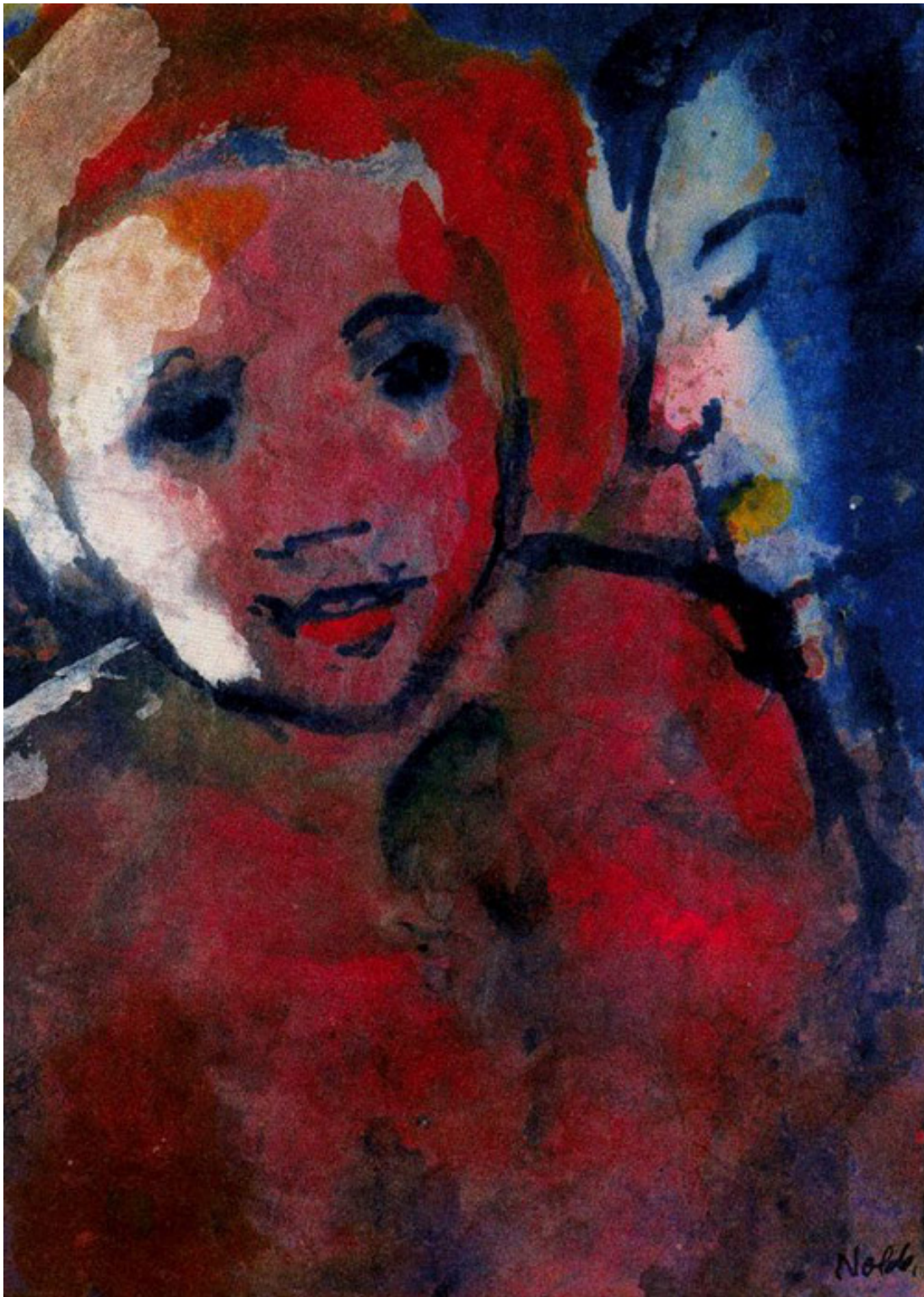


An Incident After Midnight

by [Kirby Olson](#) (July 2020)



Two People in Sidelight, Emile Nolde

I sat until dawn by the kitchen window overlooking the long driveway.

A white car went past. I took a sip of Diet Pepsi. I enjoyed the bubbles as they worked their way down my throat but one upper left molar felt as if it had developed a cavity as a shooting pain rocketed through the tooth. I had been grinding my teeth from all the tension, and the nerves were sore. I wished I could afford a dentist. I took another long pull while holding my tongue next to the tooth to buffer it from the cold. This worked. I finished the drink in a series of long pulls.

I looked down at the woodpile. The axe was missing. I peeked out the back sliding door over the backyard but there were no footprints in the fresh snow. I went to the living room and saw footprints. There were heavy rhododendrons on that side. Would the attack come from there? Fortunately, the moon was out.

I looked down the steps to the basement. The basement door was partially open and I could see a thin sliver of moonlight penetrating the coat room. Holy Jesus. The lapsed Hindu is in my abode! I expected my stomach to cramp. But the exact opposite took place. I found myself possessed of a firm grip on the Louisville slugger. There was a clear notion of self-defense in operation. I was up against an assassin. The soft drink's caffeine brought me to my senses.

I went down the steps peering into the ray of moonlight and saw a toad sitting in the thin ray of moonlight. There was an old piano down there and coats hanging. Where was Dali? Had he disguised himself by leaning against the wall? I held the Louisville Slugger in front of me, when a hand reached up over the stairwell and grabbed an ankle. It sent me tumbling. I rolled down the steps and leaped up like a cross-

eyed Ninja. My glasses were off.

“Now you pay,” Dali said.

I held up the bat to block the thrust of the axe. I wanted to ask Dali about his use of language. Sometimes he spoke good English, then he didn't. I didn't understand.

“Can you speak English or not?” I asked.

“It's my fifth language. I have to work hard to make it come out right.”

At the top of the steps Falstaff flicked on the light.

“Daddy, are you ok?”

I didn't say anything. Falstaff came running down the steps and said, “Here, dad, is your glasses.” He'd found them on the floor.

Falstaff turned to look at Dali, who was brandishing an axe.

Dali cracked the blunt side of the axe head against my son's temple. Falstaff started to cry, holding his head.

I cracked Dali across the knee with the bat, and pushed my son back up the steps. Had I been stronger, and hadn't spent my entire life reading books, I would have cracked Dali's skull open.

“Falstaff, call the police!”

“How come, dad?”

“Just do it!”

Falstaff flew up the steps holding his head.

Dali thrust the handle of the axe into my forehead and I flew back and landed on my butt, a little dazed but my

glasses intact. I straightened them.

He swung the axe and I rolled as planned and swung the bat, but my glasses flew off again.

“What about Wicca, Dali? Do you think that killing me will bring your wife back?”

“In my country I am Brahmin warrior!” Dali spat, as he brought the axe up over his head for another swing. “I get what I want in my country! I want THAT baby!”

“How dare you hit a child! What warrior hits a child? You will never get my baby.”

Dali drew the axe back. At just that point, Elliot, the Maltese dog, appeared from the bathroom, where he had apparently been sleeping on a pile of fresh laundry. He growled and then went for Dali’s ankle. Dali looked panicked. I could hear the axe head stick in a wood beam. I felt around for my glasses. He brought the axe down but it missed. I found my glasses. The axe head was stuck up in the wood beam. I felt the wind on the handle’s follow-through. I jumped up with the baseball bat and brought it down on his big toe. Now he had a problem with both feet. One had a deranged Maltese attached to it. The other had just been hit with a baseball bat.

Dali looked bemused at the axe head stuck in the beam over his head, but he was now hopping on one foot and trying to free his other foot from the dog’s teeth. He put his hands up.

“Gandhi right,” Dali said. “Non-violence the answer.”

Dali hobbled out the door, while I held Elliot back. At just that moment I saw a policeman’s head pop up in the moonlight, and then enter the door, and I saw the silhouette of his service revolver rise to Dali’s temple.

Dali went quietly, and soon the officer had him in the

squad car.

“Norm, are you all right?” The officer asked through the door after he had sequestered Dali.

“Yes.”

“Nice job, son.” The officer rubbed my son’s head, who now appeared beside me. I was proud of Falstaff but was embarrassed to realize that I had soiled myself during the fight. I didn’t want my son or the officer to see. I tried to stand to one side so that the stains were unnoticeable. Falstaff had a nasty lump on his temple.

The officer read the Brahmin, or whatever he was, his rights and took Dali to the county’s new jail. He was booked for breaking and entering, assault with a deadly weapon, and attempted murder. Within a month I figured he would be sentenced but if he had no priors he might be released within the year. Dali needed placement in an asylum for the criminally insane.

“Dad,” Falstaff asked. “Was that Brahmin a Confederate soldier from Gettysburg?”

“He was like a Confederate. He believed in caste systems, which is slavery.”

“Was he trying to make us into his slaves?” Falstaff asked.

“Yes,” I answered, erring on the side of clarity. “He was prepared to sacrifice us for his own ends.”

“It’s a good thing we won, Dad.” Falstaff said.

“You fought bravely for the Union, son.” I kissed him on the side of the forehead that wasn’t bruised. We went back up the steps.

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