

# Poem: "High to Low"

By David Yezzi '95SOA

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It's cringe-worthy yet also pleasing  
when our host at lunch — someone I don't know  
and whom I'm only meeting the first time —  
sends back a bottle of expensive wine,  
for no real reason. It's not just to show  
his seasoned taste, a hard-won cultivation  
taken shape  
over a lifetime studiously teasing  
savors from the grape.

A total creep, in fact, this guy,  
a boor — he clearly doesn't give a rat's  
who gets burned. (The waiter seems amused,  
since after all these years he's gotten used  
to jerks like this, and every bottle that's  
returned he sips in secret at the back station.)

This guy won't stand  
for it: when life offends his nose or eye,  
he takes the upper hand.

His victories are mostly Pyrrhic,  
but so what? Sure, he's obtuse but not blind  
to the ways his huffy, prima-donna poise  
is oddly winning, even as it annoys.  
Decorum is a thankless double bind,  
a game for schmucks, an over-complication.

Who ever bothers,  
when no one cares for him (so goes the lyric),  
caring about others?

And would it make a difference  
if he did? Not terribly. So, after lunch  
he strolls down 43rd Street to Times Square.  
A crane shot pulls back till he's barely there  
amid the horn-blasts and the traffic-crunch,  
a worker ant lost in an anthill nation.

And from a window  
ten stories high, another man makes sense  
of all the to-and-fro.

In his lofty, godlike view,  
the city assumes a manageable scope.  
The air conditioning hums. Pressed to the glass,  
his forehead feels the cool as people pass  
beneath him, each one with a private hope  
of getting his, by market calculation  
or avid reach.

He, too, will do whatever he must do,  
each self for each.

Pull back again and there is me  
and you, watching this guy as his eyes light  
on the man just come from lunch. His mild disdain  
for something — jacket, hat — is what remains,  
after he casually blinks him out of sight.  
And who, by further ghostly iteration,  
takes stock of  
us, is gauging us? And can they see  
us only from above?

*This poem appears in David Yezzi's 2013 poetry collection, Birds of the Air.*



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