

THE HORROR

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Watching a bad horror movie last night
was so good it almost hurt when the end
proved too improbable, undercutting

the gleeful *Grand Guignol* that preceded—
90 minutes of hacksaws and trephines
as kinetic as a kaleidoscope,

and, finally, as repetitive. Blood
will out, it's said, and out it came, almost comic
in its stalwart capacity to shun

a scintilla of believability,
which I didn't mind a bit. Only when
the director tried to knit everything

into a neat ball that might roll over
the implausibility of all
that came before did I step outside

the splatterfest, laughing for a moment
(possible without cruelty because
no one who died was more than a puppet

jerked to and fro on the scriptwriter's strings
and all that shed blood was ultimately
ironic and self-referential, less

life essence than liquid scenery). The jock,
the virgin, the whore, the nerd—each in turn
received their red comeuppance for the roles

they played in the story's machinations
as the shoddy plot unwound with the sound
of rusty gears meshing and unmeshing.

O it was a perverse pleasure to witness
punishment meted out so discretely,
a torrent of body parts and torments,

all designed to remind each character
of the true horror of themselves, the parts
they played inexorably in a world

reduced to the dual satisfactions
of judgment and castigation rendered
instantly. Perhaps that is the best thing

about the genre—its unequivocal
simplicity, its easy acceptance
of good and evil with no in-betweens,

no grays to muddle the deluge of red
that poured ineluctably from every
pore. Only at the end, when the movie

tried to put paid to the meaninglessness
of everything that went before, when it

brought together the virgin and the nerd,

resolved their essential disparity
with the *deus ex machina* of "love,"
did it cut the essential fuchsia thread

that bound the warped proceedings together
in a way that was more comforting
than scary, because everything that transpired

was so quaintly bland and expectable,
so blatantly false and mechanical
it made it possible to just relax

and tell one's self: *this is not real life, no,
nor death, these sharp edges will never touch
or slice an iota of my own flesh,*

*and thus I can sleep in peace, without the fear
that an insane-asylum escapee
in a hockey mask will shatter my window*

late some night and slaughter me where I lay.
So I turn off the lights and tell myself
it's all a sleazy dream of a fraught world

where everything that can go wrong will,
where the house next door is always home to
a family of serial killers,

that nothing, really, is as frightening
as not having this alternate world
in which to retreat, that what's truly scary

is finally pulling the covers up
to one's chin, as though hiding your body
from yourself beneath the sheets, the thick sound

of your heart ticking off every last minute,
in your ears until all you are left with
is the inescapable *thereness* of you.