

Hygga

by John Olson

Hygga was on the French news tonight. *Hygga* is big in France. And Scandinavia, of course. I'd never heard of it. *Hygga* comes from a Danish word meaning "to give courage, comfort, joy." It stems from *hyggia*, which means to think in Old Norse, and is related to *hugr*, which later became hug — Danish hug, not our hug, meaning to embrace, though why not, no reason to rule it out — and means the soul, mind, consciousness. Now there's a *hygga* movement, a set of behaviors marshaled to mitigate the stresses of the pandemic. The news item showed a woman lighting scented candles, putting some mellow music on, dimming the ambient light and lying back on a couch to read a book. All the people in the piece seemed pretty well to do. Financially comfortable. That would make me pretty *hygga* right there. Enough money to provide access to healthcare. Or if I could just reach out and grab time and pull it back and keep it from moving so damn fast. I feel like I'm sitting in the cockpit of a formula one car on a highway toward a fatal destination. No U turns. No exits. I'm not even driving the car. I don't know who or what is driving the car. I'm just a passenger. I don't even have a map. Or a spare tire. It would be nice to stop occasionally. Long enough to get out and stretch my legs. Take in the surrounding air and landscape. Grab a bite to eat at a nearby diner. My boots crunch on the gravel. I can hear a distant voice. The sound of an angel. And words are said that serve as bread. I like bread. I like words. I know why I like bread. But I don't know why I like words. Words are served as bread when I feel like loafing. Each sentence is a slice of Monk. He sits down at an old piano with cracked ivory keys and plays "Bemsha Swing." Heavy metal angels add some gutsy hymns and backflips. I have a quiet old road disappearing into Arkansas. I keep it under the rug in case I might need it someday. Here's my whole setup: an imaginary suite in a handful of words. Would you like a glass of quarks to go with your Rembrandt? I feel the pungent wealth of the external. There's the aroma of sage near Reno. The value of the

internal goes deep into language. If you open your mouth the universe will walk out. This isn't entirely *hygga*. I don't know what it would be in Danish. I don't know how the Danish feel when they see a universe walking down the street. Does it give them *hygga*, or Hamlet? Don't get me wrong. I think the universe is pretty. But it's hard to hug. Hard to hang in the shower like a bar of soap, & rub it all over.

