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Thomas Johnson

THE PARINGS

I make a fire
Of the woodcarver's shavings,
Trusting no made thing
To keep me by its shape, warm
For long.

At craft's edge, I've laid
A hearth, my faith more
In what's been lopped away:
The smile, the sideways
Glance on the cutting room floor.

How ascetic you say, devouring
A fresh orange,
To braid dross
And spinoff
Into a living rope.

With the peel, the sucked pulp
Of your leavings,

I incense my rooms,
Sweeten the flame.

Jan Long

WINTER IN HEAT

The snow
in front of the white windowsill
Ahead of these bleached pillowcases
Under my pale shoulders
Across from the fog our breathing makes
is all smothered into
a touch of lace,
dried thin on the inside
of my thighs
this morning.

Matt Field

LOOKING

FOR A REAL BIG MAN
BLASTING IT ALL OUT

EATING AND SHOUTING
THUMPING SWEATY FISTS ON
OUR NARROW SHOULDERS

WHILE WE WINCE
AND THE WIND YANKS US
ALL TO RODEO HEAVEN

Got some skinny saints
folding paper flowers for
art-deco altars

Got civil fellows
contemplating a
gall bladder or a

third divorce
buffing bookdust from
neat little offprints

NEED US A BIG MAN
TO SING US A REAL
BIG SONG

Hugh Argraves

“THAT GONE SOUND”

Last summer, I am standing on the corner of Hollywood and Vine watching the shadows fall on the department store across the way, when who should come along but Jack Miller, the orchestra leader, and Mary Clancy, the singer. Jack Miller is sporting a beaver, or beard to you, and a dark blue suit. Mary Clancy, whom I know you have heard on records, is a good kid who hit the top fast by making records in sound chambers, multiple recording and weird arrangements. They are on their way to make a recording down on Sunset as I find out.

“Hello, Mary,” I says. “And Miller, how is the beard this wonderful sunny day? What’s new?”

“Come on down and watch us make a record. You might find it interesting,” says Mary.

“Ya, come on along,” says the orchestra leader, although he don’t seem too enthusiastic, but I overlook it.

Well, we go down to the studio and there are a lot of musicians hanging around. They all look kinda bummy to me and they record the song. Some little guy with horn-rimmed glasses is twirling dials and dubbing noises. The whole thing sounds weird to me, but it must be all right as the records of this kind sell like hotcakes. I like good hot jazz myself.

When they finish recording, I notice a small dark-haired good-looking fellow come into the studio. It is Alfred Donelli, the long-haired conductor. I know him because he conducted out at the Hollywood Bowl when I wanted to pass some time, which was heavy on my hands at that time, and I have met Donelli out at the races.

I see that Mary has her eye on that handsome conductor.

“Hello, Donelli,” I says. “How are the ponies running for you and how is the music business?”

“To answer the first part of your question,” says Donelli, “I don’t go near the tracks any more as I don’t have the money and the conducting business is no good as I haven’t conducted in months. Who is that beautiful girl doing the singing?”

“That,” I says, “is Mary Clancy, the famous pops singer.”

Hugh Argraves

“That Gone Sound”

Well, time goes by, and I read in the gossip columns in the L. A. Express that Mary Clancy and Donelli are married, so I looks up Donelli’s address in the phone book and go out to LaBrea Avenue to see how Mary is coming along.

It is a big old house and when I am ushered in, I find Mary who looks very sad.

“Hello, you big büm,” says Mary, brightening up a little bit.

“Why so sad, Mary? This is the first time I have seen you without a smile,” I says.

“Well,” says Mary, “I am going to have a voice lesson in about an hour, and I am kinda worried about it. I am going to give a concert of serious songs at the Philharmonic Auditorium in L. A. in about a month.”

“Why, you don’t sing them highbrow songs, Mary. Why the change?”

“That is what Alfred wants me to do. So I am doing it. To please him,” says Mary.

About a month later I am sitting in Sam’s beanery on Highland Avenue when I run across an item which reads as follows: “Last night, Mary Clancy, the former popular singer, sang at the Philharmonic. The voice range was not adequate for the attempt. The reviewer was forced to leave early as the attempts were too much as I review good music only,” or the review was something in that vein.

I call up Mary from the phone in the back of the beanery.

“I was sure a flop,” says Mary.

Well, a little later in the month I am standing on my favorite corner on Hollywood Boulevard, when a musician I know passes by. “What’s new, Johnny?” I says.

“Have you heard about Alfred Donelli? He is leading some crummy band out in Long Beach at the Palm Gardens,” says the musician.

“You mean he is conducting a symphony,” I says.

“No, it is a dance band. I guess they got him to front the band because he is handsome,” says the musician. “I guess he had to get a job somewhere since Mary flopped so at the Philharmonic.”

“Poor Alfred – he can’t stay away from popular music,” I says.

Doug Flaherty

KILCOOLE

We visit the church graveyard
where the dog sniffs
for the secrets of flesh

Gravestones like doors
are locked until we enter
pronouncing all words we know

We should envy them
devoid of brains and genitals
they are peaceful at last

A man lies with his wife
All night their spirits battle
above the village roofs

All day their chalk fingers
burrow in one direction
searching conversation

They measure our vibration
excited they tap a message
from tomb to tomb

Happy the ones with wooden
coffins those old skeletons
who can dig their way

clean through feel again
the moist black kiss of loam
the love tangle of roots

Gus Hemenway

CRACKED BOW

A haunting vision
as I left, not turning:
naked obedience
a boy's eyes.
A string snapped turning
cracked bow.

I walked away
and sat alone at the village
by the flames
and saw you in the coals
glaring.

I saw you all night
as the moon and stars
hamstrung in the jowls
of darkness,
a beating rain
a bitter wind.
Will you understand?

Neither of us recognizes.
I am afraid
but proud
of this shed skin on the sand.
And you,
no longer watch me;
the night only
will you see.

Lou Papineau

PUMPKINS HE SMOKED

for B & C

1

“He’s dead,” I hear the moon say.
So what if his hamburger’s cold:
he’s dead. “He’s in a movie” —
last I heard he was lounging on
a hillside behind the gymnasium,
reading poems, justifying his
drunkenness. “As if it needs to be
justified,” he used to say.

2

The trees invited vagrancy
with their branches spread
like stilts from the moon.

The stillness was a luxury:
two breasts canoeing down-
stream; a canopy webbing
the river.

3

His cigarette didn’t fit him:
a nervous finger in a dream.
When night came the crickets knew
as he sank down clutching
his knees..

4

The pumpkins he smoked nightly
killed his brain. His head slept,
fell down some stairs, is still
resting there. His wonder was
a pubic thing: a woman, posed
as a tree. Beauty was: an animal
on a plate. Seduction was out
of the question.

Donovan White

LAZARUS

The valley was not large, as valleys go. The hills which surrounded it were old with unknown time, unknown life and death. That the hills were old didn't matter. Time is only measured and weighed by the living. The greenness of the land was interrupted by stretches of barren brown and black, where the skin of the earth had been ripped open to reach the life giving source beneath.

In one of those brown spots, a field, stood two figures. One belonged there. She was short and plump, as if she were a fruit ripening in the sun which had tanned her skin to a mahogany tint. Life pumped through her veins as if it would go on forever, surging through her body like the tide, an unceasing flow uniting her with the earth upon which she planted her sturdy feet. The other was her brother, an uncomprehending stranger to this world. He was taller and younger; but he should not have been breathing the air of this valley. He belonged in the hills five miles away, bound in white cloth and bathed in herbs and spices, sealed into the earth.

She came to a halt beside him in the middle of the field, a stout woman and a lean, young man. Her hair was beginning to gray at the temples but the face still held the sharp planes of a lingering youthfulness. She held a jug and a parcel was wrapped in her arms. Her sleeves were darkened with the moisture condensing on the clay. She shifted her bundles awkwardly, sliding the heavy jug to rest on her hip. Secure now, she squatted and placed the rag-wrapped parcel on the ground.

"Lazarus, I've brought you some water. Stop and rest. Talk to me for a while. It's so wonderful to have you back with us. I don't think that you should work so hard after all you've been through."

She handed the jug to her brother, reaching up as he stepped closer and bent down to take the water from her. She watched his

Donovan White

Lazarus

eyes close softly as he tilted his head back to drink, letting the water run out at the corners of his mouth. His eyes were brown and gentle when he opened them, eyes like her own, but with the lines of sweat from the hot sun instead of the pain and frustration which had etched the soft, dark skin of her face. She marvelled as she looked at him, thinking it a strange thing that death could leave no such marks as living. She knew that people could read the story of her life in her face, yet no one could ever know what this young man, her brother, had experienced. Her hands stirred, filled with a life of their own. She reached out and began to unwrap the bundle, spreading the rags in a pile on the ground.

“We needed you so much. I was sure that we would starve without you and nobody to do the heavy work. We could do some of it but there was a lot we just couldn’t do. We would have had to sell the land or rent the place to someone. First our parents, and then you. Thank God for that prophet. There’s some that say he’s the messiah, and I for one, think he just might be. Whatever he may be, he had a lot of power to be able to bring you back to life.”

The man stepped back a pace and turned his head to look away, saying nothing. She rose and looked about her. He was seeing something, perhaps, in the dry fields, cleared of weeds for the planting, bounded by hedges of thorn and bramble, the hills rising gray in the distance. If there was something there, she couldn’t see it. But then, she had never died. Or, maybe, he didn’t want to talk about the prophet. Whenever anybody started to talk about what had happened, Lazarus went away, doing just what he was doing now. He was standing there looking out over the farm, not seeing much of anything, and probably wishing she would talk about something else.

She let the breath out through her nose and said, “How is the cake? Mary just baked it this minute.”

He looked down at the cake held at his side. “It’s good. This is good.” He moved his hand to include the field. “It’s all the

Donovan White

Lazarus

same. Nothing has changed. You would think it would all be different. But it isn't."

Then, as he bit into the cake, he looked at her. His jaw moved with sweaty muscle and light. There was strength in the line of his jaw and in the hook of his nose. The skin was smooth as if he never laughed and never cried at any kind of pain. "You want me to tell you what it was like, don't you?"

"Well, you are the only one who can tell me. I think it's only right that you tell your own sister. I know you haven't told anybody else or everybody would know by now.

"It's only fair Lazarus. I haven't had much of a life, you know. I had to raise you, and nobody worthwhile ever wanted to marry a woman who had to take care of a younger brother. If you can do anything, and I think you can, it's only right that you do it.

"It scares me. It always has when I think about it. When our parents died it was horrible to be left alone. But to die seems even more terrible, more alone. The worst part is that I don't know what it will be like. But you do. You know and you should tell me. I've done a lot for you since you were just a baby. Now it's your turn to do something for me."

She wasn't sure if this was the right way to go about finding things out, but he hadn't brought it up since it happened. It had been up to her to bring it out in the open. She wasn't sure that she wanted to know, but she had to ask. She had no other choice. He wasn't looking at her. He had turned and was looking at the hedgeline on the far side of the field. He was using the rags to wipe his hands.

"I wasn't lying," he said. "I really don't remember anything about it. I knew I was sick. You tell me I died. Everybody tells me that. Well, alright. Maybe I did die.

"All I know is that I woke up in the cave with the prophet standing over me. Then there was the crowd and all the commotion, and I didn't have any idea what it was all about until some-

Donovan White

Lazarus

body told me I had died and that the prophet had brought me back to life. I thought for a while everyone had gone mad. Or I had. I suppose it did happen. I keep looking for things to be different, but they aren't."

She felt herself getting angry and she knew that was wrong. There had to be some way she could get him to tell her what she had to know. If it was only a question of getting him to do something or persuading him toward a certain decision about the farm, she could have managed. She never had much trouble with him about things like that. But this was different. For the first time he had something which she could not even get near. She tried to think of something she could use as a lever to pry it loose from him. She had spent days trying to come up with something that would work, and had failed. Now, all she could do was to keep after him.

"You have to be able to remember something. You can't ask me to believe that you went through something like dying and coming back to life and it was as if it never happened to you. Why are you trying to keep it from me? Is it so terrible that you don't want anyone to know about it? Is that why you won't say anything?"

"I'm not lying to you. I really don't know anything to tell anybody. I don't know if it was terrible or wonderful or what it was. My mind is a blank. Don't you think it's important to me, too? It happened to me and I don't remember anything about it. I keep trying to find differences in things. I should feel different. Everything should feel different; but I'm the same and so is everything else. Nothing has changed so far as I can tell. I'm the same person I was two months ago, except that now everybody is telling a story about me. I know I owe you a lot. I'd tell you if I knew anything before I told anybody."

"That's just fine," she said. She didn't believe a word of it. If it had happened to her, she would remember something about it. She eyed him, standing there like a great dolt. He wasn't fool-

Donovan White

Lazarus

ing her for an instant. He knew, all right, and he'd tell her everything before she was through. But it had been wrong to go about it like this. She would have to back up and come at it from a different direction.

She hadn't had an easy life. She had helped her father in the fields when she was a child. When he died, she had been a young woman; men had come looking to marry her, but she had sent them all away, preferring to work the fields herself with the help of an occasional hired man in the busy times of the year. She had made the farm one of the richest in the area but it had cost heavily. Now, Lazarus would be married soon. Some other woman would take her place and she would be left with nothing but the pains which had been growing worse these last few months.

When Lazarus was dead, she had tried to work the farm alone. It had been too much for her. It scared her, because the pains lasted too long and they came back too often. She could no longer do some of the things which had been so easy just a year ago without having to spend a day in bed afterward. Maybe it would have been easier if she had married one of those men who had wanted her, but she had tried to save the farm for her little brother. She didn't really like men and she had never wanted children. But Lazarus had been enough. She had been free here alone with just him, or so she had thought. Now, it seemed as if she had been trapped here all the time. What she had thought of as freedom had really been death eating away at her slowly and secretly. All her plans had come to nothing. Lazarus had what she needed and he'd give it to her sooner or later. All she had to do was remain patient and keep after him. If she could figure out why he didn't want to tell her, she could think of a way to make him do it.

"Alright. We'll talk about it later. There's work that needs doing if we want to get a crop in this year. If you won't help me with the other, at least you're willing to work. You should be getting married soon and it will take a lot of work to support another person. I can't do as much as I used to do, anymore."

Donovan White

Lazarus

She would let him think about that for a while.

“That’s another thing I’m not sure about,” he said. “I’m not so sure it would be the right thing to marry Esther right now.”

“Oh, God. We’ll talk about it at dinner.”

After all the effort she had put into arranging that marriage, he has to go and change his mind. If only he were seven years old and she could spank him. She would have to find out what this was all about at dinner. And he thought he hadn’t changed. He was more difficult now than he had ever been before he died. She was sure it was because of what he knew and wasn’t telling. He had seemed separate somehow, ever since it happened. There was a distance between him and other people. Esther had been a little difficult at first, she had been afraid of Lazarus those first few days, but they had had a talk and now everything had seemed to be alright. Apparently, however, there were things she had not been aware of that had come between them. It must be something serious for Lazarus to consider putting off the marriage.

She turned at the edge of the field and looked back to where Lazarus was kneeling and chopping at a root. She was sure that everything could be settled if only he didn’t keep it to himself. It appeared to be up to her to get him to give up his secrets. That would have to be kept for later, though. There were things that had to be done and she wouldn’t accomplish much just standing here and watching him.

As she worked around the yard and then in the house she considered her problem. She had found that things went best if they were well thought out before anything was done. Everything must be planned. If you went into something without working it out beforehand something would come up which should have been foreseen and everything would get too complicated.

Things had become very hard when Lazarus died. She was no longer young and trying to run the farm all by herself had almost killed her. It had certainly crippled her somewhat. When she heard that the prophet was coming to the area, she had pre-

Donovan White

Lazarus

pared her story for a good week. The prophet had been impressed and had agreed to help her. She hadn't realized the direction his assistance would take and had been shocked when the man told her what he was going to do. There had been something about him, though, which made her trust him. He had walked up to the entrance of the cave where Lazarus had been buried and had called him to come out. Even though she trusted the man, it had been a great shock when she saw her brother walk out of the tomb.

People had celebrated Lazarus's return for days afterward. He had seemed quiet and withdrawn at first, but when people had gotten used to having him walk among them, he had gotten warmer toward everybody. He was always being asked what it had been like to be dead but he had always refused to answer any questions. He would just look at the questioner with a puzzled look in his eyes and mumble that he didn't remember. Almost everybody had come to accept it, but there were still a few who came over to the farm every night when their work was done in the hopes that Lazarus would finally say something. They always left disappointed. They had been coming in the daytime but she had put a quick stop to that. There was too much work to be done around the place to waste time during the day.

In the town, Esther had spent the day helping her mother around the house. For the most part, that help had merely entailed fetching leather bottles from where they hung suspended at the bottom of the well behind the house and keeping her mother and her friends supplied with things to eat while they discussed those villagers absent from the gathering. The serving girls were busy preparing the house for the feast. Esther's normally pretty face passed through the house with a blank expression of boredom. She had spent too many days like this one. She never showed it to anyone but she despised her mother and her friends. Early on she had decided that she would never let herself be forced into that kind of society. She had promised herself that she would take any

Donovan White

Lazarus

opportunity that offered itself to escape from the village and the life her parents had planned for her.

Her engagement to Lazarus had evoked conflicting emotions at first. She loved him. She had always admired the boy who had played with her brothers when they were children. She had watched with alarm when older girls had begun to seek out his company. Esther had been thrilled when Martha, Lazarus's sister, had come to visit her parents and they had arranged the marriage. Lazarus had made it apparent that the marriage would be a welcome thing. He had told her that he had always been attracted to her and that when Martha first proposed the idea to him he had tried to hide his exultation for fear that his sister would decide against it because it was something he wanted so badly. But Martha had been deceived, or perhaps not, and had approved his calm acceptance of her plans for his future. Everything would have been wonderful if marriage to Lazarus didn't also mean living here for the rest of her life. Lazarus was a farmer and even if his sister would let him go, he would never want to leave his farm and take up something else in a different part of the country.

Now, as she dressed to go to the farm, she was happy. She knew that it would all be different. She had always wanted a man she could be proud of. Lazarus had always been adequate. She had always loved him. Now, however, he was unique. He was one of those men she had always dreamed about in the sleepless nights of her childhood when she had mapped out her life. He was one of those men who made the world turn. The things he did, the words he spoke, would be noted and remarked upon by the whole world. He wasn't a prince on a fierce, proud horse, but he was real; the other was only imagination.

Things were going to change for the better. Lazarus would be famous and she would be his wife. She would share in all those wonderful things that happened to famous men. He had died and she had grieved. She really did love him when he was only a normal farmer with an overbearing sister. But that busybody of a sis-

Donovan White

Lazarus

ter had persuaded the prophet to bring him back to life. That had made all the difference in the world. She had still been grieving when she heard that Martha and Mary had persuaded the prophet to try to bring Lazarus back to life. She had been scared, of course. There was no telling what Lazarus would be like after he had been dead. It must have affected him somehow.

There had been a great crowd of people that afternoon. It seemed as if everyone for miles around was there to see the prophet work a miracle. She had been in the front of all those people, walking to the tomb with Martha and Mary and the prophet and his friends. She remembered that she had been a little scared and very excited. She had wondered what Lazarus would be like. It had been strange that she had never doubted that the prophet would succeed. Mary had said that the smell would be terrible, but she was wrong. The prophet had called to Lazarus to come out of the tomb. Everyone had held their breath. The prophet called his name again and far back in the dimness of the cave something moved. A woman in the crowd shrieked and began to sob. Even the children were quiet. She could smell smoke from a cooking fire in a nearby house. The dust kicked up by the crowd in its passage was settling behind them, sifting through the air to lie down again in the road. Lazarus stumbled out into the light, his hands half lifted as if to feel his way through the air or to pull the bandages away from his eyes. For just a second she felt terror. Perhaps this wasn't Lazarus, after all. Even if it was his body, how could she ever be sure that it was really him. He had been dead for four days. It might only be some walking dead thing. She felt Mary rush past her toward the stumbling, cloth wrapped figure. The crowd began to make an animal noise and she felt it surge forward as she took a step back, trying for just an instant to hide herself in the warmth of other bodies, other lives unconnected with this thing that she watched with horror.

Mary had reached him and had thrown her arms around him. Martha came up beside them and she, too, tried to put her arms

Donovan White

Lazarus

around him. Both of them were crying and pushing their heads toward him as if to bathe him clean of the grave with their tears.

She saw him push them away with his bandaged arms and her fear died. This, then, was really Lazarus. He had always hated to have his sisters touch him. Neither of the women was the type to baby their brother, but even so, Lazarus had always shied away from any kind of physical contact with them.

Her breathing became normal now, the half strangled gasping had stopped. She began to work her way through the crowd. Threading her way between people who had begun to act as if this was an afternoon of one of the festivals when the wine skins were brought out early in the day, she came up to Lazarus as the wrappings were being pulled from his body. Mary and Martha were still crying and shaking their heads. The prophet's friends finished unwinding his body and helped Lazarus step into a robe they had brought with them. The prophet was standing directly in front of Lazarus. He was, perhaps, the one man there who was in control. She pushed through the last of the crowd to stand beside the prophet. Her fear had returned and she felt safer this close to the holy man.

Lazarus stuck his head and then his arms through the openings in the robe. He looked confused, as if he didn't understand where he was. He smiled at the prophet and stepped forward to embrace him. He stumbled over the wrappings that lay in a pile at his feet. The prophet caught him and held him upright. They embraced in the middle of the crowd, surrounded by shouting people. The prophet's friends had formed a circle around them, isolating them from the mob.

"What happened?" Lazarus said. "What are all these people doing? What am I doing here and what are these things?" he asked as he kicked at the bindings heaped in the dirt.

"You have been dead," the prophet said. "And I have brought you back to life."

"It's true, Lazarus," Mary said at his side. "You died four

Donovan White

Lazarus

days ago and the prophet called you out of the tomb, just now, right in front of everybody. Those are the cloths we wrapped around your body before we put you in the cave.” She broke down again and began to weep. Esther moved to her side and put an arm around the older woman, drawing her tight against her. A woman’s tears she could understand. Anything was better than to just stand there and stare at Lazarus, wondering if he was the same man. If she didn’t do something she would be stiff with fright.

The prophet took command and they began to move down the road toward the far. The crowd began to thin out as they moved through the town. Esther rejoined her brothers and they dropped out of the procession as it passed their father’s house at the end of the village. The prophet had made it clear that they wanted no company at Lazarus’s farm that night. Esther was perfectly willing to go home. It had been a very confusing day and she still did not know how she felt about it all. She was afraid that she would give way to an overwhelming revulsion if she had to be alone with Lazarus that night. She felt that she needed a few days to get used to the idea that he was alive again before she could act naturally around him.

There had been a banquet a few days later. Her family had been the only people from town who had been invited. Mary had created a scene by insisting on washing the prophet’s feet. Martha had been put out about it but the prophet hadn’t seemed to mind. Esther had looked at Lazarus while the argument was going on between his sisters and he had smiled at her in the old way he had when his sisters were involved in one of their quarrels in front of strangers. She had grinned back at him before she had time to think and when she realized what had happened she was relieved that things were finally back to normal. She was sharing a special world with Lazarus just like before.

She hadn’t found an opportunity to spend any time alone with Lazarus at the party but tonight, Esther promised herself as she wound a gilt cord through her hair, things would be different.

Donovan White

Lazarus

She wasn't afraid any more. If Lazarus was different after what he had been through it was only to be expected, she reasoned. He couldn't be that different. The prophet would never have done anything if there was going to be something for people to fear. If there was any difference in Lazarus it could only help the plans she had made.

She checked to make sure that she looked all right. She wanted to appear her best tonight. If Lazarus was the same person he had been before, he wasn't going to like some of her ideas. Things would go more smoothly if she was beautiful for him. She had lived in a small village all her life. She had friends who lived in larger towns and she knew what their lives were like. Some of her girlfriends were married already. They had husbands and whining children. Some of them lived with their parents or with their husbands' parents. Some had their own homes. She didn't want to live like any of them. Whenever she tried to imagine living with Lazarus as her friends lived with their husbands, she felt like breaking into tears. It all seemed so deathly. There had to be more than what she saw around her.

Somewhere people lived nice lives. Somewhere they weren't burdened with cleaning and raising children and putting up with everything, with no hope for anything in the future except the day when the children were old enough to take over the work and raise their own families. There had to be something more than just that.

Esther saw the men standing beside the shed when she walked into the yard with her brothers. Samuel said they would just go and spend a minute with the rest of the men and they would catch up with her in the house later on. She called after them that it was a long walk back home and they shouldn't drink too much. When they laughed she turned and entered the house. Mary greeted her as she came through the door.

“Evening, Esther. My don't you look nice. I was just saying to Martha and the girls that I hoped you might be by tonight. Where are your brothers?”

Donovan White

Lazarus

“They went to the shed with the other men as soon as we got here. Good evening Martha, Rebecca, Ruth. Martha, Mother wanted me to thank you for inviting us all for the other night.”

“It was our pleasure,” Martha said. “It’s a shame that the prophet had to leave. All the people in town were making such a fuss though, that he said it would be better if he left soon, before the people at the temple lost their heads about the whole thing. Those people are so small. You would think that he was some kind of troublemaker the way they hound him so. It’s a lot of noise about nothing, made by a pack of cowards who are only interested in keeping their nice, safe positions so that they can continue living off others. It’s a mess and a disgrace.”

“And the way they hound that poor man,” Mary said. “I’m sure that he doesn’t mean anybody any harm. Look at the way he helped us when we needed him. That was nothing to chase him out of town for. It’s a shame, that’s what it is. We only went to him when nobody else would help us. The people at the temple just told us that it was God’s will and we would have to accept it, that’s all. But Martha isn’t made of that kind of stuff and when she heard that the prophet was preaching nearby, she went to see if there wasn’t something he could do. After all, he was one of Lazarus’s friends. I had no idea what she was going to ask him to do, you may be sure. I would never have dreamed of such a thing. I was shocked when I talked to him after Martha had come back and told me he wanted to see me. When he asked me what I thought of the idea of bringing Lazarus back to life I was simply speechless. I didn’t think anyone could ever do something like that. I knew he was supposed to be a holy man, but really. And then he actually did it. I had no idea that our Lazarus had such powerful friends. To think that I would ever see such things. I’ll remember these days until I die, I’m sure. There doesn’t seem to be anything that can’t happen, really. And yet, it all seems so normal now. All these wonderful things just happened a few days ago and everything’s back the way it was. Lazarus and his friends

Donovan White

Lazarus

are out by the shed, Martha and I are having company in here. It's all as if nothing had happened at all."

"It has been a strange couple of weeks, Mary," Esther said. "I would hate to think that *everything* is going to be the same as before."

"Well, that's alright for you young people. Lazarus was taken before his time and I guess that that is alright, but I would be content just to live here like this until I just naturally die. I'm not afraid of death. I think it's just one of those things that comes in its own good time. I won't miss anything very much, I'm sure. But then, I've lived my life already. You and Lazarus haven't even started yours yet. It would be different for me if I were in your shoes. But you didn't come all this way just to talk to old ladies. Why don't you go out and see Lazarus? I'm sure he wouldn't mind if you tore him away from those worthless friends of his."

"Thank you, Mary. There are some things I would like to talk to him about."

Esther excused herself to Martha and the other women and went out the door. Outside, the moon had not yet risen, the yard's only light came from the open doorway behind her. Esther's silhouette showed a firm, young girl, the outlines of her body obscured by the long scarf she wore about her shoulders dropping below her waist. The voices of the men softened as they caught sight of her figure, its intimations of an essentially alien intelligence, disrupting their world of wine and darkness. She stood half in darkness as if she were weighing their worth, a judge whose values were foreign to them and in whose scales they had no weight. The silence grew as she moved out of the doorway toward them, becoming absolute when she called to Lazarus.

Lazarus stepped out of the shelter of the shed, walking out into the nakedness of the night to join her. Now, men behind them suddenly became the judges, gauging their relationship with small eyes and petty minds. Catcalls and suggestions from the yard followed them into the darkness as they walked through the fields.

Donovan White

Lazarus

They walked carefully, picking their way over the green, growing plants which seemed so black and dead in the night, the only signs of life besides themselves the sounds of feeding insects and the soft scuttle in the earth of small animals. Their eyes had become adjusted to the gloom of the night and the moon was beginning to rise behind them. Dimly, they could see the rows plowed through the fields like steps in a stairway disappearing to the hills hulking in the distance. They walked quietly, getting the feel of each other. She was wondering if he had changed in any way that she would find frightful. Lazarus was wondering if she felt that he was strange now. Separated by their minds they walked, side by side, each in his own world divided by nothing more than imagination, kept apart by their separate universes.

She stumbled over a rut in the earth and Lazarus took her elbow. It was as if the physical contact made speech possible. "Watch it," he said. "Martha will have a fit if we plow up the crop tonight." He shifted his hand to hold her arm more easily. "I've missed you these last few days. I was wondering when you would come again. With all these people coming over here every night I couldn't take an evening off to visit your house. And I'm not sure how your parents feel about the whole thing."

"They're alright," she said. "They've gotten used to the idea by now. Mother was a little shocked at first but she quieted down after being here the other night. I was a little worried, myself, for a while."

"Worried about what?"

"Well, you might have been changed, or something. Who knows?"

"I'm not changed. That's the funny thing about it. Nothing has changed. It's as if nothing had happened. I mean when it rains, everything gets wet. But they say I died and I don't remember a thing about it."

Donovan White

Lazarus

“You had better start remembering something pretty soon. That kind of answer may be alright with these people, but there are important people coming to see you as soon as they hear about it and they won’t be satisfied with what you’ve been saying.”

“So what? I can’t tell them anything more than the truth. And that’s all I’ve been telling anybody. I don’t remember anything about it. I’m still the same person I was before it happened. Whatever people want that’s different from that, I can’t give them.”

“But you have to. These are going to be important people. You’re going to be famous. You are the only man who ever died and came back to life afterwards. People are going to expect a lot from you and you’re going to have to give it to them.”

“Well, they’re just going to have to be disappointed. That’s all. I can’t give them what doesn’t exist. I can’t lie to people.”

“I’m not saying you have to lie to them. Just make something up. Nobody will ever know the difference. It’s not as if they can go to somebody else for proof. You’re the only one who knows and what you say is the way it’s going to be. Whatever you say is the truth. There can’t be any question of lying.”

“Of course there can. I’ll know that I’m lying.”

“Now, listen. This is the only chance we’ll ever have to be somebody. You’re famous now. All you have to do is tell people something about what happened to you and we’ll never have to live on a farm in this village. We’ll be able to go someplace else, people will beg us to go places and tell your story. We won’t have to live out our lives in the same place forever. Surrounded by the same dreary people. This is a chance to escape from here. I want to look up and see something besides those hills.” She pointed at the shadow drawn across the sky.

“I can’t do it,” he said. “This is just too important to me to lie about. If there’s a chance that some day I’ll remember what happened to me when I was dead, I don’t want to be caught up in a dream of lies that I made up just because I wasn’t patient enough

Donovan White

Lazarus

to wait. If I start telling lies now, don't you see, there may come a day when I won't be able to escape from the world they create. Don't you think that I want to know what happened to me as much as everybody else does? It did happen to me, after all. I owe it to myself not to confuse things with a lot of lies."

"But we can't wait. Those people will be getting here soon. You have to have something to tell people now. You can't afford to wait for it to happen by itself. You could spend your whole life waiting. I'm not going to sit around while you make up your mind to remember something that you aren't sure you *can* remember. I'm not going to marry you so we can be a pair of nothings on your sister's farm and raise a family of nothings. We have a chance to be something else." She was so mad she could spit. She knew he would pull something like this. It had been too good to be true. Oh, he was nice enough, but really, he was such a lump. Was she asking so much, to tell a few lies that nobody would ever be able to disprove? All he had to do was go around talking like one of those crazy prophets that always passed through around harvest-time, giving crazy speeches for handouts. If they could do it, why couldn't he? She watched him in the moonlight, standing in front of her, his feet crumbling lumps of dirt, first the right foot stamping, then smoothing the ground, then his left foot did the same thing. He might as well be a chicken scratching for grubs.

"Alright," she said. "I know that you would be quite content to be a farmer for the rest of your life. But can't you see that that kind of life would be terrible for me, to be stuck here forever? Won't you even try to do this thing for me?"

"I'm sorry," he said. "I just can't do it. It's too important to me to confuse everything with lies."

"It's important to *you*! What about me! I want to live. The truth is nothing; it's dead. You are so . . . so stupid!" And she turned and ran away from him, back towards the house. She stumbled over the rows of grain and felt a grim satisfaction as she

Donovan White

Lazarus

felt the plants tear and give way beneath her feet. It was as if every torn plant she destroyed was his face with its perpetual expression of placid confusion that her foot twisted and smeared into the dirt.

Gus Hemenway

I am falling underwater.
The stream is sucking me down
along the shifting pebbles
in a surge.
The rocks are clattering
together, Fish are peering
timidly, avoiding
boldly my dropping body
and many things
that windsweep with me.
Through the water
I see cars caught
as driftwood
on licher boulders
and saws and ropes caught
on sawyers,
and horses, cattle
pierced on
winterkill spruce
and cedar.
There are backbroken refrigerators
swirling in eddies
and plows and splintered
timber shipwrecked.
The river is raging
rapidly westward
sucking, tearing,
thrashing, dumping,
raking banks
and islands
and broadening
now combed
swelling
finally slowing

Gus Hemenway

now licking rock
grooming shoreline
rugged shore.
Jack-pine whiskered wolf
now waiting;
eyes of sky
now following down with me
coasting down with me;
white teeth rocks
and thicket muzzle
now lapping water
between paws, gently,
drinking water
waiting, gently,
waiting.

Martha Christina

DOG CEMETERY AT BLITHEWOLD

The open halls of cedar
let the winds mourn through
over Marjorie's dead dogs.
The trees on which these treasured pets
urinated
irreverently
are headstones now.
Attached gold plaques
bear each name and life span
where they
ran, barking.

The faithful, playful, much-loved ones
lie obediently near their mistress
in a family plot
near the house.
Marjorie visits them often,
grieving in a golf-cart.

Martha Christina

FOR FUTURE THIRSTS

There's a wetness in the wind tonight
blowing in across the bay.
Siphon it through your open pores;
carry it with you to arid places,
and when your parched memory cries for relief,
uncork this private oasis
and drink from your mind's canteen.

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