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Don't Do It

Mary Ann Allison

"And the next week, you understand, it is twice the money."

"You understand?"

A hard voice. Not shouting. Odd that
I can hear the words.

"Don't do it," I think

"Don't do it."

"What ever it is (Medicine.
(Gambling.
(Braces for a child (not so likely, on
reflection)
(Rent and liquor.
(Rent or liquor.)

"Whatever it is, don't
do it."

"Don't take his money.

"Don't owe him.

"Don't give him a hold (a bigger
hold?) on you.

I'm past them now. Two men on Manhattan Avenue unremarkable
to the eye but
to the ear compelling.

"You come to me.

"You don't talk to anybody else.

"Anybody asks you any questions, you come to me."

"Don't do it," I think.

And wonder if I should turn back.

Despite the clarity, these words capture
only part of my attention.

Looking for a (remote) Buddha answer,
caught up in my own money worries,
engaged in the errand that brought me out
(caffeine for illumination),

distantly afraid of confronting a ...

what? a loan shark, territory boss, drug lord,
Hispanic Mafia Don (OK, I should know the right word, but don't);

a powerful voice,
clear enough what he is (even if I don't know the right word);

and,

even more strange,

distantly afraid of confronting a ...

what? a loan applicant, loan supplicant, fellow citizen (or not),
fellow traveler (with and without all the trappings of meaning, please),

no voice at all that I heard,

someone likely to wish me consigned to a
wide variety of hells for interfering.

And what would I offer after?

"Don't do it," I think now;
"Don't do it" me or him, or both of us.

I go on.

I turn and cannot see them.

They are gone or

invisible.

On Manhattan Avenue,
Brooklyn,
early spring,
open jacket weather.

I write ending after ending. Nothing pleases, satisfies, closes...
forgives.

“And the next week, you understand, it is twice the money.”

It always is

twice the money, even in,
especially in,
Brooklyn,
in
open jacket weather.

Twice the money, the foolishness,
twice the risk,
twice the heartbreak, and, grace all the gods,
known and unknown,
twice the living,
twice the learning.

Forgiveness only in our living,
our learning;

only in walking down Manhattan Avenue,
only in walking down Manhattan Avenue, forgiving everything;

our jackets,
our hearts,

open to the weather and
to ourselves;

forgiveness,

twice the street price (of pretty much anything)

and

worth pretty much everything.

About the author

Mary Ann Allison, PhD, is an interdisciplinary scholar at Hofstra University who uses media theory, sociology, and complex systems theory to study the ways in which individuals, communities, and institutions are changing.