitled," *Hieroglyphics: the NSU University School Literary Magazine*: Vol. 11 , Article 13.
Available at: https://nsuworks.nova.edu/uschool_litmag/vol11/iss1/13

This Short Story is brought to you for free and open access by the University School at NSUWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Hieroglyphics: the NSU University School Literary Magazine by an authorized editor of NSUWorks. For more information, please contact nsuworks@nova.edu.

Untitled

Mallory Hellman

He boards the T at Central. He's relieved to have made it onto this train; he must be, he made it by an inch. A thin layer of oil, oil that in this sweltering capsule is nothing more than a prefix to perspiration, forms a film on his rich, coffee-colored face. He walks with an air of dignity down the aisle until he finds a seat next to a blatantly drunk gentleman in a dirty tee shirt that says, "Fishing is life," and a baseball cap. His own bright red beret is slightly disturbed by another passenger's sweaty arm as he takes his seat, and he now cautiously lifts a veiny hand to correct this. The gray tee shirt that he's using as an undergarment is visible through the unfastened upper two buttons of his canary yellow Oxford shirt. The shirt is thin anyway. The underthing's bold gray hue is too dark for such a light shirt, and even if the buttons were closed, its presence would be distracting. Both the exceedingly gray tee shirt and its worn, Easter-colored companion are tucked into a pair of khakis, fastened at the slightly protruding waist by a brown leather belt. Reebok sneakers, probably from 1989 or so, complement the outfit, as a teasing glimpse of white athletic socks fills the gap between the shoes' tops and the pants' legs.

"See, you can't trust ennyone. No one's yer frien in this goddamn city." The drunken man is slurring words of wisdom in Red Beret's general direction. "Can't even spare money for a sandwich, goddamn it."

The oil covering Red Beret's face is well on its way to becoming sweat now, and he tightly clutches

the leather dossier in his lap, somewhat insecure.

“It’s a problem with our whole nation, really”

Red Beret closes his eyes, his short-lashed lids seeming just barely to cover the parabola of his salient brown corneas. He nods, hoping this gesture of agreement will silence his inebriated new companion. It seems to have the opposite effect.

“You know what I’m sayin’, man? These, days, it’s all about the money. Nobody gives a crap about the real stuff anymore...”

I’m afraid that Drunken Crackpot will burst into tears in a minute, but Red Beret keeps right on nodding, even inserting an “uh-huh” every so often for emphasis. It’s clear, though, that his mind is elsewhere. He’s thinking about his children. He’s thinking about what they would do, what his wife would do, if he were just some boozed-up ex-auto mechanic or whatever preaching “revolutionary” gospel to an 87-degree, 60-mile-per-hour congregation. No. He’s thinking about his job. He’s thinking that he’s forty-five years old and still hasn’t climbed to a preferred rung of the “corporate ladder.” He’s thinking about his alcoholic Puerto Rican boss who threatens to fire him because, after all, “blacks are the ‘chosen’ minority in this country.” He’s thinking about his milquetoast career as an investment banker, an assistant manager at Wal-Mart, a member of a cult, a subsistence farmer.

He nervously toys with the zipper of the dossier, pulling it back and forth a fraction of an inch, giving himself a little peep show of its contents each time. Every few seconds, he reveals a minute region of a stack of financial reports, floorplans of the Smithsonian, instructions for shipping contraband items across the Hungarian border. Tiring of this soon after he starts, he adjusts his

sock and leans back in the chair with a nearly inaudible sigh of relief. He can't be comfortable; these seats are by no means comfortable. He has just loosened his grip on the dossier, and, soaking up the pungent liquid narcotic of his still-rambling busmate, has acquiesced into his own mind.

Then, his thoughts suffer a dramatic change. He starts as though he has been asleep, his lips still absentmindedly concurring with Crackpot under a thin, well-kept moustache. But now he's considering something that requires a little more thought. He forgot to go to CVS. He left the stove on. It's his anniversary, dammit, and he doesn't want to come home without a gift for the third year in a row.

The T lurches to a halt at Charles/MGH. With a brief nod in the degenerate prophet's direction, Red Beret stands with the aid of a filthy metal pole and inspects his khakis for creases. Stepping briskly, he exits the train. He was on his way to see the fireworks. Pulling a tiny American flag out of the dossier, he is on his way.