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## untitled [I sat at your desk today, poem]

Sandy Reno  
*University of Northern Iowa*

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Mostel put his face in his hands. The rest of the orchestra was standing, most were leaving to smoke or visit friends backstage. It was his wife's social time. She liked to have people view her at the concert hall. And in the dark hallway, by the men's bathroom, his sweet Babette would be waiting in her customary place for him.

Mostel hurried to the hall. Babette was not there. The xylophone player had not seen her. He went to use the restroom and remembered, pulling down his zipper, that the pistol was there. He pulled his zipper hurriedly up and went back to the hall. Several of the symphony patrons shook his hand. He still did not see Babette anywhere.

A thought dropped from his head to his stomach. Babette had had premature labor pains and left for the hospital. Mostel's heart pounded. He tried to remember what Babette was wearing as he swerved through the crowd.

First call was sounded. People were returning to their seats. His child was about to come into the world and he would not be there.

Mostel returned to the stage and looked out at the audience. Babette could, by a miracle, just be in her seat. He peered through the middle curtain. A lady in the audience waved at him. She jabbed her neighbor, who also waved. He saw Petra returning to her seat. It was impossible to miss his wife with her flaming hair.

Babette was behind her. Oh, relief. Oh, a thousand reliefs. It looked to Mostel as if his wife turned and said something to Babette. But they did not know each other. It must have been small talk, if anything.

Mostel went back to his chair. The violins were tuning again. Maddening. The years of violin torture he had suffered with this orchestra. Mostel tried to ignore them. He stuck his hand in the cummerbund to feel the gun and to remind himself what he must do.

The second chair cellist smiled at Mostel. Mostel did not like him. He had tried to talk to him once of his love for the cello, how he felt the instrument was so grand, its notes so full. But the fellow had just nodded. He did not really listen. He did not live with the cello like Mostel did. He merely played it. Yet some people were stupid enough to think that what Mostel did and what this imbecile did were the same.

The orchestra began *Enigma Variations*. Mostel forgot about the violins and the cello player. He even forgot about Babette. He played Elgar better than he ever had. The spotlight circled him for the cello solo. He felt the spotlight shone out from him instead of upon him, the emanation of his music and his joy. This is grand, he thought. This is life.

The audience was on its feet, applauding wildly. Mostel would not look at Babette as he bowed. She had missed their meeting, so let her suffer.

The last selection was Tchaikovsky's *Overture Solennelle 1812*. This piece would be better for the assassination anyway. The Maestro had arranged for a cannon shot to dramatize the ending. Some renditions called for it. At rehearsal it was booming. It was then Mostel would shoot the piano player. It would be perfect.

Mostel followed the music carefully. He knew the piece by heart. Midway through he reached into his cummerbund and pulled the revolver out. He was not nervous. It was a matter of his life, his continued life through his son. He looked at Babette. She would so appreciate his grand gesture he was Published by UNI ScholarWorks, 1987

about to perform. The piece was drawing to an end. The tension in the music mounted.

Mostel did not falter. How many chances does one get for immortality? He lifted the gun and aimed it over the cello at the piano player's back. The orchestra seemed to stop. He shut his eyes and pulled the trigger.

Nothing happened. The orchestra kept playing. Mostel looked at the gun, astonished. He opened its chamber. The bullets were gone. The Maestro kept conducting. He would not look at Mostel. Mostel could not see his wife. He looked at Babette. She looked away.

The second chair cellist sat staring at Mostel. The Maestro motioned for the cellos to join in the last stanzas, and Mostel bent forward, laying the pistol beneath his chair. Mostel embraced his cello and drew the bow across its string. A deep moan emanated from the instrument, mingling with the other sounds of the orchestra and, as the piece ended, echoing in the concert hall, dying in silence. ■

## ODE to GEORGE CLINTON

Jive on, George,  
exhaustion is one pleasure  
I haven't grooved on in months.  
Wail on. Jab another hole  
in my heart.  
Storm me to sleep with the jism  
of your royal rap.  
Render me mindful of my own  
missing bodyguard  
and some sweet birthday  
I'll have later,  
lacking my favorite lover.  
He's got other engines to rev up.  
So do it, George. Put my mind on  
that certain hopeless man  
and his chilled down,  
cooled out hands,  
and rap on.

— Pamela Lee

I sat at your desk today  
in your chair.  
looking through your books.  
In Brautigan you marked  
*Worms* as "Good!"  
I read *Worms*,  
more than once,  
wondering what thoughts  
you thought  
as you sat  
at this desk  
in this chair.

— Sandy Reno