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An Old Road Peddler Grows Sullen over Supper

The desolation evoked being away from home
Is exacerbated today
By having to stay in this sleazy motel—
And worse, on her birthday.

Supper for one in this smoky restaurant,
As I gaze through plate glass
At the massive grain and rice elevators
Buttressing the river, is paltry alternative

To a celebration consecrated with candles,
Cake, and dazzle-giddy children
Spilling over with excitement for their mother
On her "special" occasion.

Alone is too severe a sentence
For this well-intentioned road peddler,
Who never dreamed
Fate would rearrange his personal freedom

To such a disruptive degree,
Take him so far out of the way
From twin destinations he always dreamed
He'd reach: affluence and family.

Yet his aloneness owns him completely.
Only the innocuous beefsteak
And flaccid baked potato on his plate
Distract him from sullen monotony.

Solitude wears a shabby disguise.
He too well knows
Delusions of this variety seldom last an entire supper,
Realizes the missed birthday he conceived

And earlier retrieved from his murky memory
Is more than forty years cold,
That even then he couldn't redeem himself
For having squandered so precious a moment.

Now, he cowers behind a palsied coffee cup,
Aching to return to his room, phone home,
But home is his daily-assigned nowhere,
And the road his only known next of kin.