

**No Place for Old Men**  
**or,**  
**The Evening Redness in a Coffeeshop near Santa Fe**

**By Tom Gething**

*These places used to be a whole lot better than they are now. Used to care about service. But no more. Yessir, they used to be better. Didnt have to wait for your order to be taken. And the seats used to be more comfortable though they were damnation itself in that seventies bloodorange color. As if you'd want to eat your hamburger sittin on a bloodorange upholstered vinyl banquette even if they's better than those saddlehard parlorpink stools alongside the counter. Must be what that feller was thinkin who walks up just now and says, this booth taken? I says, what's it look like? Think I'm just sittin here keepin it warm for you? He stares like he's talkin to a goddamned homicidal lunatic and walks on down the aisle. Like I said, people aint got no manners no more, that's the problem. People'd just as soon take out a gun and shoot you as serve you food.*

Can I git some service here, mam?

*I dont git it neither. What all happened or the why or wherefore. Cant they see I got work to do same as everone else? Writin aint easy even if people think it's so from the readin. You got characters to create and you gotta decide their fates. Ever day you gotta decide is he gonna live or is he gonna die. Like the tossin of a coin. Heads he gits popped afore he even knows it. Tails he gits popped but first he's gonna git to know all about how he's gonna git it until he screams just shoot me already.*

Mam, you gonna take my order or not?

Just a minute, Mac.

Well I'm gittin hungry over here. With all due respect.

*Then there's the issue of dialog. Keepin it reasonable straight but just hard enough to tell who's doin the talkin so as to keep em guessin. That's what they call modernism. Hell that's what I call genius. Sheer MacArthur Foundation genius worth at least a couple hunderd grand. Besides it's a whole lot easier to type since you dont gotta worry about that shift key on the old Olivetti. You just keep goin til the job's done.*

Well finally.

What'll you have today, Mac?

I'll have a cheeseburger. No onion. And I want extra pickles. I like pickles. And you got any of that Tabasco sauce?

Sure, hon, anything else?

Yeah, I'd like a Coke. A bigun.

Wouldn't we all.

What's that sposed to mean?

*But she walks away with a smile on her face like says, you know.*

*Anyway I like to write with a pen. It's a Cross, with a gold clip and a marbled blue enamel body and a rollin ball cartridge, medium point, black ink. It's got my name and National Book Award engraved on the barrel. Dont care what kind of dark psychopath or Mexican comes into my mind, I can kill em off with a single stroke from this puppy. Like this here busboy straightenin up the booths. Little does he know that if he walked into my book he could be dispensed with by a blast from a twelve-gauge Winchester pump action shotgun just for lookin at me like that.*

I take?

No. Déjelo, por favor. Todavía estoy comiendo.

Sí, Señor Mac. Buen provecho.

And tell that waitress to come back. I'm fixin to have some dessert.

*What I hate most about my job is the paper cuts. Comes with the territory I spose but damn. All that blood. You got blood runnin down your finger and drippin on the fresh sheets of the chapter you just wrote and it congeals all over the pen too. You gotta do somethin about it so you go into the bathroom and you git one of them tins of bandaids from the mirrored medicine cabinet and you open the lid and you try to take out one of the bandaids. Then you pour the whole can out into the sink because you're*

*bleedin so bad you cant separate just the one from the others and you might of picked up the wrong size. Because you want the bigun that will wrap around your full finger. Usin your teeth you tear off the paper wrapper, and then one-handed you got to peel back that plastic piece of paper that's split in half one piece at a time. Then you make sure that the wound is clean by runnin it under the tap, and you see the pale pink bloodwater swirlin in the sink down into the drain. Iodine aint really needed if the cut's clean. But you gotta take that bandaid and git the gauze part over the wound and be careful to draw the sticky elastic bands tight so the finger, which by now is pulsin with pain, dont keep bleedin on your stuff.*

*After a day like that all you want is to git a bite to eat and not have to wait for the sudden darkness to settle upon the sere land afore you git served, and maybe also have a ice cream sundae for dessert. It dont always happen that way though and I dont know why. It's as if there aint no god no more and everone's gone insane with the desire to quell the urges of mammon at the shoppin malls. Why even in the bookstores you dont find no good books no more. Them shelves are filled with pulp and froth, as if the cities of the plain were not already littered with glitterin illusions aplenty.*

*So. That's when this cowboy knows he's had enough even if he aint from here. And as the sun sets in the West with the mountains glowin bloodred against a agate sky that asks neither why nor what for, that's when he walks down the road toward home wonderin if it aint just time to pack it up and head somewheres else. Who knows, maybe Hollywood.*