



The Piano Tuner

Peter Meinke

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In *The Piano Tuner*, Peter Meinke writes of the foreignness that awaits us when we go abroad and when we answer our own front door to admit a stranger, that confronts us in unfamiliar cities and villages and in the equally disquieting surroundings of our memories and regrets.

Often in these stories, what seems a safe, comfortable environment turns suddenly threatening. In the title story, a writer's quiet existence amid his antiques and books is dismantled, piece by piece, by a demonic, beer-bellied piano tuner. In "The Ponoos," a man recalls how, as a young boy living in Brooklyn during World War II, he became a collaborationist in the brutal pranks of two Irish bullies. In "The Twisted River," the sedate collegiality of a Polish university is disrupted when an American on a Fulbright grant attempts to blackmail two faculty members. And in "The Bracelet," a young anthropology student doing field work in Africa finds herself drawn further and further into the role of a priestess of Oshun, into a life dictated by the configuration of cowry shells cast upon the floor.

Meinke writes of a world where our control over our lives seldom exists across a border, and often extends no further than our fingertips. Attempts to bridge two cultures, two lives are sometimes successful, as when an actor finds love in the arms of a tough-talking barmaid, but more usually lead to disillusionment, as when a hard-drinking salesman's career is shattered after he is drunk under the table one night by a Polish engineer, or when an English father struggles to find common ground with his American son. Riveting, almost terrifying, the stories in *The Piano Tuner* tell of decent men and women caught in events that they could never have predicted, would never have chosen.

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