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hornsby



Marasmoid amphigouri and all lily lucubration aside, I struck my first face of the greater world when I drove headfirst through two walls of flesh and spat-tered into a broken puddle of everything I had known before. The greater world must have sounded through the skin drum of my mother's belly and rolled dull waves through my amnion, for, whether in fear of

kerukostical blues

There were two. This the way I remember. The wide black earth and two, one of them myself. I watched them. Smoke somewhere. Single black tree, knuckles on the branches. This way the way I remember. See it. One of them myself. Dressed—I invent—dressed one in russet doublet, silk stockings, verdigris greaves, gaberdine of ermine trim, sleeves in great billows poofed over the humerus—latticed and teardropped and rubbing the armpit raw, loose-shift, gold-mail girdle, green-rib-boned thigh-garter, laced fastenings adrift in the wind, a damp starched ruff flouncing as he prances, underneath the maroon cravat, pearl earring, talced periwig, banana-skin toupee, and a wide brimmed petasus. He shuckles his bauble, nycely. The other ducked-low knee-knocked stumps along, his green bicycle cape thrashing in the wind, his little legs mince in harlequin tights. The two, stalk and trundle, alone on the heath.

'How goes it little one?'

'The bladder the gout on alternate steps.'

'See for me, the wind has dried my eyes. Speak for me—I am alone.'

The heath as wide as flat as pity would allow. Iron sky. One stoops. One of them myself. And the other? From before.

'On a day such as this one time one place one youth set out...'

'Oh! speak for me. Oh! how I am lonely. Oh! the wind slashes me, the horizon veers its brow, the earth begrudges my very tread—ah little one, we are small upon this earth. Sing it to me. Sing...'

'Will ye cant forever—I had started, I was there.'

'Oh start again.'

'On...'

'And softly, sing it softly.'

'Have done have done.'

'I have done.'

Pause in which the two walk, I see them. Resolve reenters.

'On a day such as this one time...'

[In sudden horror] 'Not this day—'

'On a day such as this only in summer...'

'Wonderful...'

'...one time one place one youth set out west to see his sweetheart. The village was distant but the love and the youth and the want in his chest were bright and he whistled as he trode, toes struck up high in the air. He rounded a vague knoll and stopped. All about the fields lay rich in sun. Ahead the path ran down a little way then entered a long gentle rise, white and straight and dry as you like. His shadow stretched off in front, sloping slightly right, and tapered to a peak. He shuts one eye and brings his right hand up before him, the first two fingers extended, right angle with the thumb. He adjusts it a little and there, the line: arm, wrist, thin bones through to the long fingers, and the path is perfectly obscured. No distance in the one eye, just fields, his line, and the planed sky. He runs the line of his arm all away to the west. He opened his other eye and the path came back into view, now to the left of his arm, broken once by the perpendicular thumb. And then he noticed for the first time a little dark speck just over the thumb where the path began its rise, and a low dust mist drifting off. He

this distant thunder or in unborn eagerness, when the only world I had known before collapsed and spilled away beneath my feet and the drum tumbled and spasmed above me and two great walls of flesh split and staggered and the wet void was there ahead and convulsions shuddered down and through me down and through me I wrapped my umbilical cord about my throat before exit and propelled myself as though leaping from the hangman's stool into the noose and so there the cord which all this time before had diffused loveliness through my belly, and now ravelled and straining, pulling

against the push, tautened while my infant fists plucked at it like a banjo string and striving downwards again the convulsions the tautening the thunderous spasms of a slipped world striving downwards cave and drench downwards and with an enormous slump the belly gave and I sprawled dying into the open wet mess of my broke all, like a lozenge water balloon, knotted at the neck and my body a slip afterslur, like a bloated puppet strung under the chin, like a memento mori dangling horribly from the head, its skull's jaws chattering, its orbless stare. This was all—I am informed—

frowned and then made off with cheerful briskness to catch it up. As he drew closer it resolved into a man, burdened, an old burdened man, crooked and in black, ah crooked under a beam, a beam across his back and sacks and tins hanging down on either side, shuffling, burningly slow, white hair, white beard, dark clothes and, barefoot! yes, dark trousers to the shins, a scraggy calf gut-strung down and straining, and the dust-white ball of heel, rope belt, skin dry, yes, and smooth, thin wrists, high round bone there, like an egg, and three blue veins over the back of the right hand. The old man had barely started up the slope when the youth approached him and offered his patient hand. At which the old man hacked and threw down the beam and sacks upon the dust and the tins clattered in the dry dust.

“There, take up my beam, accursed youth, you who go this way my beam goes west with you.”

The astonished youth knelt to take it up while the old man gambolled about him, scuffing dust in his eyes and mouth and kicking him low under the ribs. The youth rasped the grit across his face and set the beam on his shoulders, steadied, and then rose and hooked his wrists over on either side. The old man whooped and sprang from foot to foot and shied small stones at the youth, and pricked his arse to drive him on. And so they progressed, the aged one pouring scorn on the young man, and he, bent but sure, walking under the heavy burden, his arms stretched out on either side and slung over the wood beam. One time the old man struck him on the ear so that he tottered, another took a stick and dug it well into his left side, elsewhere tripped him and he spilled forwards

and lurched to stamp the ground off from his falling face. And all the time the curses rained down and made a fog about his head. The youth turned his ears inwards and his eyes down and the old man's voice became to him as one heard from underwater. The sun slewed up to midday zenith and the shadows grew short. The dust glared and all the rocks were sharp and cruel with light. The youth began to feel the heat of the day and the ache of the beam across his back, and he fell to thinking about his sweetheart waiting in her cool dim room for him, and his neck prickled. A bead of sweat fell and dropped on the toe of his left leather shoe. He glanced across at the stringy-legged old man, still dancing on his heels, still hissing and grimacing. His bones became heavy and blood clouded behind his eyes. How this burden slowed him and how needlessly he carried it and how servile he was being under all this abuse. He was an ox to this man, a yoked ox and a thing of mockery. His spine bristled and his skull boiled and the blood broke open the vessels at the backs of his eyeballs, until turning on the old man he ripped his arms from the beam and swung it crashing onto the path between them and—

“There, I was glad to carry your burden but now I have done with it. Your company is more than I desire on such a day as this and so here I cast you to your things and your bile and your own febrility and the hot sun and the dry way and all the thieves and snakes and stinging things that may annoy travellers and yet still are more gracious than yourself. May your spleen rage in your own breast now for it will gnaw at mine no longer.”

‘At this the old man laughed and dropped to where his bags slumped on the

on the 4th April 1977.

Since then I have been searching ways to make nooses out of the things that fed me and to jump through them each time the world cracks and the amnion drains and the compulsion leads you mourning into the next sack. And I have done so with the deep-throat taste of choking at the end of every one.

ground, and unstringing one, fell to clawing the contents up in the sun. There was a flash of light and then gold and precious stones—sapphires, beryls, chrysolites and cymphanes, studded into the deep gold, wrought into patterns dark and strange and without meaning to the youth. He looked on at all that tumbling sparkling wealth rain and splash, in the sack-mouth and upon the dust.

“Hot youth, turn away now, this treasure is for others than yourself, for such as who will help me and all my flock.”

“But I did help you, I carried you on, I bore your load and you reviled me.”

“You threw down your strength for me. I seek those who will throw down their spirit.”

The youth turned and left. He looked over his shoulder once, at some remove, and saw the old man still squatting there, still playing in the dusty wayside.

That night after making love the youth fell back off his sweetheart feeling estranged and thick with shame. The figure of the old man returned to him in the cooling dark. He knew it unlikely that another would pass that way today, and also that his call upon thieves was not idle. They usually came out after drinking to wander the countryside for the noiseless width and the open moon and whatever else they may happen across. He should not have left him there, he felt in that distilled loneliness beside his sweetheart—

“I shouldn’t have left him there.”

“As if were he not so loathesome you would have.”

“Should not the able help the unable?”

“As if were he not so mean he couldn’t leave what he was unable to carry and

come along nicely.”

“With his life he put together such things as he had there—what means has he to make again what he loses? His hand now is weak and his back like old wire.”

“As if he hadn’t his time, a youth of his own.”

“Should not the able help the unable?”

[Long pause] The two walked on a little way, until infuriated one broke out—

‘And do we leave him there?’

‘In the blue night.’

‘The blue night? This is ridiculous—I beseech you, do we leave him there? I will no more of him.’

‘No. He goes on.’

‘Will you ever have done?’

‘In stages the youth coarsens...’

‘In stages! This is inhuman—I beseech you, spare me your stages.’

‘He goes on, but coarser, and becomes bitter to the world. His sweetheart no longer sees in him her youth. He becomes dissolute and stings his friends for their good counsel. Gradually they cease to come. The bloom on his cheeks withers and red gathers instead in his nose. He settles into his dissolution. He becomes a peripatete...’

‘A peripatete! This is indecent!’

‘He becomes a mendicant, known by many but himself knowing few. He travels the country and the towns fall from him like leaves until he cannot distinguish, and with no point of departure or of arrival he moves. He finds in all the change

a sameness and stays there. After many years and many paths he is on the back of a cart, facing backwards. On his left furrows pass out all away to the hill. There is a length of mist, a gentle rise, and he falls into a dream. The sky is flat with cloud. He stirs with that sense of displacement, the bleached sense that the world is real without him. The light from the clouds is very white. Looking, he realizes that he is on the same path, the one that led once to his sweetheart. The furrows slow, the passage slows, the furrows in the earth become separate and individual, and he has the distinct sight of a compound rock of earth and beside it a tussock of browned dry stems. Then the speed gathers again, the furrows run together, the path runs away between his legs.'

'And what am I to do with that?'

'What you will. There is no lesson.'

'God spare us from such things.'

The two, myself and another. A wide black earth and the sky now pool dark. The sun slipped sunk upon our totter and all changed, and changed us. It is as though a lever has been pulled around the lens. Fleet across came two girls—the one with bone-china face and waterpale eyes and hair like fine rain. You remember her. They are on the wet bleak heath now, they come like fine rain—and do they greet the two? The image shatters—someone has dropped a stone—thoughts shard, spill against each other, configurations all anew. And as it passes out now it is us, myself and the girl—in the dark—myself and the girl. The moon comes up on a pulley. She is the one with waterpale eyes and is wove in dove-grey sand-grey smog-grey

wreaths. I close my eyes to inhale, open to exhale. The fourth fingernail of her right hand comes across my cheek, a slender touch. The moon is a slim slit, a yellow eye. The single tree is still there.

'Draw me a little something, draw me of your well.'

'So I am here for you?'

'You are of me, I invented you.'

Then what is mine?

Use my memory, retell it of me.

'I was driving east—'

'Where, tell me when.'

'What, will you have everything? This is an exercise in narcissism.'

[Within] 'I know.'

'I will do it of you—you are driving east.'

'Yes.'

'It is dark. The road is lined with trees [yes]—it is like a corridor. There is no moon—'

'And the stars?'

'—are in tonight. On your left a parcel of space and the tree-dark wall. On your right the white lines come, slow from afar and whip whip under you. Ahead a soundless corridor of night. Chatoyant stippling. You dip the lights down—there is a black fringe and the road runs swift from it. The night is close now, you are a capsule within it. Your skin too is close and you can feel it when you breathe, now a little shallower, now in your mouth. It is thick there and cloddy at the

back. You will take a little wine, you think,'

'I will take a little wine'

'—but you have the sensation that you are bound. Your pulse comes up in your ear. The air is close in there and you can feel it coming now, closing. Breathe a little shallower still mouth thicker and [yes] the certainty now that you are held in bindings. You want to open the window but you know that you cannot. It tightens. The road rips at you soundless from the beam's edge and you hate yourself [yes]. The trees tight on either side and all that terrible imbroglia of night. Your left ear burns and the pulse, each one smashes across like a gong and you know now that it is coming and the smashes, quicker [yes] until it is just sheet-noise in there with the hatred hard in front and the road still belting from the black | trees tight on either side and you know now that it is coming [yes] and the air so close quicker shallower and you know now that you cannot move and the ear booming and the chest-screwed tight and the tongue clod thick as muck and the self-hatred is pinning you [yes] pinning you [yes] you are sprawling and there boom there it rolls over you like a rock. Sink a little now you can sink, soundless. You want to be a child again. A time comes back to you.'

'When?'

'The south of France. You had a little yellow dinghy, blue around the inside and a ribbed base. It would bake up hot in the sun and very very soft. When you let out the air that was hot too, and smelled funny. And the sand was hot underfoot. You spun the wide seas on your Sea Tiger.

Yes, I did.

You are spinning. You liked to lie in your dinghy under the azure and the sea moved you. With the tide you drift east, the way the water went. Your arse bumps the ground and now you beach up, but the littoral is unfamiliar—a length of sand shielded at either end and all the browning bodies supine and nude. You didn't know you had come here. The men have peters like you, slung across their bellies or in the fold of their thigh, adrizze in the slack heat. But the women have just a furze chevron, dipping between their legs. You stand there, child-skinny, salt hair and the dinghy trailed from your right hand, gazing at the naked miles. You feel a little drip on your left hamstring and the sun on the backs of your knees. The other children haven't found this place.

Yes, I did.

You are there awhile before your parents find you. Someone pulls a pile from the sand to let them through on the west side. Your mother hangs by the barrier while your father comes scuttling, knees bent, feet very close to the ground, head vulturish low from his shoulders. He is still wearing his red swim-shorts with the black trim and the loose string dancing. No, your parents are not naked.

Hee-hee, yes, I remember that.

You remember it in the car there. It passes and you feel a sense of fall—a billow breaking, the dying of a struck match. You are back in the night now, and you drive on. You are again aware of bindings but this time without the fear; and instead you feel an impalpable release. All responsibility of action and inaction lifts from you and flips back into the night. You leave it on the road behind you. Petrification of things both done and left undone.

Maceration of a waning God.

Lull and shush of all desire.

The immarciscible pregnancy of time is gone too, you are through even that.

There is only the road [yes] and the implacable vastness of night. Calm instills, inspissates. Nothing is either good or bad and everything that exists is closed. In the distance ahead you see a man walking east. He turns and lays himself down on the side of the road in the long grass. The blades shiver beside him and dew, languorously. Condense and rest. Condense and rest the rest.

But then it changed and I don't think it was her in the beautiful part, and I don't think it was character either. Just the two uncharacters, myself and the girl, falling like needles, with me at her hips my hands as the mould of her womb. My two thumbs met in a line, spiring from her navel, and my hands closed under her ribcage, my fingers flanked her kidneys. And she was so small here as though my hands closed in prayer that my head sank, my forehead rested on my thumbs, my face over her, gently suspiring. Like this we fell, like needles.