

The Complex of All of These

This is a retrospective of future lovers, lined carefully against the wall to await nomenclature. *You're getting ahead of yourself*, whispers something in the leaves. The steady diction falters in a moment of self-doubt. Too late. Carry on. Majuscules and minuscules stand alongside the lovers, properly in order, modestly spaced for clarity, following for the moment laws of grammar and syntax as the line gathers strength. *You're getting ahead of yourself*, protest the leaves in vain, while the characters rush forward, amassing in an explosion of fervor (anxious for companionship, eager for raison d'être), clamoring for a period and a space to prevent asphyxiation. All the while her charming self watching with a satisfied smile. La lutte continue!

The narrative begins in bed, awake long past the appropriate time to be awake, nouns and their inseparable adjectives huddled together for warmth, a pair of hands occasionally groping blindly in the darkness to reassure that none of the blankets had mistakenly fallen to the floor as they often do. The fingers dart quickly back into their flannel cave, draw the covers once again to the chin, and in due course calm themselves. Perhaps this time sleep (a small Swede with a red cap and red stockings) will come to cast some charm or enchanted dust that for the next few hours the hands move again only in dream. No such luck.

His nine stories on repeat through the white sleepless night, not over and over, but again and again, to try to catch that elusive something between the cursed hair and the mosquito with thin hands, and how nice it is to look at the day-crow of the rooster as mourning the loss of the moon. In between each word lie three more; she carves for him a letter out of music, boundaries drawn and hand-colored, and he slips her words into his pockets. Later, he carelessly untwists the metaphors while a growing audience peers over his shoulder to translate the pile of scribbles accumulating on his desk. The first: "How do you keep up, my dear." Another: "It is such a pleasant wounding you inflict."

Whirlwind, settling bit by bit like so many pieces of glitter in a snow globe, cities drowning and buried in white. The map unfolding, the world expanding too fast for its edges, the narrator barely escapes unscathed. And so begin the interminable nights despite anyone's best effort at daylight savings time (sleeping pills, warm milk), and to be fair it must be said that they began well, low voices at two in the morning, gentle whispers between parentheses, impervious to their inadequacy. To be fair it must be said that they meant well, grand overtures which spanned rivers and mountains and time zones, a discernable relief found in the company of another, deliberate, particular. This awkward world of missed gestures and misunderstood words which claims to be the only possible reality. Cleverly-concealed weaknesses, announced one April day to the clover which held the impression of their combined weights—an insuperable distance (remember the persistent mountains, rivers, time zones, now rendered mute) ordered into meaning, the green things negotiated into the discernable configurations of her body and his. They meant so well but were lost in translation and amidst miles of tangled telephone wire.

In the underbelly of a dolphin, quarters cramped considering the small scale of the beast when compared to the usual whale, shadows obscuring shadows, comes the anticipated moment. Without even candles for light (lest the flame leap too dangerously close to the animate walls), their selves awkwardly groping through the murky depths, slowly now, careful. The gestures of her hands lost to a blind audience, smell rendered irrelevant by a congested nose, taste rendered useless by carelessness, leaving only the sound of three hearts' syncopated rhythms: her self, his self, and the great beast encapsulating them. Whispers travel the length of the cavern, *I think I forgot something, I don't understand*, until again fumbling selves find each other, her head leans against his stomach, touch returns, the ground again parallel to the sky.

The sun rises and so it rises. Inside the curtains hang precariously in the windows, holding the thick darkness within. From the corner a low voice, easy and slow, fills the space as it waits for cover of twilight or rain. *I covet them; I want them*, eyes flashing bright in the curtained room, desperate for someone to say no or yes. His heart: too hard, too fast, but somberly reassured by the small deaths trembling inside their selves, bits of patient truths no longer obscured by the unfaithful narrator. Polishing the rust off his secrets, he offers them to her, shiny, for her to bury again inside him as far as her arms can reach. They sink into the vast deep, nothing marking their place save the invisible lines her fingers trace on his chin. Each time must be the last time; the day begins already to show signs of wear, the shapeless residue of sunlight seeping through the quiet recitation of their solitary histories and mutual transgressions. Nothing without its signs: dragons in clover fields, breathing fire, breathing each others' shallow breaths. Yes, and now.

Their asymmetrical histories unravel slowly, unevenly. Patience, anxious darling. They climb into the cave, into each other in the dark, filled with epic ambition: existing to be found. Inarticulate hands fumble to find a body, a face, denser and seemingly more unsteady with each slow grin. They sail a tightrope over the sum of their lives and under the ether, enough present to make possible a story and enough missing to deny an answer. Sailing (the vague possibilities of a world without edges, the greatest possible smooth universe), a reversal of ground and sky suspending the transparent lovers. Elegy: they lie, still entwined, belonging not to each other or themselves, sleeping in the infinite configurations of contradiction—like so many others, backwards, empty. Let's not hold hands, he says. All stories are turning into his story, timelines trimmed and repainted to match. Such small changes (April to March) exchange entire bodies in the alchemy of memory.

The windows breathe with winter air while the lights are carefully unwound from the tree. Everything fragile is organized gently in boxes: a stutter, a red balloon, a thank-you letter, a kiss whispered to a neck, night falling on a couch; the pieces glued carefully with clear-drying epoxy and left to set overnight, through the next day even, gingerly testing their strength (mouths twisted in the beginnings of grimaces in anticipation of subsequent fractures.) Separation anxiety, in the together-but-alone sort of way, each in anticipation of the imminent departure (distant, looming). A conclusion always in excess of its reading, grand finale, the maestro raises his gloved hands as bows fling into the air gliding across their final strings. This is how stories are told—hearts drawn idly around six absent-mindedly written words: the complex of all of these. Carefully constructed conceits: a red dress in the afternoon (attentive to the smallest detail in the recesses of their furthest corners), a thing accidentally said to someone expecting silence, half an hour, maybe more (half of April)—the anticipated longing... A gap between two gestures, in which the depth of another world is made visible. An overture to the contented present: these are the things of importance, now, ever.