

Judy Klass' latest tale displays her usual subtle grasp on poignant emotion.

Rosemary and Time

by Judy Klass

Rosemary sits in the smoky downstairs performance space of the old Village Gate on Bleecker Street in Greenwich Village. It's 1964 and, coincidentally enough, the duo up on the stage are singing a song about Bleecker Street: about the poets and artists who try to eke out an existence there. Paul strums his guitar and sings sweetly, and Art adds harmonies that are high and clear and even sweeter. The two young folkies wear simple black suits and skinny ties and their hair is all there and close-cropped; Paul's is black and shiny and straight, cut in a monastic style that accents his exotically dark (to Rosemary) Jewish features, and Art's hair is blond and curly, and together they sound sweeter than the Everly Brothers, even. Sweeter than the angels.

Simultaneously, however, Rosemary is sitting with her daughter Marjorie in Dr. Krauss' waiting room in 2007. The doctor is a pioneer in the area of stroke prevention. Since Rosemary had a mild (extremely mild) stroke last year, Marjorie is Very Concerned about her, and she is always lugging Rosemary around to one specialist or another. Rosemary even lives with Marjorie now, and with Marjorie's husband Mitch the dentist, and little Gwyneth and baby Seth—though how their squabbling and whining is supposed to soothe her Rosemary does not really understand. She cannot drive and she feels she is a prisoner in their home in New Jersey. But Marjorie had advised her for years to move in and save her money for possible upcoming medical costs (so thoughtful, that Marjorie) and after the stroke, and after her silly fall, Rosemary foolishly agreed to give up her glorious rent-controlled apartment on West 17th Street and comply.

Mitch the dentist is pals with Dr. Krauss, which is why this consultation is a freebie.

Marjorie is putting some strange new product in her

own mouth—a filmy strip of lime green, spearmint-scented, mouthwashy something—and she offers one to Rosemary. “Remember, Ma, you put garlic on your pizza,” she says reproachfully. Marjorie is reproachful because Marjorie did not even want to stop for pizza at all. She would have dragged Rosemary into a salad bar if she'd had her druthers. Rosemary declines the strange new product.

The wait continues, and fortunately, Rosemary is now listening to the second song in the set of the hot new folk duo at the Village Gate. It's a mournful tale of a little sparrow, and how no one will love her and take care of her. Rosemary's date beams at her. He's a pretentious, moldering beatnik-type named Stanley. He has a pointy little black beard, and glasses with thick black frames, and when she met him in Washington Square Park, he was actually wearing a black beret, although he is not sporting one now. He told her that line about how the statue of Garibaldi, there in the park, will draw its sword and wave it in the air if a virgin ever walks by—but only NYU girls like Rosemary walk through the park, so the statue never does it. Rosemary has heard that story before, but Stanley seems to find it very amusing.

He is at least ten years older than she is, and he claims to pal around with Bobby Dylan and Phil Ochs at Folk City, and to drink wine and argue philosophy with Hubert Selby, Jr. He sees himself as intense and political and avant-garde. He talks about insights you can only have at three a.m. while smoking weed or when you ball with another person who has the soul of an artist, and about friends of his who have sold out, and how any act you might commit that would annoy the fuzz takes you a step closer to truth. But when it comes to women, he does seem to favor safe, seemingly vanilla types like Rosemary: a freshman coed who left