



## 2 POEMS

*Hilary S. Jacqmin*

## DRUNKS

The ones who switch to seltzer  
are all younger than you:  
thirty-five or thirty, twenty-two.  
At parties now, they chain  
smoke, muscular as Christ,  
their faces lit like end-

of-spring bonfires. Before  
they sobered, there were broken  
hands, sand, blackouts, and  
the kind of sex that's more  
like throwing up. And yet,  
they are so lovely now:

tan refuseniks, both men  
and women glistening  
in a way that lightfoots,  
slowly sipping Rex Goliath,  
never do. Teetotalling  
has, somehow, saved them, kept

their minds like buffalo,  
their heartlines luminous  
as mariners' maps, while you,  
the photo-finish of  
rib-eating innocence,  
get fat, not blitzed, on beer.

You're old, or getting there.  
The world's unfair: the zodiac's  
a lie, and every problem drunk  
you eyed in college—punk  
or labor activist,  
pre-med, post-goth, classicist—

has shaken off that sheen  
of fake rebellion on the way  
to real, grown-up despair.  
They could not help themselves,  
they couldn't stop, and so  
they quit. What's *wrong* with you,

that you should ply them now  
with drinks that—honestly—  
you don't know how to mix?  
You almost miss the cool,  
reflective chip of ice, the way  
your first martini spilled,

and watching wasted boys  
perspiring, their eyes  
like tacks: they couldn't, wouldn't, watch  
you back. Does safety mean

that someone's got to be  
impaired? If someone must,

let it, at long last, be you,  
mouth blurry as a shot  
of Snap, your confidence  
some perfect ping pong  
volleying through an extra stout,  
your beer gut softly beautiful.

—

### JUGHEAD, MID-LIFE

In Tokyo, the long dream of Riverdale fades  
like spilled Hitachino Nest. Who was I back then?  
Seventeen, my stomach an empty eel,  
no eye for women. I knew my way around  
a short sheet. I knew Big Ethel's tears  
must taste like celery salt, and what  
the secret *S* stood for on my ringer T,  
and how to bang out "Sex and Candy" on a drum kit.

Eyes shut—some dumb mystic—I could predict  
whether a random tin can buoyed SPAM, or chaw,  
or licorice Altoids. But high school ended,  
and everybody scattered. Even Archie lost  
his knack for wise-ass love triangles. At Oberlin,  
I found, the food was infinite, and infinitely bad:  
grease-trap soft-serve; gristled albumen. I slept through  
Pornography: Writing of Prostitutes. I slept

through everything, until they didn't ask me back.  
And that was it for me. I mean, I lost my appetite  
for Rutt's Hut rippers, fake IDs, and *Philadelphia Story*.  
My cut-up beanie, badged with stars. My belief,  
that pure Americana, that anything could be finagled.  
Now, I make my way past love hotels  
and rabbit cafés, one hapless ex-pat among  
the salarymen. The subway smells like cut salami.

Is this Japan, or just an afterlife where nobody  
likes cheese? Every pal I knew back then  
is bankrupt, mortgaged, or screwing someone  
on the side. Their kids have eyes as tight as ticks.  
So I couldn't face the entropy of growing up.  
Here, I might be strange, but at least  
the sunsets flame like diesel gasoline  
and the noodles are all hand-pulled, alkaline.

It tastes good, is what I'm saying. Like gold.  
Salt-packed, uncomplicated  
as a demo reel. I still don't know  
what turns a woman's buckwheat gaze,  
but I can melt pork bones  
into *tonkatsu* broth, and I've learned  
some breakaway Japanese. Unbroken pleasure's  
larded like *kae-dama*. It's a soft-cooked egg.

ON DRUNKS: I was a bit surprised to find that -- just as I was entering my early 30s, finally felt I had learned what makes a good Manhattan, and was confident enough to occasionally have three whole drinks at a party -- a lot of my peers were giving up alcohol altogether. I'd spent my college years a step behind, barely getting tipsy. "Drunks" came out of that uncomfortable social realization that perhaps those of us who'd been too sober in our youths were now doomed to be viewed as irresponsible luses in adulthood.

ON JUGHEAD, MID-LIFE: I loved reading Archie Comics in my childhood, but I wanted to know what happened to the rather stock characters when they grew up and aged out of the perpetual adolescence imposed upon them by Riverdale High. I don't think that *Afterlife with Archie* (which I hadn't yet read when I wrote "Jughead, Mid-Life") or *Archie Meets the Punisher* go far enough to create a sense of psychological realism. Here, I've envisioned a Jughead, self-exiled abroad, that David Chang could (maybe) love.