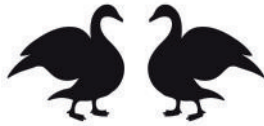


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SHEEPSHEAD 3 9078

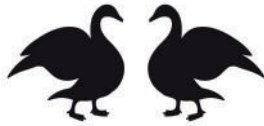


"Hello, who is this? Hello. Hello, answer me, hello.
Pervert, I can hear you breathing. I'll call the cops."
Finally I blurt out "Sheepshead 3 9078."
But old neighborhood-named area codes are long
forgotten,
replaced by cold three digit numbers.
And even the dialing rotary itself is recalled now only
by those with arthritic fingers.
Today is a push button world and I'm pushing her
buttons.
"Pervert, what do you want?" she growls.
"I really don't know," I answer silently.
Sheepshead 3 9078, I first dialed it on my toy red phone.
Mom showed me how.
And for 30 years Sheepshead 3 9078, for 30 years,
till Pa died and Mom could no longer live alone.
"I'm calling the cops" and at last she slammed the
receiver.
Her voice was as harsh as Mom's was, when I used to
drive her crazy so long ago.
Certainly today I'm half crazy, after phoning up
phantoms, hardly speaking,

my ear searching for a lost connection but listening
now only to dead air,
for there are no Gypsy mediums to summon long
departed souls.
But half crazy is also half sane.
I used a pay phone, that vanishing species
and so have no fear of *69 calling me back.

RICHARD FEIN

VIGIL FOR IRENE



Irene you're still in intensive care and too many flock to
your bedside,
kneeling, praying, shedding genuine tears.
But others clean up selling Hallmark get-well cards,
fake flowers and false remedies.
Everyone claims to be family.
And no one wishes the sheet be finally pulled over
your face,
or at least they don't say so out loud—except me.
I'm tired of returning here each time I hear rumors
that miraculously you're awake, sitting up, and brushing
your long, silken hair.
Irene, please recover. But recovery is unlikely,
and since you've been comatose from even before my
birth and everyone else's
dying would end this cycle of disillusionment.
Irene, sweet lady, end this eternal vigil of ours.
Let us bury you, grieve, and move on,
without having to always rush back here full of
false hopes.
Eirene, beautiful goddess of peace, die already.