

A

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A bodes poorly, he thought.

But there was nothing he could do about it.

It never failed to stun him – a blow that divided time – how much the contour of her skull, her jawbone, the sealed vaz that was her head – how little that *physical object* – her skull – had to do with her actual being in the world, her herself, his experience of her. Like a ventriloquist throwing their voice, so that the real message – the real being – the voice – and its dumb house – the body – were flung apart, he experienced her as this *gap*, this parting. He called this empty space her nickname: ‘A’. He knew the moment the voice and its house seemed one was actually the moment they were disintegrating, too late, like the moment of changing lanes, the gallop of the broken line shooting between the wheels. Apparently it was during a lane change he’d fallen in love with her. They’d got back between lines right quick.

In that vaz that had her face on it, the face he knew as the face of his eternity, behind it – but *elsewhere* – was an ancient city with its own eternity, its own language and rituals, blood sacrifices, performed beneath the gaze of a class of ruling elites possessing a rigor of intellectual precision that was as cruel and unflagging as a *minyan* of Inquisition torturers. Verdant highlands surrounded this walled city and brought it coolness in the mornings and twilights. It may have been another planet, another galaxy, a place where time passed in sudden gushes, stopped almost completely, then lurched again; it may have been where he himself slept, in a small stone cell, on a narrow wallplank on a pillow made of his own rolled up wool coat, a rib of sun wandering down and up the wall each day, a nurse administering his intravenous necessities, here he slept, slept forever, and sleeping dreamed of meeting her – in this world, a world much larger than itself and that used her face as its PO box – he’d come into sharp, brief, piercing contact with it, this world,

remember it, be stunned, and then, recovering, avert his inner eye again. *Who was she* was not even the question. She wasn't, really, a *who*. She was a *where*. An elsewhere.

The contour of her jawbone lent the presence of her lips the quality of a palmful of precious stones. Her nape like a swarm of starlings swooping in ruby light over sunset rooves, water tower silhouettes like rockets with their feet caught. He'd go to his grave wanting to kiss her again. He wanted to kiss her even when he was kissing her.

So, what? This meant he lived inside her? Yes. He did. He knew it. Try as he might to imagine himself into her *elsewhere*, into where he knew she really existed - to imagine *her*, singularly, independent of anything and anyone, he always ended up encountering himself in there, usually in some state of unconsciousness or injury, or sometimes in a state of luxuriant, lazy waiting - waiting for her. Waiting for her to come to him while he lazed inside her. His attempts at imagining her inner life were apparently surreptitious expeditions whose goal was overthrowing control of - her. Taking control. He'd look at the line of her jaw, and in the message of its beauty was always added its translation: *she'll never stay*.

He'd lie beside her and put his cheek to hers, and his ear to hers like listening to a shell, the cool smoothness of her face to his hot and rough, and he heard in her not the *il y a* vastness of the ocean of blood but the empty agitated puff of dust which marked the spot he'd just been - inside her - he heard inside her his image's destruction - vaporized as if by a wizard or weapon - he stifled the pang in him by kissing her cheek softly, sealing the truth of his being wiped out inside her with a peck.

But soon he felt himself reanimate, returned into her. On the very spot he'd been annihilated he regrew. The peck on her jawbone - the bone that moved through him like a plowshare opening him for heart surgery - that peck was the light, battle-loving taunt of

the beloved enemy announcing after an attack he was unharmed, much as she believed she'd conquered him. He knew she thought nothing of the kind, was not thinking anything of the kind, didn't exist in this fantasy of battle and striving for a foothold *inside him*, she'd never cared one way or the other if she lived inside him or if he contained her; she didn't experience living this way; she didn't experience *loving* this way. Did she?

He looked around. In the distance a blur swept between two trees - trees that bore a kind of fruit that was the exact color - a blue that was almost white - of her eyes, surrounded by green, palmate leaves. That blur had raised the hair on his neck - it was a threat, it was an instability, it was a menace. He walked to the trees. He reached and pulled one of the fist-sized blue fruits off its stem, and with his right thumbnail split the skin and sucked the blood-red juice that flowed. It was salty-sweet, with the flat-numb aftertaste of papaya. He opened it up and was surprised its meat was brown, almost to black. He bit into it; sweeter than the juice, and faintly muddy. He ate the entire thing, blue skin as well, licked clean all his fingers; the ruby-black pit, about the size of a peach's, he held in his mouth. He walked on between the two trees, and began to search for what had made that blur.

The pale ground was covered in light down and had gooseflesh where he stepped.

There in the distance something marred the surface; he couldn't tell if it was a stain, a pile of excrement, or the site of an old gash in the ground; but it seemed to be in a plot which otherwise would be an idyllic grove, were it not for this aberration in the pale soil. It moved. His skin tightened and his breathing stopped: he watched as it grew onto its feet, its legs growing up from the ground. It stood, and looked at him, unperturbed, curious, with a posture of openness that also conveyed confident readiness to war.

The wish, the full-bodied wish and want, the sincere alignment of his bones, organs, blood, mind, breath, teeth, hands and legs in one perfected desire - seized him like a big cat does its prey - and he was flung into a leap at the figure before him, to murder it. It was the perfection of intention of true prayer, of knowing what he wanted and the knowing expressed solely in its action, rather than its thought, the thought was the doing itself, the knowing was the doing. His left forearm backhanded the man's neck on its left, and his right arm hooked around the opposite waist, and he spun the man like a pinwheel and slammed his head into the pale earth. Gooseflesh rippled around them. As the man went over his hand reached up and two fingers caught his nostrils, and as his head slammed the fingers were wrenched out of his nose the nails cut him inside and sliced his nostrils rims. The sting angered him, and made him realize he'd not leapt at the man in anger, something else, something more dialectic and purposeful had charged him. Under him the man wrapped his elbow around his ankles and swept him off his feet, and he fell onto his side, where the man found his way on top of him. He looked up into his own face, as it stared down at him, and watched as a fist was formed to sock him with. He preemptively shoved the heel of his left hand into the face - his face - and splattered its nose, blood spurting down into his own eyes. The anger was gone, he noticed. He was performing necessary tasks. The him on top of him sat up and grabbed his crushed face with both his hands, and he felt sadness at this pose of weeping and reached into his mouth and pulled out the dark pit and using the sharp bottom end of it swept it across the upturned throat above him - and this, while not cutting the windpipe as he'd hoped, at least caused a deep wound that sprung the man off him and sent him writhing on the pale, gooseflesh-and-down bloodwet ground.

He stood up and watched, his own nose dripping blood.

He had surprisingly little feeling, he noticed, watching himself groan in pain on the ground. Sadness, regret, rage. All sniffed, barely felt, through a spectator's disengaged amazement. This - the man - had been the blur, this the pile, this the marring, this the prey he'd come to find. So he did. He'd thought he'd always liked his own face, its reflection had mostly given him satisfaction and a sense of having received a good one, one he'd felt was the least of his worries. But watching it here, suffering masked in wet blood - and, he hoped, dying - he reviewed the moments that had just led to this, and realized it was not a face he liked or would be attracted to, notice as remarkable, or once having seen it either remember it or want to see it again. It was a bland, manual-laborer gene pool face, with centuries of cruelty and fatuous rutting causing a kind of apparent handsomeness that looked at now was obviously a mirage. A flattish face, cheekbones broad and like a farming or mining tool themselves. Perhaps, like married couples, after a few centuries a man began to look like the tools of his trade. It was a face that was certainly accustomed to slamming into unmoving objects, either literally or in its thinking. He walked over to it and gave it his shoe in its eye.

If the sun was bad and you killed it would the planet just freeze? Or would a second sun, out of gravitational imperative and the peristalsis of the cosmologic bowels wriggle and be squeezed out of the anal dark into its place?

He'd never see her with this thing in the way. The thing he saw with *was* the thing in his way. His seeing itself blocked his vision. That was why, inside her, he only encountered this: him.

He straddled the man and reached down and grabbed his neck in his hands and lifted his head up off the ground, looking down into his face. Blood bubbles gurgled as he breathed through his splattered nose, and the throat wound was a bleeding grin. He

tightened his grip. The eyes were uncannily bright looking out from the red muck of the face. Two cerulean crises, one looking out from swollen lips, looking into his, seeing knowing fearing death but also pronouncing final sentence with calm intensity: *you*. His eyes. That's why, he saw. That's why they wanted to *know* him, and kiss him. He felt it too. He held tighter. The fear in the eyes increased, and he felt the hardness increase beneath his ass where he sat. Feeling that hardness inspired his own, and in that moment he found himself at a crossroads, needing to choose the way. And as had so often happened - as it always and only happened - in fact, it was how he'd found himself here, now, inside her - *It* chose for him. The jewel of the mind, freed finally from the body's insisting, jewel balanced so precisely upon his upturned palm, finally there to be observed, and always finally and *for the first time* - the *true* object, the goal, the reward of eternity - vanished again before his eyes in a,

crush of meat hunger. Nights of solitude, precious and productive, flung into trash in that call. *Her here*
 eating eating itself

He unzipped himself, and reached back and unzipped the hardness beneath him. He held himself in each hand and began to move. The bubbling blood stopped, and he realized the man below him was holding his breath. He let him go and slapped his bloodcovered face, the bubbling started again, he got off him and tugged down and off the

pants and then pulled down his own. He pressed the man's knees to his shoulders and used blood as wetness and entered him, and as he fucked him he looked into his own eyes, keeping one hand held tight around the man's hardness, the other around his cut throat. With each thrust he squeezed tighter, and felt the man squeeze him tighter in reply. The man's insides felt hot, as with fever. He went as deeply as he could each stroke. Both their breaths soon were quick, and he watched the eyes beneath him close and felt in his gripped hand the animal struggle, watched sprays of white land on the wet red belly and mix with the blood. The sucking rhythms of the man siphoned him and he filled the bowels he was in with the disaster of night as he came.

He'd seen it, old film, that suction of silence – after detonation but before impact – of the nuclear blast, the moment everything tended back *towards* the ignition, houses and trees in bowed devotion to their destroyer, before they were sent forever away, in elemental discharge and ecstatic reunion with emptiness.

He had his ear beside the man's ear beneath him. Blood and sperm slurped between their bellies. He listened. The gurgling breath was fast and light. He heard it – an attempt to speak. *I* –, and he cut it off there, pressing the neck straight down into the ground with one hand, no longer looking at the face, but staying here, ear next to ear. The man's ass squeezed him out. He felt the heart race and the beats striking his own chest. Something like a second orgasm seemed to ripple through the breath and body beneath him, it was just like that, a ripple, a tension, then a cascade of loss of tension. The neck in

his hands became rock hard and then suddenly felt like water. He raised his head and looked. The eyes, his eyes, were wide open and turned up in their sockets, as if they'd followed something flying in their last moments. The eyes looked like hers. He saw that as if for the first time. Very much like hers. *A*. Immediately he sensed all the *craving*, all the needing her – gone. He got up and looked at this mess.

Buttoning his pants he thought he saw move in the distance ... a blur.

Then something else moved, at his feet. He looked down. He saw what he immediately assumed was air shifting in the belly of the body, a corpse's body farting posthumous release. But a shape then seemed to rotate and press from the inside. This movement made the body sway slightly side to side. Then all movement stopped. The deadness of the dead man seemed changed, seemed ... activated death. The pale bloody ground's surface tightened around them. He heard wet lips slurping. The white shell of an egg pressed out of the body's asshole, smeared in blood shit and come. The size of a too-large chicken egg. Free, it dropped to the ground. He poked it, shit-smearing his fingertip: it was gelatinous, semi-soft. *this? ... all this time. give it to her. she deserves it.* What was this, this thing on the ground, this body? And did its eyes really look like hers? He looked again. Yes. But they were his. The deadness of the body had returned, sunken down into itself again, attaining absolute density. In its lifelessness he felt *But I can live in here, now*. He knew he had to, but he dreaded having to carry that thing, and for how far? With his shitted fingertip he wrote her name on its belly.