

Tending the Locals at the Moscow Hotel

... for Genevieve and Erin

Old man Bode's heart pulsed here—abiding,
hard work, hard liquor, the H in his middle name, Hello.

Yesteryear college students stepped off the Greyhound right
outside and found Mom, the woman whose face became more

than mother-of-strangers-no-more, the woman of all trades,
whose daughter she birthed in Apartment 2-3-1. Old Bode's

granddaughter grew up in the hotel, hanging out while parents
served parade people Vandal Homecoming parties—

greeted Friday's faction, stopping in for a frothy, cold beer
before calling it a day and home to supper. And that daughter

cradled life inside those walls, PUSHing through oak framed,
glass doors, sliding her hands on beaming brass banisters,

counting stair steps, seeking hidden staircases, crawling
under foyer benches and basement pool tables, making fishy

faces, friends forming their own school, reflections polished
in etched windows, barring them from access to the locked bar,

riding the elevator, pining to be up on the roof like perched
pigeons, hours of hide-and-seek, tagging themselves “the happy

hour kids” who grew a new generation of high school buds, cool
youth who opened doors of the downtown deli and found

Marlboro Reds—and bottoms up—and party tricks, like tying
cherry stems after the thrill of that first bar-poured Shirley

Temple so rich in grenadine that the kids felt like hot shots,
like grown-ups. Making an entrance gave them license—

inspecting the angle of daylight as it passed the jumbo jade's
red-tinged leaves—the way dawn tracked the gallop of Scott

Fife's Appaloosas—portrayed the revelry of Bacchus gorging
grapes; the way the booth seat faced the brightness over Friendship

Square, where piling-in-friends exhaled smoke over their shoulders,
sang “Bad, Bad, LeRoy Brown” on their last two bits with a Long

Island Iced Tea in hand. Why this clientele would never “...leave
a dog on step”—these bosom friends wore their rainbow pride, drank

deli espresso and relished oven-hot cinnamon rolls cart-pushed out
the door for Saturday’s early market vendors; these regulars revered

the hotel’s workmanship, its terra cotta tiles, arched windows,
stairways to a hotel heaven celebrating that rite of 19, then 21,

and all the wedded lives like Steve and Heather forever—Bill and
Abby, too—settling down, saying goodbye to Lounge-loving patrons

to bartenders like Nick, servers like Dawn—the crew after 2,
passing their time—looking for somebody they wished they knew.

—Susan Hodgkin
Moscow Poet Laureate

“Tending the Locals at the Moscow Hotel” was written for the American Civil Liberties
Union (ACLU) mural launch on Tuesday, September 18, 2018,
for the Moscow Hotel and Garden Lounge,
now owned by Carly Lilly and George Skandolos.