
Reflective Commentary

In this piece I have identified the elements of Raymond Carver's *So Much Water so Close to Home* and transposed it to a piece of my own, with the same title. I have used Carver's style of dispassionate and spared use of language to tell the identical story from a different perspective. The same cold environment is created, with a filtered perspective through the use of understatement, episodic structure and uncomplicated sentences.

I have presented a different perception of the family, which implied the men of being guilty and controlling and their families of being irresponsible and victims of the men. The individual perspective and the insight it provided is an important facet, and I have maintained this feature. Carver limits any emotional expression to Claire's inner thoughts in the original and this viewpoint is provided by the main character in my story, Valerie. She is the next door neighbour of the Baker family, the focus of the original, and this provides the opportunity to include original events but also add to their characteristics with ease as they live so close. Her altered perspective is added to and developed by her sister, Edith, who she lives with, and their friends, Maria and Dottie, through their local neighbourhood gossip.

The difference between their world of tabloid's and scandal and the small simple town they live in is emphasised through a change in the use of language. Descriptive and proper language is used in their conversations in contrast to the simple and detached style of the rest of the story so that their personalities are communicated effectively. The environment and setting as a whole is the same, but has the added contribution of the intrusive gossip between the women.

Due to the stories precious and silent nature, punctuation is an important aspect and I have used this in a dramatic manner. Short paragraphs and long gaps between many of them contribute to the atmosphere and also emulate the episodic nature of the original. The story is a series of disjointed events, that, when strung together, create a different but equally unique tone to the original.

*Quoted/adapted directly from *So Much Water so Close to Home*, Raymond Carver

So Much Water so Close to Home

My sister sits opposite me and drinks her coffee. I'm sure she doesn't like coffee. But, she drinks it anyway. She picks up the cup and takes a sip.

"It's disgusting, isn't it?" she says.

"Doesn't really surprise me", I say with a shrug.

She puts her cup back on the saucer.

"Goddamn it, why can't people mind their own business!"*

We both jump in our seats. Edith knocks her cup and it shatters on the ground.

*

Maria had called me straight after she'd seen the report. Four men: Stuart Baker, Gordon Johnson, Mel Down and Vern Williams, had 'found' a dead girl on their fishing trip. They had tied her naked body to a tree and carried on with their weekend. She wasn't going anywhere. In Stuart Baker's statement to the police, he had said they decided it was too far back to their car to report it at the time. The men carried on with their fishing trip as they did each year; drinking, fishing and telling stories. The morning they left, they had gathered their stuff and hiked out. They had driven until they had reached the nearest telephone and phoned the police. They gave their names, they had nothing to hide. The group agreed to wait until someone came so they could give better directions.

I was in bed early that night. I couldn't get to sleep for hours. Just as I was getting drowsy, a car pulled into their drive next door. I stayed awake for a while longer, thinking.

*Quoted/adapted directly from *So Much Water so Close to Home*, Raymond Carver

“Go to hell!!”*

My eyes broke open and I was woken by shouting. The phone next door rang again, and was followed by more shouting. I couldn't sleep. I got up and read the paper to see if there was any more information and Edith came out of her bedroom.

“What's going on now Valerie?” she asked.

It was then that I told her what I just told you.*

I sweep up the broken cup as Stuart and Claire continue yelling next door. I hear their door slam shut and it echoes throughout their house and ours. I wish we lived in a brick house sometimes; it would stop most of this noise.

Edith puts the last pieces of the broken cup into the bag and I take it outside. As I walk down the steps I see Stuart sitting on his front veranda drinking a can of beer. He doesn't even glance at me; he's occupied with other things. He leers at the high school girls walking past his house. They don't notice him as he stares at their youthful bodies with a smirk on his face. I put the rubbish in the bin and walk back inside, now with a sick feeling in my stomach.

“Edith, what were they thinking? Honestly.” I say.

“Not a lot, clearly” she replies.

“If they did kill her, why would they wait until the weekend was over to report it? Surely they realised this would make them seem more guilty.”

“And if they didn't kill her?”

“Well if they didn't... how did they sleep while a dead girl floated in the creek next to them?”

“With the help of some whiskey”

We both chuckle quietly, if only to laugh it off, but I still feel troubled and I can tell Edith does as well.

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“Come on Edith, we’re meeting the girls for coffee soon” I say.

We gather our coats and step out of the house. They drive off as we walk past and both look deep in thought, in their own world. It doesn’t surprise me that Dean isn’t with them; he’s probably been left home alone again. Ambling to town past the houses, I see curtains close quickly out of the corner of my eye as we pass. We reach town and meet Dotti and Maria inside our regular coffee shop.

“She is quite weird. Have you seen what she wears? And! You know they leave their son at home by himself regularly. He’s only eight!” I say.

Maria chimes in, “Yes, it’s lucky they live in such a friendly neighbourhood”.

We nod in agreement.

“Those men have always behaved suspiciously. I remember Vern and his wife when they first moved to town. She seemed like a nice lady, but he wouldn’t let her out except to buy the groceries”, Dotti says.

“Yes! And Gordon and his wife Hilary, they’re never at home. Too busy in their suits off in the corporate world; I don’t think I’ve seen either of them smile before” Edith says.

“Well I saw something yesterday afternoon that made me feel sick. Edith and I had been startled by another of Stuart’s ranting episodes and I went outside to put the rubbish in the bin. And do you know what I saw...?”

The girls lean in a little closer.

“Stuart drinking a beer on his veranda and staring at school girls as they walked past!” I exclaim.

“Oh that’s just paedophilic!” Maria utters.

“Stuart is a very selfish man as well. He hardly cares for her at all, except for a pressure release after dark” Dotti cheekily observes.

We chuckle briefly at Dotti’s comment.

There are only a few people in the coffee shop as most have been scared into their houses by the news crews. I would like to run into one of them myself; I think I could give a very comprehensive report.

I sit at the kitchen table reading today's newspaper and the front page announces "Fishing Four Further Implicated". It doesn't shock me, for Stuart isn't very convincing in any manner. My thought is interrupted by the phone ringing.

"Dotti, how are you?" I say

"Good, good. I have some very interesting information. Guess where I was yesterday, that poor girl's funeral" she says.

"Ah, why did you go to that?"

"Well to see who else was there of course. And, would you have it, Claire was."

We spoke for a while longer. Dotti told me about the service, but mostly about Claire. She had been very dressed up, perhaps to show some remorse and make them seem lest suspect.

The wind blows in the leaves as the sun shines onto the grass and the birds swim in the lake. The dark, cold lake. I stare at it. Transfixed.

I look at the creek. I'm right in it, eyes open, face down, staring at the moss on the bottom, dead. *

So much water so close to home.*

"What's happened to this town Edith?"

"I don't know. It's changed. Something has moved over it. It's like a large wave, a dark cloud."

We sit in silence. Our local sight seeing spot now tainted.

Back home we sit in the lounge room. There's more shouting from next door so I turn the volume up on the television.

"That child will have nothing left soon. He'll be by himself a lot longer than an afternoon" I say.

"Might be better than what he has now" she says.

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The shouting has stopped. I can hear Dean playing in their backyard and the silence is interrupted by intermittent voices from here and outside.

Edith says something else. But I don't need to listen. I can't hear a thing with so much water going.