

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."