

From THE PERRY MASON SESTINAS ·
James Cummins

Perry and the fly walked into the dingy conference room.
Seated around the circular table, in front of large cups
Of coffee and small tin ashtrays, fourteen haggard faces
Glanced up as one at the hulking, beetle-browed presence
In a blue hospital gown, Hush Puppies and MR. PEANUT tie.
A short, portly man with long hair and a beard — a poet

From the college who had received a grant to teach poet-
Ry to the mentally disturbed — indicated there was room
Near him. Perry sat down, fingering his MR. PEANUT tie
Nervously. The fly drifted lazily over the coffee cups.
“Presence,” the man was saying. “You establish presence
In a poem by the authenticity of experience.” The faces

Nodded slowly. Some dozed off. Perry watched the faces
Carefully, sensing one of them would hate him. The poet
Continued. “Often, a young poet shows great prescience,
Even about his own future . . . But look around this room:
How many of you thought you’d end up here?” Three cups
Spilled, twenty hands lit cigarettes. “A MR. PEANUT tie

Can’t save you from experience. Right, MR. PEANUT Tie?”
Perry felt his stomach drop. Grimly, the lunatic faces
Swung toward him. The fly swooped down. “All dem cups
Runnin’ ovah, man. Let’s split.” But the college poet
Was being honest. “For instance, say a poem is a room.
Say you’re throwing a party. Just look at your present

State — would you invite yourself to a party? *Presence*
Is not just *personality*. Do you agree, MR. PEANUT Tie?”
Perry trembled, his mouth dry. He saw, across the room,
In drug-like clarity, an old woman shake some dry faeces
From a styrofoam cup. One man had written the word *poet*
On his notebook in pinpricks of blood. A girl’s hiccups

Echoed in the silence. Perry sweated. *Hiccup. Hiccup:*
More loudly, more loudly, until it was another presence,
Stalking through the room. His face contorted, the poet
Demanded a response. "MR. PEANUT Tie? MR. PEANUT Tie?"
Perry threw his head back. He frowned on all the faces.
"Yes," he croaked. "Yes!" Then stumbled from the room.

. . .

Perry was ecstatic. In the sad room, in their presence,
In the smoke over styrofoam cups, in his MR. PEANUT tie,
He faced the faces, spoke. In his own voice. The poet.