

METALLICA & I

It turns out  
they've both been to shows. He  
saw them way back — like, *way* the hell back —  
back before they were known, back  
before they were really even Metallica.  
Back in some guy's garage or something.  
Back, in fact, when what's-his-name was still with them . . .  
    But she's barely listening. She,  
for the moment, has retreated  
to a private personal distance,  
a joyous yet foggy place  
she loves to revisit.  
At best, she nods  
at his little  
anecdote  
before launching right into her own Metallica tale:  
how *she* knew someone who somehow  
knew so-and-so, who somehow got them all in  
and then —  
    and then —  
they were backstage, backstage  
with Metallica  
and James Hetfield  
kept handing her beers,  
but the band was totally laid back  
and so mellow  
and calm and completely  
under control  
and all that wild shit is mostly just  
a stage thing — for image, you know —  
and really they're all just

gentlemen, she said, perfect  
gentlemen, Metallica, sitting backstage  
putting back some beers  
with me  
and some of my friends and  
etcetera, and etcetera.

And after that, he responds  
not by bowing in her presence  
or pausing to reflect,  
but by saying that, well, he once,  
*he once,*

*he once . . .*

And that's really all I can tell you,  
because that was all I could take.  
I gave up on my search for a copy of *Siddhartha*.  
If either of them had been listening, they'd have heard  
the door chimes jangling behind me.  
There was no grace in that place, and the only love  
was for the band.  
Rather than listening with rapt attention, delighting  
in a shared passion, each silently despised the other  
for having been with Metallica,  
even for a moment, even  
so long ago.

So, as I said, I couldn't tell you what came next —  
but, then again, neither could either of them.  
She might have said, "Believe it or not, I am —  
in a sad, strange way you could never understand —  
both sister and spouse to both Lars Ulrich and  
James Hetfield,  
and our mutual father-slash-father-in-law  
is none other than  
the late Moon Unit Zappa."  
She could've uttered those very words,  
with no regard for the fact  
that Moon Unit Zappa was  
neither dead nor male,

and he would have countered,  
after no more than a shrug, with  
    “Well, odd as it may seem,  
Metallica and I were once riding in a zeppelin  
somewhere over the equator, fully intending to engage  
in a bit of recreational skydiving,  
but as we stood at the open portal  
holding hands and preparing for the plunge,  
the band chickened out at the very last second  
and asked if it could just paint my toenails instead.

Of course, I said yes. (This was not a proposition  
to which one says no.) And then  
they went to town, painting away,  
decorating those little fuckers in exotic rainbow fashion,  
their strokes confident and bold. And at that moment,  
Metallica had never been so happy.

    But soon it came to an end. Sadly,  
it was time to land. Despite their display of skydiving spineless-  
ness,

which the band kindly asked me to keep under wraps, Metallica  
still had to pay the driver. And not only did they  
tip him well after he dropped us off  
somewhere high in the Andes,  
but then they invited the blimp navigator  
to join our table for breakfast, which  
James Hetfield  
cooked on a roasting-spit  
ignited by his own breath of fire.

He prepared us a very good breakfast. Lars was in charge  
of the fresh-squeezed orange juice, which he pressed  
in his ample armpits, much to the delight of us all,  
including the small group of animals  
that had gathered around in an oblong circle—  
and by small group of animals  
I in no way mean to say ‘a group of *small* animals’  
—because there were giraffe, my friend. Giraffe.  
And that *is* an accepted plural.”

But such a tale, I'm sure, would only fall  
on deaf ears. The only way to get to these people –  
to get through to these vicious bookstore clerks –  
would be to give their stories the responses they deserve.  
As in, "Wow! Get out! How neat  
to have seen such a fabulous band –  
in their formative years, at that! How special  
to have relaxed with them after a show  
and have the lead singer take such keen interest  
in you as a person! Brushes  
with greatness – especially such  
intimate brushes – sure are wonderful.  
I have to admit: I'm jealous."