



STAYING HUNGRY

BY

JOHN O'HARE

WHY I LIKE IT: *Fiction Editor JOEY CRUSE writes...*

I think that you can make some comparisons to Bukowski or Philip Ó Ceallaigh with John O' Hare's, "Staying Hungry." There are vestiges of Factotum and Notes from a Turkish Whorehouse spackled throughout, or those books are spackled throughout me and my life and those are the comparisons that I feel like making. Both express the terribleness of having to work their jobs, or having no job, both express the creativity that can come from being a disentangled part of the working class, and O' Hare, in his prosody, makes a strong comparison for the absurdities of working life in the face of what living is – Heaney's "Digging," or the frustration of D.H. Lawrence come to mind as well.

I tend to hate rhyming poetry.

Although “tend” may be too much of a qualifier, as this poetics qualifies more as prose and I, on sheer, general principle, its inherent simplicity, and the need to tap into a concept of either silliness, childishness, or old verse cannot stand rhyme, but O’ Hare creates a disintegration of expectation. There is power between the connection of the words he plucks from thin air and the sounds that drive them together to create a diaspora that reflects the contemporary zeitgeist – naturally or forced.

When the whimsy gets to be too much to be believable or tolerable, he casts you down in the muck and turns the wanton into poetic realism. He’s created a rhythmic sound and fury, a grasp of hope in an utter disappointment, a sense of content knowing the world is crashing around, an accepted attempt at failing to get a job knowing that your soul can live a little longer until the next one – because you’ve only got one big suit and one big life.

Hunger and desperation will always get you somewhere, words may as well, for good or bad, and as we always say at FOTD:

Stay hungry.

Enjoy.

Staying Hungry

I’m flapping through the streets in my big, borrowed suit. Creases so sharp they could slice fruit. What I’m trying to say, is I’ll be your five-a-day. I’m used to working long hours for low pay. It’s the part in church that goes, ‘get on your knees, let’s pray.’ It’s a new despairing style. I’ve been cruising through job sites like a lonely missile. I’ve been turning out my pockets in the reduced aisle. See my LinkedIn profile. I took a selfie in front of a random yacht. I’m trying to say, I’m hot. I’m on fire. I’m sweating like a zoo. I’ve got a fever and there’s nothing I can do.

Achoo!

I’ve got the Old Spice lathered on like petrol on a BBQ. I’ve been prepping hard for this interview. I’ve been up all night. I’ve bleached my teeth ice white. On the first day the Lord said let there be light. And now here I am, fighting the good fight. I want to be your saviour tonight. I’ll be your sunshine. I’ll be your rain. I’ll be the vampire you invite inside again.

Wow, even the slightest breeze causes my teeth inconceivable pain.

I play another clip from the motivational speeches.

Hey, you, the speaker beseeches. Stop walking around so fuzzy. Straighten yourself!

I'll play it so straight that rulers will call me square. I'll perform the most basic tasks with flair. I'm basically sustaining myself on thin air.

The speaker says that you live your life for days like these.

He also said, complacency is a disease. Hold my nose I think I might sneeze. I can't sit still, I can't settle. We are born ready to grasp the nettle. Show me the teabags, I'll fill up the kettle. If you don't keep active, you get sloppy. Get your bum on the machine, click photocopy. Think fast. Act fast. I'll be the mail that's delivered first class. Speaking of which, I've reached the address.

I spot my reflection in the tinted glass. I start repeating to myself: I'm feeling good, never better. It's the greatest day of my life. I'm striving for gold. I've got genes so good they should be canned and sold. I'm Peter Pan, I'll never get old. I'm more than resilient. I apply myself. I've got pragmatism. In fact, I think I metabolise optimism. I beat the iron filings to the front of the queue when they were giving out magnetism. To try harder than me would simply be masochism.

I think I might well be ready.

The receptionist hands me a clipboard and a checkbox form, and I take it and I check it, and tick it, like I've been ticking boxes my whole life.

I sling it back at her and stroke my quiff which is massive. Then I head straight into the interview room like a twitchy cowboy in a bandit saloon.

Yabba dabba do, I say, and I smack my rump so hard that all the windows burst open.

Relax, they say.

I tell them, I'm as relaxed as a deflated balloon supping cocktails on an all-inclusive holiday. I'm ready moulded for your vacancy, it'll be like cold custard slopped over a smouldering ashtray.

Just start by telling us what brought you here today.

Go to hell, I say. This is no time for pleasantries. Let's get down to business, quit the foreplay. I don't want to have to run the whole gamut. This is probably the best job on the planet. Of course, I want it. Just give it to me. I'm an XL tub of tenacity. I don't listen to those who tell me what I can and can't be. Naysayers don't speak the same language as me. I make breakfast every morning, and every morning I slide it in the bin just to remain hungry. For me a job is a hobby. I'll turn up to work so early that you'll think I live in the lobby. You be Mummy, I'll be Baby. I'll pretend to work, and you pretend to pay me.

Ok, we've heard enough, they say.

Bring home the bacon? I'll bring you the whole farmyard. I'll let you milk me. Just give me a lanyard...

Suddenly, I'm being led out of the building by security, and tossed into the street.

Thankfully, my suit is so wide that I take off like an albatross made of burning paper.

Let's go champ.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: *Staying Hungry was inspired by my search for work and the prevalence of self-improvement culture. People expect you to be excessively motivated, no matter the job. It's a case of getting yourself so wound up for something that you storm through it and just keep on going. It is a playful take on beat poetry and lends itself nicely to being read aloud and repeated until it becomes mantra.*

AUTHOR BIO: John O'Hare is an artist and writer based in Bristol, UK. Recent publications of his work include – Crack the Spine – The Year Anthology; Fauxmoir Literary Magazine; Sculptorvox – A God Complex; and the Writers and Readers Magazine. He is currently completing his first novel.