

the **WARREN**
UNDERGRADUATE REVIEW



VOLUME 9 **SPRING 2018**

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GINA HAY

Hazel

One

“STOP TOUCHING THAT,” Ava murmured. Hazel touched it again. She put her hand up on the window, pulled it down, created a thick smudged print on the otherwise clean glass.

“Could you please—” Again. Another smudge. Quicker this time, thin and angry next to the thick, patient handprints running down the surface, racked up like soldiers in a line. Fogging up the image of outside, trees, domes of dark green, lazily stirring in the wind.

At eighty-three, Hazel’s face was wrinkled, but she tightened her already thin mouth into a horizon. The red lipstick on the inside of her lips was bleeding onto her teeth, and her skinny eyebrows were furrowed into a harsh V. Her eyelids were half-shut in contempt. She wanted to make herself ugly, mean. She wanted to look like a red-faced child in the midst of a tantrum. A nuclear meltdown.

“You make it hard. For us to call you, I mean,” explained Ava, plain-faced and charming, exasperated. She was so well put-together. Clean bits and pieces all tied up in ironed clothing, business-casual. Dennis, her quiet boyfriend, sitting at her side, holding her hand. It was Friday. Ava had washed her hair, stood in front of the mirror with an o-mouth, heating red strands into curls. Hazel had woken up in the afternoon, headed to the bank to exchange a ten-dollar bill for a bag of nickels. Two hundred, in rolls, stowed in a laundry bag by a bank clerk with pursed purple lips, small eyes half-closed in suspicion. She’d walked home, listened to the wind washing away the leaves only to pull them back in, whistling. Hazel’s hair now hung, thin and oil-infested, limp waves along the sides of

her small face, reaching her shoulders. She made her lips thinner, pushed them together until, below the lipstick, they turned white.

“Jane wants to take you in. Make sure you’re safe.” Ava explained. Dennis nodded. They were in a restaurant on Hazel’s block. Neither Ava nor Jane trusted their mother to meet them in places with hordes of people, because they’d all be able to see the woman acting out. Small places wouldn’t do either, it would all be less discreet, harder to cover up and hide away. The place had to be close. Hazel had to use a cane to carry around her eighty-three-year-old body, which her daughters suspected would collapse once a walk reached the twenty-minute mark. After twenty minutes, her mind would indubitably also fold over upon itself; she kept herself busy with devoted pursuits; long sessions of low-voiced preaching at the dinner table relating to pus and insects, leather shoes caked with wet mud slugging through restaurant carpets.

“You can do whatever you fucking want. Until the day you drag me through the streets by my ankles, into Jane’s suburban shit-den, I’m staying in my house,” announced Hazel. She sat there quietly, waiting for Ava to say something. Waiting for Dennis to agree. When neither of them did, she reached below her chair, pulled out the laundry bag, started breaking up rolls of nickels. Ava sat, peering through unaffected eyes, as though she were watching a child wear itself out; the child unaware that this would result in a sound sleep from afternoon to morning. Outside, the wind fell quiet, and nature turned blank.

Two

Once they got to Hazel’s home, thin layers of wrappers and plastic bags strewn over every floor, she went to the bathroom. She didn’t announce anything, she just went. Ava had become a weatherwoman of sorts, able to predict every act Hazel had planned for herself.

“Give her a minute, then go get her,” she told Dennis. He was sat down on the couch, watching her collect trash off the floor. She’d brought a trash bag in her purse.

Dennis walked up the stairs, and was met by a yellow light flooding through the bathroom door-frame. Outside, a willow swayed, all disturbed and impermanent. He walked up to meet the light, and tensed up once he saw Hazel. She was undressed, down to her bra and underwear, making faces at the mirror's reflection. She studied herself, turned her mouth and eyes gradually more angry, until all that was left was a pool of contempt. Non-verbally growling, biting into itself; eyes as thin slits that malice slipped through. Lips open a quarter inch, a snarl, more growls, somehow made yet inaudible. Dennis was in no sense surprised. This would happen, she would strip down, she would get angry, Ava would fix it as Dennis perched on the sidelines. Back when he was in his thirties, Ava in her twenties, he'd been shiny and interesting. Now, he sometimes had to touch his skin to confirm that things had turned out like this; fatty, dry, red and raw. He was bland. And he couldn't fix things like Ava could. In the bathroom, Hazel's face went slack. The white lace, hung from a pale silhouette, suddenly paired with an earnest dread. She looked out the window, where everything seemed to have come to a standstill. A silence crept through, into herself. It often did, when the skies turned to blank paper slates, and house plants retreated into their ceramic containers; when the neighbors mowed the lawn, and she stood at the window, peering through the blinds, paralyzed. When the wind picked up, she breathed in again, eyes shut. Then opened them back up and dressed herself. Dennis had lost track. His gaze was now fixed on the outside, rooted in the permanence of change. At some point, everything would fall silent again, only to pick back up, and keep growing.

Television

FADE IN:

1 EXT. CAR IN TUNNEL - NIGHT 1

MARA, 18, is seated in a BLACK car driving down a TUNNEL that seems to not have an end. WHITE LIGHTS flash over the car as it quickly drives through. MARA is skinny and tanned. She has thick brown curls and a mischievous facial expression. She OPENS the window, reaches out her arms to grab the ROOF of the car with both hands. She taps her nails on the roof's surface, but the only sound is that of the car in the tunnel. She LIFTS herself out, sitting on the car's window frame. She LAUGHS, but it doesn't make a SOUND. There's a zoom-in of her upper body. Her eyes CLOSE, she leans back, holding on to the roof with her hands, showing a smile as the tunnel lights FLASH over her face.

BLACK SCREEN

2 INT. MARA'S FAMILY HOME - DUSK 2

ELITH, 39, and daughter MARA are seated in the home's dining room, having a meal made up of absurdly vast amounts of MEAT; sausage and sirloin. The room is small, containing only a wooden TABLE for two, mismatched fold-out chairs, and a tiny TELEVISION on the end of the table that airs its programming. The only sound the television makes is a high-pitched WHIRRING. The room is brightly colored but dimly lit.

ELITH (V.O)
Your aunt relocated.

On the tiny television settled on the end of the table, cheap and grainy, flashes a bright LANDSCAPE. It shows a society. People commuting in cars, kids playing in the streets, tending to their gardens in aprons, pearls and rubber gloves. Cut to Elith's PLATE; she's cutting into pieces of meat and blood seeps out in slight pools.

MARA (V.O)

She relocated?

On the television, a SHADOW shapes over the town. People look up and turn fearful. Suddenly, in a haze of BLACK SMOKE and flame, a BOMB circles down. There's an overhead shot of people rushing through the streets, countless and tiny, like ants in an anthill facing an hourglass held parallel to the sun. The bomb HITS, resulting in a smouldering CRATER. Cut to Mara's plate; all the pieces are cut up, but she keeps cutting them into smaller chunks. The shot pans to ELITH.

ELITH is heavily built and pale; she has thick, curly black hair and no facial expression.

ELITH

She's upstate now, with the rest
of them. Your grandfather must
be so excited to have her there.

On the screen, the sides of the crater start to overflow with people CLIMBING up and out. Smiles on their faces, below beads of sweat. Clothes coated in the BLACKNESS of the smoke. Great crowds start to collect around the crater. In a wave, the people BOW and CHEER. ELITH and MARA put down their utensils to applaud the footage until the screen goes black and cuts to an image of an elderly folks' home. Expressionless, they continue their meal.

MARA

Upstate. Relocate.

ELITH

What?

MARA

How come they never call us, or write? It would be nice to know more about what it's like.

ELITH

They're probably in a pool, not paying taxes. It's so hot there, in the North. It's so cold down here.

She smiles wryly, but pulls her mouth back into a straight line quickly. Presses down her knife into her meat and starts cutting. Her knuckles turn white under the pressure.

ELITH

I'm glad. They must be happy.

She laughs a slight bit too loudly. It sounds suspicious. She notices and quiets down. Shoots MARA curt glances. MARA stops cutting, looks down at her plate and gnashes her teeth before talking.

MARA

Rose's goldfish died last week. It hadn't eaten in a few days, it just stopped. She tried to fill up the bowl with fish feed. It just swam into the glass. It died, and floated upside down overnight. Then Rose fished it out and flushed it and it was dead, and also gone. What happens if people don't eat and run into walls, hurt themselves?

MARA has stopped looking at her food now. She GLARES at her mother's plate. ELITH finishes cutting through a piece of sausage, chews it and puts down her cutlery. A TEAR wells up in the corner of her eye and she goes to dab it dry with her fingertip. She looks down, then tilts up her head, starts to speak forcefully, almost ANGRILY.

ELITH

Animals are different, meat is meat.

She looks up and SMILES, laughs again as she pushes back her chair and starts to gather their PLATES.

ELITH

I'm feeling tired. Heaps and heaps. I can feel it in my skin. It's old, sometimes it's just itching for the upstate, your grandfather, your aunt. It isn't my time yet, so for now I'll take this. Cleaning dishes. Washing my own sheets tonight, or sleeping in dirty ones. There really is no winning, is there?

She smiles wryly.

SNAP TO BLACK

FADE IN TO:

3 EXT. CAR IN TUNNEL - NIGHT 3

MARA's smile has turned into a hearty LAUGH that can be heard over the sound of the car driving down the tunnel. An arm PULLS her back into the car. The arm is CARLA's. CARLA is 24. She looks tired, but smiles. Her hair is cut short, almost down to the scalp, her round face

makes her look kind and motherly. She LAUGHS and her voice is low and happy.

CARLA

Take it easy. Don't hurt yourself.

MARA settles back into the car, puts her feet up against the dashboard. Laughs again, announces ironically,

MARA

What if I want to go upstate?

CARLA

Don't be stupid. Stay in the car. You'll fall.

MARA pulls her knees to her chest then puts them over CARLA's lap as she drives. CARLA puts one hand on MARA's ankles, uses the other to keep driving, staring straight AHEAD. MARA stares at her from the passenger's seat.

MARA

It's not real, you know. Upstate isn't real.

CARLA doesn't react, keeps driving.

MARA

It's an excuse. My mom doesn't know I remember what it was like across the border, but I know; I remember sitting in front of the television when I was young, watching the news. People die. People can be dead. Like animals, like meat is dead.

CARLA stays QUIET, staring ahead. She runs her fingers over MARA's ankles but doesn't verbally react. The tunnel lights are still FLASHING, making their faces bright white then pitch black.

MARA

I want to, at some point, be nothing and see how it is.

Nobody needs the television, the videos. I don't want another life on top of this one. Do you?

CARLA looks to her side. Her GRIP on MARA's ankle firms slightly. She fixes her gaze on the road.

CARLA

Just don't climb out of the car.

She pushes a button at her side. The passenger-seat window rolls up and the whirring of wind in the tunnel turns quiet. MARA looks at CARLA solemnly. Says defensively,

MARA

We're driving, I'm fine.

She leans over, grabs CARLA's hand with both of hers. CARLA smiles, steers with the other. MARA's voice lowers and softens into a whisper.

MARA

I just couldn't be around that television set anymore.

MARA's face is lit up by the LIGHTING of the tunnel. The lapses in which the WHITE LIGHT brightens up the frame become longer and longer; soon, the entire screen is turned to a bright white. The high-pitched WHIRRING of the television fades in, growing LOUDER.

MARA (V.O.)

I'm feeling tired. I can just... feel it in my skin. Sometimes it's just itching for the end of a tunnel.

SNAP TO BLACK

AN-TE CHU

Bread to Dough

Let me pour bread tags into your cupped hands
Plastic sharp edges, please be careful

Now wait for the blocky typeface of expiry dates to soften
(so you can stretch and tug this hot rainbow mess)

Make long snakes like newborn candy canes,
or teenage baguettes encouraged to try out for junior varsity basketball,
or astronauts forgotten in space,
growing taller and taller

I imagine the fortified grains, magnesium and all her friends, whispering and wondering why a
small punctured square was put in charge of the whole loaf

Out of Breath

I TUGGED AT THE WRISTS OF MY GLOVES, bringing warmth closer to my fingertips. Most of the snow had melted, coming and going as quickly as someone trying to stay sober, at a party with infuriatingly attractive people. I tapped my fingers against the glass, drumming out my stress on the face of a local realtor. Her arched right eyebrow served as my hi-hat. I thought about the Fred Armisen stand up special I watched last night.

At some point, I couldn't remember any more of the special. My brain was stuck on the same joke, a jam in the cassette workings of my brain. I could feel my frustration spilling out in loops. I slipped off my gloves and texted my friend Nathan.

Do cassettes die elegant deaths? Flowery loops etc...

It only took a few seconds, Nathan is always good for this kind of thing, catching the flickers of my thoughts, no matter the time of day.

No, they die of strangulation. Sorry can't talk, girlfriend is coming over

Hmmm. Goddamnit Nathan.

Thx. Have fun!

I have this theory where I'm sure I'd be much happier if my friends all broke up with their current partners. Once they start having sex with any semblance of regularity, they can never quite focus on what I'm saying, some part of them always wandering away to daydream. I don't think I'll ever understand why well adjusted people go around sticking their heads into the jaws of relationships.

This theory had never been truer than two weeks ago when I had everyone over for a dinner party. Something in the wording of my group text made everyone bring their significant other. Last I checked my name was No-rah not No-ah. It was as if the totalitarian government decided that wine pairings were mandatory, don't we go great together?

Cole, a slack-jawed paperweight of a man, was the worst. Brought along by Genevieve, like salad to a potluck, I wasn't sure what he did, but throughout the night he made sure we all knew exactly how funny each particular moment was. That's pretty funny, oh my that's gold, well that made me chuckle, I haven't laughed this hard in years. Jenny must have filled my glass seven, eight times, unaware of, or perhaps sympathetic to my swallowed rage.

Despite having shared that article about California drought on Thursday, I served baklava for dessert. I gave Cole an uncomfortably large slice, the pistachio crumble barely held together through strands of honey. When I tipped over my water—accidentally, I swear—he declared that the move made it all the more moist. I nearly strangled him—I didn't, though only because I wasn't sure there was a trachea under all that neck.

Shortly after I said Goodbye to Genevieve and her magic eight ball, I hooked up the straps of my bike helmet. Drunk on duck fat and the thought of murder, I cut through the the back streets, leaving behind trees and driveways. The air felt strange, how my breath slipped into the night. It was unnerving, but there was nothing I could do. I turned and biked back up towards my apartment.

A passing car sprayed slush at me, I was back at the bus stop. I heard swearing; I took out my earphones. I took a step towards the soaking wet woman, she smiled back but waved me off.

By the time I locked up my bike, showered, and ended up with my back flat on the rug, legs draped onto my chair in the den, there were a few texts on my phone. Jason, thinking he was funny, asked whether I'd "got home safe." I sent him a gif from one of those Saw movies. The group chat pinged at its usual clip. It appeared that everyone else had liked Cole.

When I'd first met Genevieve, we'd all but went to the same high school; we knew so much about each other, through Jason of course. Two insomniacs, probably the only two people in this city of Gladwrap who made veggie stock from scratch, who shared awful taste in men. I had learned better, but she was like a golden retriever, bringing back man after chewed-up slobbered-on tennis ball of a man, expecting somehow that I reward her dedication to not dying alone with more pilsner in the fridge.

The bus still wasn't here. My grocery bags drooped on the bench, celery stalks poked out, threatening to spill the secrets of my poor diet. I had already sentenced them to a slow Siberian death, maybe a few would make the trip to work with me, but only if I remembered to wash the Tupperware. My phone buzzed, it was Jenny.

when he said this was a six out of five night, I really thought you were going to stab him

Was I that obvious? haha I wanted to choke him, it was personal!

with that neck? then you'd REALLY be a tree hugger huh?

I laughed just as another car swept by, this time I wasn't paying attention, and I didn't care.

I stood there, smiling dumbly. Waiting to tell someone how happy I was.

Exit

SHE DOESN'T LAYER. She wears her clothes like storm clouds, her music pounding out of earbuds obscured by loud black hoops.

The rest of the people around us suddenly shapeshift into crude lines as if they each had very different concepts of what shapes were and what an oncoming bus looked like. The bus still sits off to the side, like a patient insect. It's not even the one we're waiting for. They'd all moved because the door to the bathroom had opened, emerging was a homeless man without a driver's license.

I stand behind her, not really sure why and when the actual driver would get here and how long his piss break at the depot might be. I wonder whether they have two ply. The evening floodlights have come on, our faint shadows merged, her arm reaching through my head.

My dress shoes feel heavy and out of place. Everyone else has showered or at least gone home before getting here. But the weight of my mind and feet make me all the more eager to leave. Whenever I'm tired of work or just fucking Newark, I like to just take a bus or train out somewhere. Anywhere really, as long as I have enough to cover return fare. I reach inside my jacket to make sure the ticket is still there.

My last boyfriend took my trips away as evidence of cheating or at least half-heartedness. My SSRIs make it hard to get hard. Brandishing a damaged-through-machine-tumbling ticket stub for Philadelphia he confronted me with an anecdote about the philandering nature of the City of Brotherly Love. A truly scathing indictment.

I had laughed and pushed him back into our piles of folded matching towels then fucked him until the laundry got cold. But still the distrust remained and grew until anti-wrinkle creams took up all of the bathroom counter and I couldn't fuck away his eyebags. He began to look like me.

It was true I chose Philadelphia because of a man. A balding man scarfing Jimmy John's and rocking a Roy Halladay throwback cemented my dart throw on the departure board.

I kept the irony to myself as the door slammed shut and I could hear the car pulling away. Maybe months ago we would have laughed about that.

And tonight this black-hooped woman pointed me to Camden. I flicked the Airbnb confirmation email up and down on my phone. Sleeping in a stranger's house made my night time escapes all the more voyeuristic.

I took a seat near the back, orange lettering about the fire escape handle obscuring my view. I pressed my feet into the back of the seat in front and my face between the letters. The sun had set by now and the terminal was flattered by the darkness. A light breeze rattled two PBRs and a few dead pamphlets out of the spotlight illuminating a bus stop for Jersey. Understudies caught on stage.

As the bus began to rumble and groan, a couple fought their way on board and down the narrow aisle towards me. I kept my feet pressed in but they sat down anyways. Relaxing their 200 pound frames into the peeling polyvinyl, creating a counterbalance to the universe. I could barely see the other half dozen passengers behind the hair and necks of these two. I felt sucked into a small tent at a carnival. Forced to listen to doddering banter from people too old to have any lingering, if ever present, sparks of magic.

"She has family there"

"At least she won't be living with the ex husband"

Fuck, they were worse than I thought. Not just boring people, but boring shitbags who speak in agreement. Like an improv troupe whose audience consists only of their moms' new boyfriends, who want to, one day, be called Dad. Only 'yes and' without the 'get the fuck out of my house.'

LUCIE VON SCHILLING

The grape lives

in sweatpants and a tight
crop top. It feels tasty
peeled, but thinks this appeal
doesn't translate when

clothed. Eaters, why doesn't
the grape love
the way the crop top
accentuates its roundness?

You do. Have you ever
put the grape in
your mouth, filled
your cheeks with air,

and shook, bounced
it around? The grape
calls this game
getting fucked up.

It loves *getting fucked up.*
Yesterday, the grape

did a whole load of
purple crop tops.

Have you ever seen
something like that?
An entire load of purple.
The grape flaunts
its figure despite its fatness.
It knows it is seedless,
dependable, even addictive,
and that everyone rubs its

skin before they pop it. Eaters,
how many grapes will crunch
between teeth before you feel
whole again? It repeats,

*I am a body, but
I am not just a body*

PAIGE PARKER



PAIGE PARKER

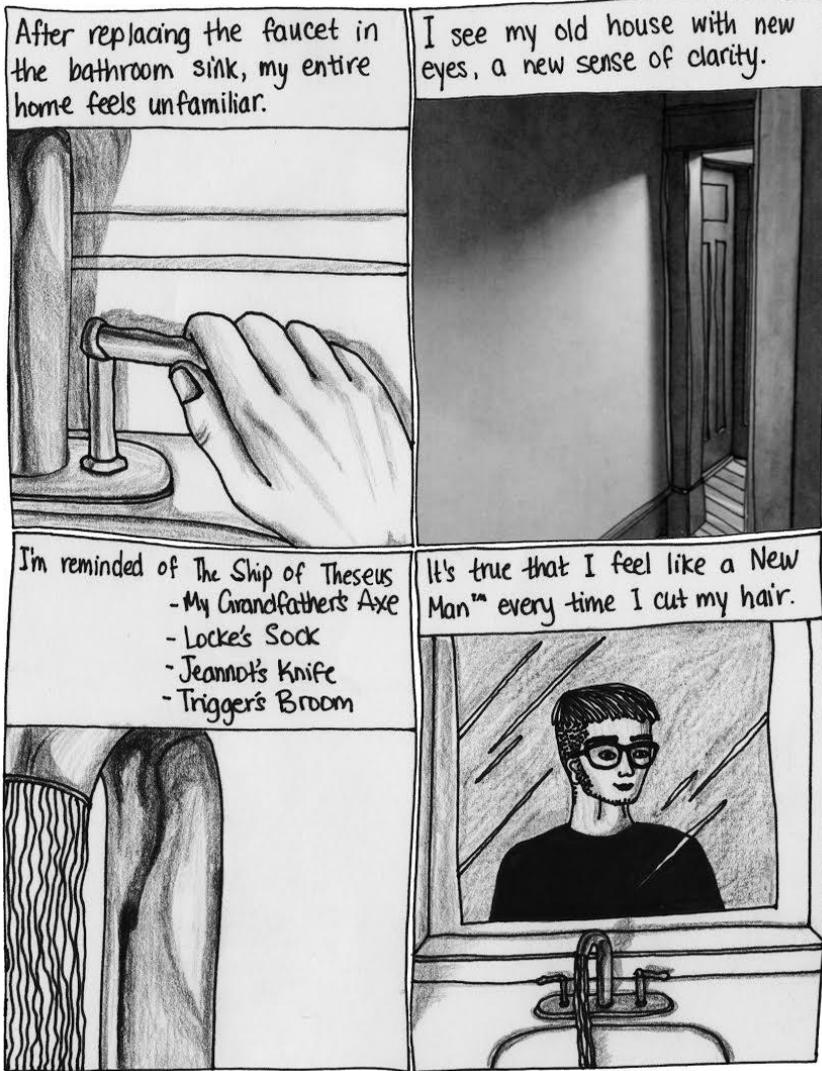
Fox

ALLYX WILLIAMS



ALLYX WILLIAMS

Now Hiring



REID URCHISON

Comic

ALLYX WILLIAMS



ALLYX WILLIAMS

Noise

Black Ink

Her cool, blue rolls and
peaks under clenched fingers.

Kept in celestial tow, kelp tangling.
They're pulled deeper on the undercurrent.

Swells of salt smash together,
moans surface and resurface.

Sheets of rain hover before each
squall picks them up, like waves,

and throws them against the rocks.
Inside, in bed, bodies' hurricane.



The cedar bough whispers
in brushes to the red tin roof,
 Do storms make
you horny?
The roof answers,
Yes, in gentle cries.

Beyond this, the beach
sleeps, except for the tide.
The relentless awake.

Cervix is latin for

neck. she is thirteen, standing in front of a
mirror, undressing slowly. practising.
she is older, now.
wine

crawling up a throat. vertigo
in the murk of sleep.
choking

on laughter and lady-fingers. a bar
of citrus soap, lathered, and turning
over and over in a hand.

she is bedroom eyes.
stoner eyes, butterfly tea
belly. she is teeth

sinking into mango, torn open
pomegranate. she is each individual calyx
on a sprig of spring lavender. she is
lavender

crushed between fingers.
seasoned cast iron. still,
she is undressing slowly.
painfully now.

a long haul of tobacco after smoking

a hybrid. oxygen rush. a mouth full of
red

meat. she is imagining herself
as a thin neck.

why? they answer: because
she is a woman.
she is

GRAHAM BOLDT

Excerpt from: The Lay of Garbaduuc

CANTO I:

Let us now sing of Garbaduuc,
Pict king be-spat with blue and blood.
Whose carnal mind received Marduk-
had sinews strummed by demon god.

Suspend yea now the histories—
cantons for the glorious throned.

Find truth instead in fantasies
and text book fact for now postpone.
I call thee now, my Morpheus Muse!
cast shadow-scapes, while we peruse.

—When Darius of Persia sent
his ships to conquer northern climes,
the sea was churned in rich torment
and Dover's cliffs wept o're the brine.
And Garbaduuc did spy them there,
when Luna hid her lunar eye,
mistook their hosts for distant flares
of stars spread o're an invert sky.
Then clouds removed, revealing there
Ten million masts amassed. Beware!

T'was at that time, his mind went black—
far blacker still than onyx ore
and in that state of mania
danced reckless on the darkened moor.
For in that waste where witches lust,
there dwelt a god far greater foul.
Fair succubi, dark incubus
lay passive to his beck and howl.
Yea, in the black our lord did fawn,
outside the touch of rosy dawn.

—And so

The demon, laying patient, called
the Pict with spells and quiet chants—
this siren's song did thus enthrall
the Pict, whose soul was now entranced.
With clouded mind and weary feet,
King Garbaduuc did stagger on—
dumb to that which he would meet,
yet, drawn to that from the beyond.

To demon god, to demon god!
To dark Marduk the Pict did trod.

Dagon, Azog, Ahriman, Baal—
his names did span all mortal tongues—
Marduk, the demon god, once called
on ancient man to slay his young.
And there amidst the crumbled stones—
etched o're with glyphs of hateful things
—the Pict did trod on their soft bones,

the tributes from past savage kings.
Then Luna lift her cum'lous lid
revealing death where once was hid.

And there the bones—the bones—lay white!
So white their glimmer mute the mind!
Long hence the Pict recalled the sight
of piled skulls and how they'd shined—
so luminous in the milky bright,
so brightly shining in the night,
Like tyger's eyes reflect the light—
absorbing moon and reflecting fright.

Then in that knell where moonlight fell,
a hollow hum resounded low—
a chant or some forgotten spell
that glyphéd stones alone could know.
And Garbaduuc, returning sane
turned tail to flee the pit of bones,
Yet up the bank he ne'er could gain
a hold for foot or hand on stones.
Back down the gob he plunged again,
down in the cup of Marduk's fen.

—Suddenly

from the bones there rose a maw—
an onyx mask with visage shear.
Deep browed, deep cheeked, with razor jaw
and eyes—two tawny crystal spheres.
It was as though Hephaestus' flame
had scorched the face of Furies dark,

turned flesh to glass and cut the frame
to match corruption's infernal mark.
Next neck and shoulders, trunk and breast
Sprouted up and out that bony nest.

"My Garbaduuc," the demon spake,
"Thought you mightiest of mortal men?
The once proud Prince of Picts a'quake
when gaze he now on Marduk's den?
Look you well on these dry bones,
for here there lie whole races lost.
Their voices turned to quiet moans,
the wind's whispers here amongst the rocks.
Now, bow you down upon command,
'tis ground unhallowed you present stand!"

Now Garbaduuc, though savage still,
 was sired by a Nephalem—
 the malformed angeli, Gabri'l.
Yea, the Pride of old Jerusalem,
lay dormant in his Pictish vein—
the hallowed blood of demi-god
ran swift to counter heaven's bane—
but the demon god had left him awed
and of his sire, he ne'er was taught—
his haloed line, though worth the laud,
was lost in dreams for now forgot.

 And as it was—
His muscles taught, his eyes downcast-
bent he low 'fore demon god,

and yet, little did he know, alas!
the demon king alone was shod!
“Mercy, master, mercy!” cried he
whose purple fist the bear did fear,
“The madness took me from the sea,
atop the cliffs of Dover sheer.
Before my land there lies a waste,
the Southron horde I now must face.”
“‘Tis not your land, but my domain,
remember this my bar-bar pet.
T’was my hand that cut in t’wain
this isle from Pangea’s set.
So, Darius has come at last?
Upon mine shores he lays his feet;
tries he now, with arms amassed,
to challenge here my ancient seat?
Ha! Darius, your time has come,
bring thee to heel, my demon son.”

SOPHIE CROCKER

Everything's a Hummingbird

it's strange,
crying someone else to sleep: i drink her grief and
return it to her, her head on my lap. after an hour
her nightmares heat my pelvis through her skull –
are any bones built for grieving? marrow, maybe. salt,
maybe. asleep, she finally cries – cries the way unconscious drunks
vomit to asphyxiation. i turn her face to the side
so her runoff soaks my leggings. she's superheated,
body hyperaware it's alive. survivor's guilt scalds.

(towards summer's end all the bumblebees turn bold and painfully
yellow before hibernation, as the butterflies wilt and the
wasps die.)

even corpses
move internally. atoms vibrate slower when cold but
they still vibrate. matter trembles at molecular level—
ice, glass, plums, baleen, harp strings, cinnamon, cicadas,
and heart strings, living or no. everything's a hummingbird:
atoms on fire, atoms alight, atoms a wing-beat away from
disappearance – disintegration – song. from under her eyelids,
nectar trickles hotly onto my thighs. she barely stirs but remains
kinetic. then she half-opens her eyes; dragonfly-teal irises
trapped in red webs.

CARSON REDDEN

Friends with Dead Dogs

I HADN'T SEEN GUY IN SEVERAL MONTHS. I'm sure he was around, just off the grid somehow, and the few times I'd ran into him previously he told me that he'd seen Silver behind his house, that he'd been leaving bowls of raw meat out for him, and that a pair of green eyes followed him around town in every second patch of trees he passed at night. I told him he needed help, that he wasn't in his right mind, and he said Dana would understand, if only he could find a way to tell her, but I said she left him for a reason; that he was too smart to think that dog lived after being ran over by a car again, and as the words were coming out of my mouth I realized how much less magic there was in the world for me. I didn't want Guy to delude himself. Wasn't I the one who got all superstitious about the stranger's cellphone? Ignoring fate is always unwise, but I couldn't read the stars anymore, and I had put away my Tarot cards when I moved in with Martin. He didn't ridicule it like Guy, who hammed it up whenever I gave him a reading—Martin just couldn't be bothered to care. He was more things to me than I'd ever known love to be before, but the uncertainty about him became regular, and I got used to not knowing what was going on inside his head. I always cared, until I didn't. Then I went looking for Guy.

He wasn't easy to find. He changed his phone number and friends, slept at his house a handful of times each month, and seemed to sustain himself from the dumpsters behind supermarkets in sketchy parts of town. Seeing his car out front was by no means an indicator that he'd be around. You'd think he'd gone feral, but his old friends who found his new friends said that that was far from true. Rumors spread that he'd been fucking the head of this accounting firm who put him on his payroll, that he'd done copious amounts

of ketamine and never emerged from the dissociative state. Others saw him sporadically in parks and coffee shops, clean shaven and clear-eyed, always talkative but with one foot out the door and a faraway look in his eyes that wasn't readily apparent until the conversation shifted to himself. Somehow that struck me as how he'd always been - never the one to initiate, but once you gave him some interest he'd learn as much about you as he could. Less an interrogation than an honest desire to know, undercut by a fear of knowing anything about himself.

Sometimes I wanted to say that Silver knew something about him, when people would ask why anyone would go so crazy over a dead dog. But people are always different around their animals, and it's easy to explain why: they can't talk back in the way you or I can. Everything is second-guessing, or second-order communication, where you infer as much as you can on a handful of cues while remaining keenly aware that you have their full attention. Martin (and most humans), operated in the opposite manner; giving honest answers to questions they halfway heard, and I'd have to interpret how much truth was there for me based on the scattered commodity of his attention span I was getting at any given moment. "What are you thinking about?" meant dinner, double-shifts tomorrow, daily routines, something occasionally unexpected, but never, "I'm alone with everyone but you," like Guy told me one time.

I don't want to say Guy was deeper than the rest - he could be a real dumbfuck. But when he looked at you, he was never lost - just on the verge of it, like he was hoping you were, so he could save you and himself too. Maybe that's why he saw the stranger's eyes in strands of oaks. Someone beyond saving. So he made the wrong decision by the indecipherable utilitarian calculus in his head - something he would've taken pride in anyways, then felt ashamed for making life harder than it needed to be, and he'd settle for the explanation that things couldn't have gone any other way.

I wasn't sure what I was going to do when I found him. Tell him to go home? At least knowing he wasn't there gave me hope he wasn't alone. When he lost Dana, I felt happy that I could take care of him, and also secretly satisfied that I didn't share his feelings. My relationship was still working. I could get through my day without chest pains and psychosomatic irregularities to distract me from the task at hand. I opened up at regular intervals, cried often, let myself feel my feelings. Guy lost control, then reined it in too hard, all the while convinced he was in the right, believing that only he knew what was

going on inside his own head, when anyone close to him could read the unease underneath any expression on his face.

Maybe that's half-true. The weeks before he found Silver, he'd seemed settled. Like he was ready to move on. He was tired, but in the normal ways people wear out. Not like something next to suicide he'd lived all summer, taking care of himself to the n-th degree so he could bury himself in anything his body would let him.

One day he came home from work and told me he was the happiest he'd ever been. This was the day after he found out Dana had moved to Croatia without saying goodbye, and when I pressed him on it, he wouldn't be convinced.

"Life is horrible, but I'm happy."

How do you tell somebody otherwise?

Say you're trying to tell a story to someone. Do you stick to your thoughts and actions, or do you bother bringing in the way things felt too? Like if I'm explaining the difficulty of building a bookshelf without having anyone around to help hold pieces together, and keep me company during the process, do I fixate on the fact that I can't find the screws I need for the back, or that I think prefabricated furniture is a tremendous waste, though I certainly need a place to store books besides liquor boxes, or do I come right out and tell you I'm fucking frustrated with all of life at this particular moment? Together, you get a pretty good picture. But Guy always left out the last part until it was too late, and maybe then it came out when he was alone. Sometimes at night I'd hear him praying in the room next to mine, and I hoped he'd include himself in them, though I could never feel right listening in. I'd just put my headphones in, or pay close attention to the sounds from the street, and say my own little prayer for me, in hopes that I'd stay stronger than he was. Is that selfish?

After several months of efforts interrupted by life (my mom got sick, Martin moved in to my new place, my arm developed an irregular mole that turned out to be benign), I saw Guy standing on the corner; cartoonishly chiseled jaw, marlboro man mustache, clothes I'd seen him wear a thousand times.

"Hey stranger,"

"Hey Steph."

There's that stare of his.

“Seems you’re pretty hard to find these days.”

“I was starting to think that too. I’m glad I ran into you.”

“Should’ve told me you were gonna go off the grid. I could’ve gone for a bit of that.”

“Didn’t seem like something to dip in and out of.”

“Where are you these days?”

“Here, mostly.”

“Awfully cryptic answer, mister.”

He cracked a smug smile.

“Seen any more of that ghost dog?” I said. Now he was sheepish.

“I sure hope not. Silver didn’t have a very good life.”

“You shouldn’t say that. I think you made him happy. Even if things weren’t always ok.”

“S’pose you’re gonna tell me we were meant to be?”

“I’m not the one who decides that.”

“For a while I wondered where you went to.”

“You knew,”

“Initially, yeah.”

“You been looking for me or something?”

“I wouldn’t say that. Mostly not looking for anything.”

“Why?”

“Steph,”

“Yeah?” I was waiting for something big to break.

“Take care of yourself.”

“Always do. Do I need to tell you the same?”

“Never hurts.”

PATRICK MCCANN

Creaverunt Formas

A M what I eat.

I recycle paper.

Every time there is an

apology there is a fence.

Invoke but don't supplicate

That grand ol' floating bulb,

The top of the chain— the train's haul.

I learnt towers, I spilt blood and alcohol.

Clod. Clot. Homme, a hymn. Muck spoils but

we brought a stew, a Thespian one (I think).

Come, sit and drink, if there are any

hard feelings wash them in this basin.

Thank You for Shopping

I saw the ghost of
John Ashbery last week.

He was at the supermarket,
 getting in line,
(I was at the supermarket
 trying to survive)
and
He said with his eyes,
 “duration is deceptive,”
and
He said with his face, quoting
 Aristotle, that change
is “consistently inconsistent”.

He looked alright, considering,
 pleased but not
surprised (at least not as much
 as I seemed to be),
and
He told me things that were
 immediately forgotten
since
He had neurons that fired in
 hyper-morse, his voice
bathed in idiosyncrasies.

He seemed easily accustomed
to a ghost's lifestyle
(I speculate as to what I
quite mean by that),
for
He had caught word of some
thing he had thought of
before;
He prepared compliments towards
those whom he had
previously conversed with: other ghosts,

the Muses, Moderns, and Metropolitans—
I saw them at the supermarket last week.

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